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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Narrative Strategies and Traumatic Experience in Toni Morrison's Trilogy

Narativní strategie a traumatická zkušenost v trilogii Toni Morrison

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí diplomové práce (supervisor):
Mgr. Pavla Veselá, Ph.D.

Zpracovala (author):
Bc. Magdalena Müllerová

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Prague 13th August 2021

Magdalena Müllerová

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Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá narativní strategie a zobrazení traumatu v trilogii Toni Morrison, skládající se z románů *Milovaná*, *Jazz* a *Ráj*. Romány Morrison ilustrují zkušenosti Afroameričanů ve Spojených státech napříč historií; její trilogie začíná příběhem *Milovaná*, který se odehrává v sedmdesátých letech devatenáctého století, pokračuje ve dvacátých letech dvacátého století knihou *Jazz* a končí v sedmdesátých letech dvacátého století románem *Ráj*. Tato práce se zaměřuje na zkoumání narativních strategií ve vztahu k prezentování traumatu. Morrison manipuluje příběhy za účelem poukázat na nevyslyšené traumatické zkušenosti Afroameričanů, a tudíž kritizuje dominantní rasistickou kulturu ve Spojených státech. *Milovaná* popisuje přímé dopady otroctví, zatímco následující dva romány odkrývají, jak skryté traumatické důsledky otroctví nadále ovlivňují společnost dlouho po jeho zrušení.

Vybrané teoretické přístupy k narativním strategiím a traumatu jsou představeny v první kapitole. Narativní teorie Mieke Bal kombinovaná s Afroamerickou literární teorií, kterou Henry Louis Gates Jr. popisuje ve své knize *Signifikující opice*,¹ jsou základem analýzy narativních strategií, zejména hlasu, narativní struktury a retroverzí, a opakování. Postkoloniální přístup k traumatu, založen zejména na teorii traumatu vysvětlené v *Trauma a uzdravení: od týrání po politický teror*² od Judith L. Herman, je propojen s Afroamerickou zkušeností s rasismem, jež vznikla v dobách otroctví a nadále ovlivňuje situaci i v současné společnosti. Tato kapitola dále komentuje problematiku literární reprezentace traumatu a trauma narativ, a poukazuje na nutnost tyto příběhy rozeznávat a zkoumat v literatuře.

Následující kapitoly se zabývají analýzou jednotlivých románů a jsou rozděleny do podkapitol na základě tematických prvků. První podkapitola vždy pojednává o traumatických zkušenostech postav z jednotlivých románů a je založena zejména na výkladu traumatu v díle

¹ This is a working translation of the original title *The Signifying Monkey*, which has not yet been translated into Czech.

² This is a working translation of the original title *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Abuse to Political Terror*, which has not yet been translated into Czech.

Morrison z knihy *Rasa, trauma a domov v románech Toni Morrison*³ od Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber. Narativní strategie jsou analyzovány ve spojitosti s těmito traumatickými zkušenostmi v následujících podkapitolách dle hlasu, narativní struktury a retroverzí, a opakování. Výsledky těchto analýz jsou v závěru porovnávány a mapují vývoj použití vybraných narativních strategií za účelem zobrazování traumatu. Zároveň jsou výsledky porovnávány s myšlenkami ze sekundární literatury za účelem zasazení práce do širšího kontextu kritiky Morrison. Dále jsou představeny další možné přístupy k daným románům a celému dílu Toni Morrison, stejně tak k narativním strategiím a traumatu v dílech dalších Afroamerických autorů. Tato část si klade za cíl poukázat na důležitost tohoto tématu a navrhnout další směry budoucího zkoumání traumatických narativ Afroameričanů.

³ This is a working translation of the original title *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, which has not yet been translated into Czech.

Abstract

This thesis examines narrative strategies and the representation of trauma in Toni Morrison's trilogy consisting of *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*. Morrison's novels illustrate the black experience in the US throughout history; the trilogy begins in the 1870's with *Beloved* and continues through 1920's in *Jazz* to 1970's in *Paradise*. The main focus of this thesis is the exploration of the narrative strategies in the connection to trauma in order to showcase how Morrison manipulates the narrative to draw attention to the unheard traumatic experiences of black people, and consequently criticises the racist master narrative. *Beloved* depicts the immediate impact of slavery, and the following two novels expose how the underlining traumatic effects of slavery are reproduced long after its abolishment.

Selected theoretical approaches to narrative and trauma are introduced in the first chapter. Mieke Bal's approach to narrative, combined with Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s African-American literary theory described in *The Signifying Monkey*, provides the basis for the analysis of the use of voice, narrative structure, retroversion, and repetition in the trilogy. The postcolonial view of trauma, informed mostly by Judith L. Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Abuse to Political Terror*, is connected with the African-American experience of racism stemming from slavery, the influence of which is still relevant even today. Furthermore, the issues of literary representation of trauma, and consequently trauma narratives, are also included, explaining the importance of the acknowledgement and examination of trauma in literary works.

The following three chapters provide the analysis of the individual novels. Each chapter is divided into four thematic sections. The first section, which is chiefly based on Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's account of trauma in Morrison's work in *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, establishes the traumatic experiences of the characters presented in the specific novels. The narrative strategies are explored in connection with the traumatic events in each

subsequent section, dealing with voice, narrative structure and retroversion, and repetition. In the conclusion, the findings of the previous analyses are compared in respect to each thematic section, tracing the development of each narrative strategy in the trilogy. The results are further examined in the relationship to the ideas presented in the secondary sources, placing the thesis within the wider context of the criticism of Morrison. Other possible perspectives on the novels, the rest of Morrison's oeuvre, narrative strategies, and trauma in the works of other African-American authors are considered, concluding with suggestions for future research and the emphasis on the necessity of the examination of African-American trauma narratives.

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Introduction

Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison's astounding contribution to literature, both in fiction and literary criticism, had a seminal role in the expansion and redefinition of the American literary canon.⁴ Henry Louis Gates Jr. considered Morrison one of the most formally sophisticated novelists of African-American literature, even claiming she had "her own mode of literary representation."⁵ Morrison's style and narrative technique has often been discussed, similarly to her literary project. One of the aims of her literary efforts was to bear witness to the struggles of African Americans in American society before and in the twentieth century.⁶ The Western literary tradition, as Morrison claimed in her lecture "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," has previously ignored black voices and their imagination and interpretation of themselves.⁷ According to Harold Bloom, Morrison was aware of the limits of literary tradition:

Morrison [...] battles against being subsumed by the traditions of narrative fiction. As a leader of African-American literary culture, Morrison is particularly intense in resisting critical characterizations that she believes misrepresent her own loyalties, her social and political fealties to the complex cause of her people.⁸

Therefore, her narrative style combines Anglo-American tradition with techniques typical for African-American expression,⁹ to illustrate the experiences of black individuals and their connection to a larger community¹⁰ in a social climate informed by racist past and present.

⁴Jan Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction, Revised and Expanded Edition* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 2014), 4.

⁵Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K.A. Appiah, *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (New York: Amistad Press Inc., 1993), ix.

⁶J. Brooks Bouson, "'Speaking the Unspeakable': Shame, Trauma, and Morrison's Fiction," in *Toni Morrison*, ed. Harold Bloom (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), 122.

⁷Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (October 7, 1988): 132-133, <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/m/morrison90.pdf>.

⁸Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Toni Morrison* (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), 1.

⁹Alan J. Rice, "Jazzing It up a Storm: The Execution and Meaning of Toni Morrison's Jazzy Prose Style," *Journal of American Studies* 28, no.3 (December 1994): 430-432, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27555838>.

¹⁰Roberta Rubenstein, "Pariahs and Community," in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr and K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press Inc., 1993), 127.

My thesis will focus on Morrison's loosely connected trilogy: *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*,¹¹ and the ways the narrative techniques are manipulated to not only mirror African-American expression, but also to illustrate the traumatic experience of slavery and its political, social and psychological impact on black people even decades after its abolition. The connection between narrative strategies and Morrison's effort is based on the fact that narrative as such, according to Monika Fludernik, "is based on the representation of psychological states and mental perceptions."¹² Furthermore, as Mieke Bal claims:

Narrative is a cultural phenomenon, one of the many cultural processes by which we live. The conditions of possibility of those processes are what constitute the interest of narrative analysis; there lays its cultural relevance.¹³

Questioning the larger narrative, Morrison's fiction significantly contributed to the discussion of racism in the twentieth century; however, the issues raised in her novels are still relevant today. The current social climate in the United States, with systemic racism, racially motivated police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement gaining global recognition, proves that the examination and understanding of not only the processes that have informed such climate, but also of the black representation, imagination and experience, are still relevant and necessary even today. Morrison's novels exemplify all three components in the way that her literary imagination employs narrative strategies to represent the forces informing the black experience in the racialized American society.

In order to illustrate black experience and culture, Morrison's novels combine Western literary traditions with an oral style, described as "the oral language of black people, the mix of blues and jazz and gossip and tales,"¹⁴ or evoking "tribal storytelling tradition of the African

¹¹Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, 108.

¹²Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 60.

¹³ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 9.

¹⁴Danielle Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 285.

griot.”¹⁵ The emphasis on authentic black voice and mode of storytelling enables Morrison to authentically express the hardships of African-American people in the aftermath of slavery. Such a goal requires the consideration of extra-textual relationships of the narrative, to understand not only the presumed intended meaning, but also Morrison’s choice of literary techniques.¹⁶ The undeniable trauma of slavery and its effects on subsequent generations of black people in America is one of the central focuses of Morrison’s trilogy, making the novels trauma narratives. To fully understand the way it is expressed, it is crucial to understand the nature of trauma and the way it can or cannot be represented in literature.

Morrison took inspiration from real life events in what later became the *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* trilogy.¹⁷ Throughout these three novels, Morrison explores the immediate impact of slavery as well as its social, political, and economic consequences. While discussing *Beloved*, the first novel of the trilogy, Morrison admits:

I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I’d written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia.¹⁸

The idea of remembering is crucial for Morrison’s literary project. For her, writing is the place to “think the unthinkable.”¹⁹ Morrison understood the effects of racism not only in the terms of black people: “The trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis,”²⁰ explaining the necessity for the whole society to acknowledge the shared trauma. To comprehend the condition of American society in terms of the black experience, the trauma of slavery and its

¹⁵Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 4.

¹⁶Judylyn S. Ryan, “Language and narrative technique in Toni Morrison’s novels,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Justine Tally (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151.

¹⁷Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 206 and 240.

¹⁸Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 257.

¹⁹Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 278.

²⁰Morrison, “Unspeakable Things,” 141.

repercussions needs to be remembered and acknowledged. In a 1988 interview, Morrison explained:

There is necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there is necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember.²¹

The chief concern of literary trauma theory is exactly this - the necessity and difficulty of representing trauma in literature: speaking the unspeakable.

Since postcolonial literature deals with the consequences of colonialism,²² Morrison's texts are often considered as postcolonial.²³ Furthermore, as was previously mentioned, Morrison is writing from the Western literary tradition and African-American tradition. The combination of those influences to express the unspeakable in an authentic black voice is questioned in postcolonial trauma theory. The difficulty of this task is mirrored by the narrative structure of Morrison's novels, which, like memories, is scattered. The characters must remember the traumatic events in their lives to narrate their story. Similarly, the oral expression, the fragmented structure, repetitions, and interruptions of the characters' memories offer episodes that need to be put together to create the story.²⁴ The narrative, then, mirrors what it represents, inviting the analysis of the narrative strategies in Morrison's trauma narratives.

The introduction of narrative theory and trauma theory will be included in the first chapter of this thesis. I will identify the chief narrative concepts, mainly rooted in the combination of Meike Bal's theory and the concept of Signifying introduced by Henry Louis Gates Jr., which will be used in the analysis of the individual novels. Furthermore, I will briefly explain selected critical and theoretical approaches of the Western literary theory, as well as the

²¹ Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 247-248.

²² Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3.

²³ Irene Visser, "Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison's Home," *Postcolonial Text* 9, no. 2 (2014), 6, <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/issue/current/showToc>.

²⁴ Bouson, "'Speaking the Unspeakable,'" 140.

approaches to African-American tradition not only to narrative strategies, but also to trauma theory. The postcolonial rethinking of trauma and its representation in literature, based on Judith L. Herman's approach to trauma, will be discussed to provide a sufficient background to fully comprehend the nuanced ways in which the narrative structure of Morrison's novels expresses the traumatic experience.

The following chapters will examine the three novels in a chronological order according to the date of publication. From *Beloved*, through *Jazz*, to *Paradise*, this thesis will investigate the relationship between the narrative strategies and the recovery of traumatic memories they represent. In the second chapter, dedicated to *Beloved*, the characters' struggle with the traumatic memory of slavery is mimicked by the retroversive, repetitive narration. Similarly, the analysis of *Jazz* in the third chapter presents the characters' reluctance to relive their traumatic past in 1920's Harlem in a non-linear, fractured manner. *Paradise* is examined in chapter four, introducing the traumas of two different 1970's communities and its destructive aftermath in a circular, episodic narration. The combination of structural analysis and close reading is necessary for the examination of the novels, since the stories are not presented in chronological order; rather, they are presented in episodic manner, one storyline interrupting the other. The narrative strategies prominent in each novel will be identified and their usage will be analysed in the relation to the traumatic events they present.

In the concluding chapter, the summary and comparison of the outcome of the analyses will be included, together with the consideration of the agreement or disagreement of the secondary literature with the results. I will also propose possible directions of future research into narrative strategies and trauma in Morrison's work, as well as the possible application of similar analyses on other African-American texts.

Chapter 1 Narrative Theory and Trauma Theory

Morrison's masterful storytelling has been discussed since her literary career began.²⁵ Her emphasis on the importance of stories, narratives, and therefore literature, is evident not only from her writing, but also from her comments on the craft of narration and its significance: "People crave narration [...] People want to hear a story. They love it! That's the way they learn things. That's the way human beings organize their human knowledge – fairy tales, myths. All narration. And that's why the novel is so important!"²⁶ The study of narrative examines this relationship between the form and the story, and its cultural relevance and impact.

Narrative theory has a rich history and tradition of different schools of thought, such as Structuralism or Russian Formalism, and is enriched by authors like Roland Barthes, Wayne C. Booth, Jonathan Culler, Gérard Genette, or Tzvetan Todorov, among many others. However, for the purpose of this thesis a narrow scope of theory must be selected. The terminology is taken predominantly from the Western tradition, but the influence of African and African-American tradition will be acknowledged and combined to analyse Morrison's texts. The definitions will be taken from *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Lauren Ryan, and the overall approach to narrative will be informed by Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Since the fourth edition of this title includes theoretical discussion relevant to and exemplified on Morrison's *Beloved*, it signals the fact that Bal's theoretical approach is aware of the changing cultural context and is applicable to African-American texts.

1.1.1 The Narrative

The most important distinction that must be made before introducing further theoretical concepts is the difference between narrative, narration, and narrativity. Narrative is a complex

²⁵ Gates and Appiah, *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ix.

²⁶ Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations*, 3.

term not exclusive to literary studies. The concept of narrative has entered the spheres of medicine, law, or psychoanalysis, among others. For the purpose of literary analysis, the narrative shall be defined as such: “[n]arrative, in this view, is the textual actualisation of story, while story is narrative in a virtual form. [...] narrative [is] a type of text able to evoke a certain type of image in the mind of the recipient.”²⁷ The purpose of narrative is as polarising as its definition, and ranges from transmitting of culture, preservation of memories, to a source of education and knowledge.²⁸ Narration, although opinions and definitions may vary depending on the theoretical approach, is the production of the narrative.²⁹ Finally, narrativity is defined as such:

the set of properties characterising narratives and distinguishing them from non-narratives [...] designates the set of optional features that make narratives more prototypically narrative-like, more immediately identified, processed, and interpreted as narratives.³⁰

In a sense, narration and narrativity are properties of the narrative which is actualised in a narrative text.

In Bal’s approach, narrative text is that in which a story is conveyed through a medium, such as language. Story is the content of that text, and it is the particular way in which the fabula is presented. Fabula, then, is a sequence of chronologically and logically related events.³¹ In literature, the author creates the fabula and presents it as a story through a narrative text. The role of the author and their relevance to the interpretation and analysis of the text has been widely discussed, with theoreticians such as Roland Barthes describing the author as a medium for multiple meanings of the text.³² Besides Barthes’ reconceptualization of the figure of the

²⁷ Marie-Laure Ryan, “Narrative,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 347.

²⁸ Ryan, “Narrative,” 347.

²⁹ H. Porter Abbot, “Narration,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 339.

³⁰ Gerald Prince, “Narrativity,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 387.

³¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 5.

³² Fotis Jannidis, “Author,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 34.

author, Wayne C. Booth's idea of the implied author, a source of the purpose of the text and its meaning, is also accepted. Nevertheless, Bal abandons this concept due to its theoretical contradictions, and favours the clear distinction between the author and the narrator. She defines the narrator as "the agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs that constitute the text."³³ Furthermore, according to Bal, the aim of textual analysis is "not to account for the process of writing, but for the conditions of the process of reception."³⁴

Although some theories either discard or emphasise the reader, Bal's theoretical approach considers the reader as a crucial part of the process of reception. However, she acknowledges that though the reader is indispensable, the social and cultural context of reading cannot be fully determined, and so the reader should not be considered as a solitary or an omnipotent participant. This clarifies that her usage of the term 'reader' does not mean the individual people that read the book, but rather a conceptual participant in the narrative act; someone who can decode the meaning of the text but is not alone in the process.³⁵ This co-creation of the narrative is something that even Morrison sees as integral to her writing:

[my] writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. It's not just about telling the story; it's about involving the reader. The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound.³⁶

To ensure this participation in the narrative, the text is written, presented, and manipulated in a way to engage the readers. Those strategies are as important as the story in the creation of the meaning, and the interaction of the strategies and the story shall be analysed in this thesis. To fully understand the levels on which narrative strategies work, the pivotal concepts will be defined next.

³³ Bal, *Narratology*, 61.

³⁴ Bal, *Narratology*, 65.

³⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, 11, 66.

³⁶ Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations*, 164.

1.1.2 Narrative Strategies

Patrick O'Neill defines narrative techniques as the devices of storytelling. He specifies that most approaches to narrative as division between a *what* and a *how*. The *what* includes states, setting, characters, and events, while the *how* is the technique in which the *what* is presented. This domain includes voice, focalization, temporality, and style. Narrative technique also entails features such as narrator's reliability or the adherence or deviation from conventions.³⁷ Since the strategies this thesis is focused on belong under the category of *how*, the primary terms relevant for this thesis are voice, focalization and temporality. Bal attributes the category of voice to the properties of the text, whereas focalization and temporality belong in what she calls story aspects.³⁸

Voice relates to the narrator and their presentation of the story. Bal claims that 'first person narrator' and 'third person narrator', accepted terms in narrative theory, are the same when considering the narrative situation. Since 'first person narrator' presents the story as an autobiography, a testimony to their experience of the fabula, and the 'third person narrator' narrates a testimony to the story of the fabula, the difference in narrative situation is none. Bal also entertains the concept of the second person narrator, which is not logically possible nor manageable for the reader.³⁹ She then identifies the external narrator, a narrator that talks about others, and the character-bound narrator, who talks about themselves and is thus personified. The distinction between the two calls into question the narrative rhetoric of truth.⁴⁰ The rhetoric of truth connects to the concept of reliability. To what degree the narrator is reliable depends on the implications in the narrative.⁴¹ The identification of voice can be difficult, since it can shift or be manipulated by the use of various other strategies, for example focalization.

³⁷ James Phelan and Wayne C. Booth, "Narrative Techniques," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 370.

³⁸ Bal, *Narratology*, v.

³⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 123.

⁴⁰ Bal, *Narratology*, 12 - 13.

⁴¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 16.

Focalization is defined as restriction of the narrative information, particularly by a specific point of view. Though one of the accepted approaches to focalization originate in Gérard Genette's theory, Bal criticises this definition for implying that focalization is optional, whereas she states that "[s]torytelling is inevitably slanted or subjective in nature, and to deny this constitutes a dubious political act, for it means denying narrative responsibility."⁴² For Bal, "[f]ocalization is, then, the relation between the vision and what is seen, perceived."⁴³ In this relationship, there is the focalizer (subject), the point from which the focalized object is viewed. If the focalizer coincides with a character, Bal calls it the character-bound focalizer.⁴⁴ Furthermore the situation can be divided into two modes of focalization:

When focalization lies with one character that participates in the fabula as an actor, we can refer to *internal focalization*. We can then indicate by means of the term *external focalization* that an anonymous agent, situated outside the fabula, is functioning as focalizer.⁴⁵

Moreover, Bal states that there are several levels of focalization, which can be distinguished depending on individual instances. At the same time, she claims the difference between a first person narrative and a third person narrative is non-existent, as far as focalization level is concerned.⁴⁶ In her approach to focalization, she identifies double focalization, in which the focalization seems to apply to both the character bound focalizer and the external focalizer; ambiguous focalization, where the focalizer cannot be decided, and a special type of focalization, that of memory, which distorts temporality. The employment of focalization in Morrison's novels, especially the inclusion of memories, complicates the temporal order of the stories.

The relation between the order of the events of the story and the order of the events of the fabula is what is considered in Bal's account as temporality. Within the narrative, this order

⁴² Bal, *Narratology*, 132.

⁴³ Bal, *Narratology*, 133.

⁴⁴ Bal, *Narratology*, 133-135.

⁴⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, 136.

⁴⁶ Bal, *Narratology*, 142.

influences the narrative structure. Specifically, the temporal ordering of the story can be sequential, or deviate from the sequential model. The deviation can be, according to Bal, variously motivated:

[p]laying with sequential ordering is not just an artistic convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to produce suspense, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides. It is narrative's way of achieving a density that is akin to the simultaneity often claimed for visual images as distinct from literature.⁴⁷

The play on sequential, or logical, order is of particular significance, since Morrison's novels often employ memories. Such deviation from chronological order is called anachrony; specifically, retroversion and anticipation,⁴⁸ also known as analepsis and prolepsis, flashbacks and flashforwards. Anachronies can be considered in terms of their spans, either durative or punctual, complete or incomplete. They can also be external (completely outside the timespan of the primary fabula), internal (within the timespan of the primary fabula), or mixed (outside the primary fabula timespan and ends within it).⁴⁹ Anachronies can form episodes, which are defined as "bounded, internally coherent sequence of situations and events that can be chained together with other such narrative units to form larger narrative structures."⁵⁰

The way temporality is presented in the text produces a narrative structure. One of the typical narrative structures is the framed narrative. Bernard Duyfhuizen defines it as follows:

[framed] narratives occur in narrative situations when events are narrated by a character other than the primary narrator or when a character tells a tale that, although unrelated to the main story, contains a moral message for the listener in the text. [...] Commonly, framing occurs with simple embedding or else the 'intercalating' of one narrative within another.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Bal, *Narratology*, 69.

⁴⁸ Bal, *Narratology*, 70.

⁴⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 77.

⁵⁰ Thomas O. Beebe, "Episode," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 140.

⁵¹ Bernard Duyfhuizen, "Framed Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 186.

Embedding, then, is the concept of one character in a narrative text becoming the narrator of a second narrative text within the original narrative text.⁵² Different narrative situations occur in cases such as parallel narratives or multi-plot narratives.⁵³

Embedding also complicates the notion of narrative levels. The analysis of narrative levels “identifies and differentiates the multiple narrating acts that make up most narratives.”⁵⁴ The primary narrative level consists of indirect discourse, free indirect discourse and the narrator’s text in which the words of an actor, or character, are narrated.⁵⁵ Different narrative levels are direct speech,⁵⁶ or previously mentioned embedded narratives. When describing the connection between the fabula and the embedded narrative, Bal explains:

[the] function of the embedded fabula is then no longer merely explanatory: the exposition influences the primary fabula. Consequently, the structure of narrative levels becomes more than a mere storytelling device: it is part of the narrative’s poetics and needs to be understood for the narrative to be fully appreciated.⁵⁷

She exemplifies this point on *Beloved*, which will be discussed in the chapter dedicated to the novel. Narrative levels are integral for the structure and therefore temporality in the text.

Another aspect of storytelling that influences temporality, in Bal’s theory, is rhythm. Rhythm depends on narrated information on one hand, and omitted information on the other. It includes ellipsis, pause, summary, and slow-down. Ellipsis influences the rhythm of the story by omitting a section of the fabula. On the contrary, pause dedicates story time to something that takes no time in the fabula, like an object.⁵⁸ Summary presents non-crucial information in a concise manner, whereas slow-down serves the opposite function, but occurs rarely. Still, Bal mentions an instance of a brief slow-down in subjective retroversion, a flood of memories in a

⁵² William Nelles, “Embedding,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 134.

⁵³ Patrick O’Neill, “Narrative Structure,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 368.

⁵⁴ O’Neill, “Narrative Structure,” 369.

⁵⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, 48.

⁵⁶ Bal, *Narratology*, 36.

⁵⁷ Bal, *Narratology*, 54.

⁵⁸ Bal, *Narratology*, 90.

short period of time.⁵⁹ Memories also influence frequency, which is the number of times events of fabula appear in the story. The most common aspect of frequency is repetition,⁶⁰ which is significant for oral storytelling, as will be explained later. Repetition often appears in retroversion, and, according to Bal, serves a specific function:

[the] repetition of a previously described event can change, or add to, the meaning of that event. The same event is presented as more – or less – pleasant, innocent, or important than we had previously believed it to be. It is thus both identical and different: the fabula elements are the same, but their meaning has changed. The past receives a different significance.⁶¹

The retroversions employed in Morrison's novel often utilize repetition for that exact purpose. The retroversions appear as memories, which Bal further examines in connection to colonization:

In stories set in former colonies, memory evokes a past in which people were dislodged from their space by colonizers who occupied it, but also a past in which they did not yield. Going back – in retroversion – to the time in which the place was a different kind of space is a way of countering the effects of colonizing acts of focalization.⁶²

What Bal describes here is a step for dealing with traumatic memory, and as such it is a necessary deviation from chronological structure for any narrative that deals with trauma, like *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*. This specific condition of colonization raises the question of the traumatised people, and traditions they come from.

1.2.1 Oral Narrative and African-American Tradition

As Torben Grodal explains, the origin of narrative is widely considered to be in the oral language, the first human communicative medium. Although the written narrative is widespread in the Western world, it is still based in oral narration. Furthermore, some cultures have not deviated from orality as significantly as Western cultures. To oral societies, narrative is a fundamental concept, functioning as entertainment, instruction, and transmission of

⁵⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 92-94.

⁶⁰ Bal, *Narratology*, 100.

⁶¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 79

⁶² Bal, *Narratology*, 145.

knowledge. The existing binary between oral and written traditions has prompted theoreticians to study oral culture in contrast to written culture. This binary opposition has been called into question by some, proposing the study of oral societies and cultures in their own individuality, rather than in contrast to writing.⁶³

The influence of orality on written narratives is considerable. For example, oral-formulaic theory emphasises the fact that to remember the orally transmitted narratives, certain formulaic phraseology, themes or story patterns had to be developed, and as a consequence were unconsciously adopted into writing during the transformation from orality to literacy. However, when a written narrative purposefully employs orality as a feature, it is not an authentic representation of spoken word, rather it is a product of writing. Still, orality in literature has important functions, such as distinctive language use, dialogue, storytelling, depiction of conflict between oral and written cultures, or the presentation of interactions between the narrator and the reader, or the characters.⁶⁴ The usage of oral features in texts is common, and a subject of critical thought. For example, the concept of *skaz*, a term of Russian Formalism, is a term for imitating oral monologue, speech act, or written reproduction of oral narration.⁶⁵ In a way, *skaz* is a particularly Western term for Morrison's use of African-American vernacular English in her novels. Nevertheless, due to Morrison writing from an African-American tradition, concepts relevant to African tradition have to be mentioned.

1.2.2 African and African-American Tradition

Although the tradition of the African narrative is considerably rich, with each language, each country, or even each community producing different tales, conventions and structures, orality is the fundamental basis for African narrative tradition in general, including written

⁶³ Harry Garuba, "Oral Cultures and Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 409-410.

⁶⁴ Donald A. Ritchie, "Oral History," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 411-413.

⁶⁵ Ann Banfield, "Skaz," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 535.

narratives. Any analysis of written African narrative tradition often consists of identifying the underlying oral influence of styles and structures of written narratives. The comprehension of the African narratives cannot be achieved unless the peoples' conventions, idioms and understandings of meanings are fully examined. Those conventions can be identified in genres such as the praise poem, proverb, riddle, trickster tale, and so on.⁶⁶ As was previously mentioned, the concept of African narrative tradition consists of various different traditions; however, Henry Louis Gates Jr. connects African-American literary tradition to Western Africa, especially the Yoruba people.⁶⁷

Gates explains the connection between Western African oral tradition and the African-American literary tradition in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. In his approach, Gates traces the origin of certain African-American literary tropes to African myths, namely the trickster, Esu, a figure appearing in numerous African traditions, especially in Yoruba mythology. Based on the oral tradition, Gates relies on the notion of double-voiced discourse, which he claims is indigenously African as well as related to Bakhtin's theory of narrative.⁶⁸ Bakhtin sees language as

inevitably carrying ideological meaning, and views any national language not as a unified system but rather as a collection of sociolects or registers [...] each of which carries the values of its group.⁶⁹

Gates expands on this by examining the concept of Signifyin(g).⁷⁰ Signifyin(g) is form of language play, encompassing "marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on."⁷¹ Although difficult to define, Gates

⁶⁶ Harry Garuba, "African Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 8-9.

⁶⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁶⁸ Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 22.

⁶⁹ Phelan and Booth, "Narrative Techniques," 372.

⁷⁰ Gates uses the capital S to distinguish African-American Signification from the English verb 'to signify' and its usage in Western theory.

⁷¹ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 52.

describes Signifyin(g) as “a formal revision that is at all points double-voiced.”⁷² It “epitomizes all of the rhetorical play in the black vernacular. Its self-consciously open rhetorical status, then, functions as a kind of writing, wherein rhetoric is the writing of speech, of oral discourse.”⁷³ In literature, one text can Signify upon another, allowing to trace formal relationship within the African-American literary history.⁷⁴

Gates identifies two types of Signification: motivated and unmotivated. Motivated Signification is essentially a critique of the original text, corresponding to parody, while unmotivated Signification is a form of appreciation, similar to pastiche.⁷⁵ Although Gates examines both motivated and unmotivated Signification predominantly among African-American texts, it extends to the whole American literary tradition, including the play on white texts.⁷⁶ According to Alan Rice, Signifyin(g) can be used in African-American texts, including Morrison’s, to “create passages which posit a different reality from that which the dominant Anglocentric culture is used to hearing.”⁷⁷ Narratively, Signifyin(g) means to retell stories and rework them to create new meaning; it is, simply put, repetition and difference.⁷⁸ James A. Snead also identifies repetition as one of the central tropes of black culture, connected to both music and literature,⁷⁹ corresponding to Gates’s emphasis on the importance of repetition and revision in literature as well as jazz music.⁸⁰

Besides repetition and revision, Gates explores the trope of the Talking Book, a speakerly text which represents speaking black voice, or the black vernacular, described by Zora Neale Hurston and Ishmael Reed “an oral book, a talking book.”⁸¹ The black voice

⁷² Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 22.

⁷³ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 53.

⁷⁴ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 88.

⁷⁵ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, xxvi.

⁷⁶ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, xxvii.

⁷⁷ Rice, “Jazzing It up a Storm,” 431.

⁷⁸ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45.

⁷⁹ James A. Snead, “On Repetition in Black Culture,” *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no.4 (Winter 1981): 150-153, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904326..>

⁸⁰ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 52.

⁸¹ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 112.

presented in the Talking Book is the voice of the black oral tradition. Gates identifies it as African-American tradition's most fundamental repeated trope, and a possible narrative strategy.⁸² It is particularly significant to the transition between the oral text and the written text, something that is explored in slave narratives. As Gates explains, the issue of representing the oral within the written in the moment of such a transition is paradoxical, and in early slave narratives it is represented by the Talking Book failing to speak. Furthermore, it exposes the tension between the black voice and the white text, between the oral and the written traditions. The question of voice in the text, according to Gates, is

compounded in any literature, such as the Afro-American literary tradition, in which the oral and the written literary traditions comprise separate and distinct discursive universes which, on occasion, overlap, but often do not. Precisely because successive Western cultures have privileged written art over oral or musical forms, the writing of black people in Western languages has, at all points, remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject.⁸³

Morrison, by choosing to reproduce black speech and unique voices rooted in oral tradition in her novels, employs the trope of the Talking Book. Furthermore, her texts employ Signifiyn(g) as well as repetition. Aiming to authentically represent the lives of black people in American society, Morrison fits Gates' view of the tradition: "[much] of the Afro-American literary tradition can be read as successive attempts to create a new narrative space for representing the recurring referent of Afro-American literature, the so-called Black Experience."⁸⁴ As will be later examined, Morrison's novels, in order to represent the black experience, include the narration of the trauma black people were subjugated to during slavery, and showcase the continuous renewal of this trauma through racism after the end of slavery.

⁸² Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 181-198.

⁸³ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 131-132.

⁸⁴ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 111.

1.3.1 Trauma Theory

The concept of trauma is widely used in society today. To fully grasp the theoretical approach of literary theory to the issue, trauma is defined below. *The Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry* describes trauma as such:

an injury (Greek, “wound”), either physical or psychological. [...] Psychological traumas include emotional shocks that have a more or less permanent effect on the personality, such as rejection, divorce, combat experience, civilian catastrophes, and racial or religious discrimination. These are often referred to as traumatic experiences.⁸⁵

Naturally, trauma has been the subject of psychological and psychoanalytical study, however it has entered the sphere of literary study as well. Mainly based on Jacques Lacan’s and Sigmund Freud’s theory of trauma, critics such as Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, among others, developed trauma theory applicable to literary texts. In this approach, trauma is considered an unrepresentable event, as Michelle Balaev summarizes: “an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language.”⁸⁶ It needs to be acknowledged that since the initial traumatic experience can never be fully recovered, it can never be fully narrated. The idea of ‘the unspeakable’ contains the inability of language to articulate the experience, but alternative models of trauma theory suggest there is considerable value in trauma narratives.⁸⁷ Those approaches, namely postcolonial approach, utilise Judith L. Herman’s account of traumatic experience.

Herman’s book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Abuse to Political Terror* views trauma as not only an event, but also considers durative traumatic experiences. Therefore, she includes atrocities such as domestic abuse, captivity, or slavery.

⁸⁵ Robert M. Goldenson, *Longman Dictionary of Psychology and Psychiatry* (New York: Longman Inc, 1984), 762.

⁸⁶ Michelle Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,” in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, ed. Michelle Balaev (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

⁸⁷ Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,” 1.

Survivors of such trauma, according to Herman, “challenge us to reconnect fragments, to reconstruct history, to make meaning of their present symptoms in the light of past events.”⁸⁸ Since traumatic events produce significant and lasting changes to psychological functions, they produce fragmentation. This fragmentation affects cognition and memory, and especially traumatic memories, which do not shape a linear narrative. Due to the lack of verbal narrative and context, those memories form vivid sensations and images.⁸⁹ Such memories, due to their visual nature, connection to bodily sensation, and lack of verbal narrative, resemble the memories of young children. Further, reliving a traumatic experience evokes a strong emotional reaction, therefore traumatized people try to avoid remembering and reliving the trauma.⁹⁰ Herman describes techniques of dealing with trauma and the recovery process as connected to the retrieval and subsequent narration of the trauma. She emphasises the role of supportive community, the importance of building self-identity, and the process of recovering a sense of power and control, which was taken from the survivor by the traumatic event.⁹¹

An important step in dealing with trauma is the reconstruction of the story. Herman assigns the narrative a seminal role in recovering from trauma, and thus allows postcolonial narrative approach to apply her concept. The reconstruction of the story, and therefore the creation of the narrative, includes the events as well as the responses of the survivor and important people in their life. It is natural for the survivor to not be able to express the most traumatic moments in words, however, putting everything into words is the ultimate goal. As Herman writes: “[the] patient’s first attempts to develop a narrative language may be partially dissociated. She may write down her story in an altered state of consciousness and then disavow it. She may throw it away, hide it, or forget she has written it.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence From Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 2.

⁸⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34-38.

⁹⁰ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 42.

⁹¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 158-159.

⁹² Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 177.

When the trauma narrative is produced, the story “becomes a testimony [which has] both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial.”⁹³ The concept of bearing witness is also important for Herman’s trauma theory. Witnesses are also subject to the dialectic of trauma, and similarly to the victims, they have difficulty seeing fragments of the situation and piecing them together.⁹⁴ Moreover, the witness needs to respect the victim’s narrative, including its silences, help the victim narrate the historical silence of slavery, and listen without emotionally resisting the narrative.⁹⁵ The solidarity with the victim, when their trauma narrative is presented, in Herman’s view, fuels social change, challenges oppression and creates hope for liberation.⁹⁶ In short, Herman’s approach to trauma narrative is “therapeutic, enabling psychic integration and eventual resolution of Trauma.”⁹⁷ This possibility of narrating trauma is a significant deviation from the previously mentioned traditional approach to trauma, and opens the space for the interpretation of texts as trauma narratives.

1.3.2 Trauma Theory and Literary Representation

The application of trauma theory on literary texts is the object of literary trauma theory. As was previously assessed, Caruth, LaCapra, Felman and Laub have considered the problematics of literary representation of trauma extensively in their respective works. Although the original traumatic experience remains unspeakable, the scholars generally agree on the necessity of testimony. As was explained in Herman’s approach to trauma, testimony allows the victim to work through and possibly overcome their trauma. According to Jennifer L. Griffiths, the testimony “depends on a relationship and a process between the survivor and

⁹³ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.

⁹⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 2.

⁹⁵ Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women’s Fiction* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 148.

⁹⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 247.

⁹⁷ Irene Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects,” *Humanities* 4 (2015): 256, www.mdpi.com/journal/humanities.

the witness, as memory emerges and reunites a body and a voice severed in trauma.”⁹⁸ In the case of textual testimony, or trauma narratives, the reader becomes the witness. However, as Eden Wales Freedman explains, there is danger in the assumption that by reading about the trauma the witness “understands intimately what an actual victim has endured.”⁹⁹ Since the original traumatic experience can never be fully narrated, it can never be comprehended in its full extent. Moreover, readers participate in the trauma narrative by the mere act of reading, searching for connections, motivations, meanings, and thus participate in what might seem as further violation.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in order to become a witness to the traumatic story, it is necessary to first recognize and take responsibility for the position a reader adopts towards the text.¹⁰¹ Consequently, the need to recognise one’s position towards a text extends even to trauma theory.

The postcolonial approach to trauma combines psychoanalytic theory and postcolonial theory, or cultural studies.¹⁰² Unlike the previously mentioned authors, who analysed mostly the trauma of the Holocaust, this perspective focuses, according to Balaev: “on the specificity of trauma that locates meaning through a greater consideration of the social and cultural contexts of traumatic experience.”¹⁰³ Therefore, a single conceptualization of trauma cannot be sufficient, since it cannot account for individual and cultural concepts of the self, memory, or society in literary texts. Moreover, the cultural-historical aspect of individual and collective trauma requires different understandings of trauma and non-Western forms of narrative, which are acknowledged in postcolonial theory,¹⁰⁴ hence the acceptance of Herman’s revised approach to trauma.

⁹⁸ Jennifer L. Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Memory in African American Women’s Writing and Performance* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009) 2.

⁹⁹ Eden Wales Freedman, *Reading Testimony, Witnessing Trauma: Confronting Race, Gender, and Violence in American Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020) 11.

¹⁰⁰ Freedman, *Reading Testimony*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Freedman, *Reading Testimony*, 12.

¹⁰² Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,” 3.

¹⁰³ Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,” 3.

¹⁰⁴ Balaev, “Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered,” 8-9.

1.3.3 Postcolonial Approach to Trauma and Literary Representation

One of the main objectives of postcolonial literary theory is the problem of analysis of non-Western postcolonial narratives through a Western theoretical lens. Postcolonial theory accounts for the distinction between Western theoretical approaches and non-Western cultures represented in literary texts. Irene Visser, one of the chief critics of trauma in postmodern contexts, claims that the application of Western trauma theory to non-Western cultures is problematic, for it does not account for spirituality, orality, and different belief systems. Visser identifies Freud's approach to trauma as a point of departure of further expansion to accommodate non-Eurocentric, non-Western models.¹⁰⁵ Thus, postcolonial and critical race approaches allow a critique of the originally patriarchal Eurocentric theories while simultaneously reworking them in order to enable a more universal understanding of trauma outside the Western scope.¹⁰⁶

Visser identifies Judith L. Herman's account of trauma as more suitable for postcolonial approach: "not only because it entails an openness to the structuring of narrativization but also because it allows a historically and culturally specific approach to trauma narratives."¹⁰⁷ Through dismantling the classical models of trauma and focusing on the suffering caused by the traumatic event while acknowledging the cultural forces, this approach to trauma can be applied to African American experience without the threat of diminishing the impact of the actual events and the conditions created by racism.¹⁰⁸ Since Herman's approach allows the connection between cultural, historical, and personal realms,¹⁰⁹ it opens space for the inclusion of various factors of culturally specific traumas, as well as the exploration of different kinds of trauma omitted in other conceptualizations of trauma theory.

¹⁰⁵ Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 3 (2011): 279, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.569378>.

¹⁰⁶ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Visser, *Trauma Theory*, 274.

¹⁰⁸ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 5.

One of such omissions is collective trauma. Collective trauma is experienced by social groups, defined by social positions, and it is the outcome of sociocultural acts of traumatic experience constructed through narrative.¹¹⁰ Slavery, through its connection with colonialism, can be identified as such collective trauma. As will be shown, the original trauma of slavery produced racial trauma, generational/transgenerational trauma, as well as abandonment trauma of African Americans. Racial trauma encompasses the immediate effects of slavery as well as its lasting impact on American society through racism, the marginalization and othering of black people.¹¹¹ According to Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, the constitution of the black body as ‘the other’ by the dominant culture’s gaze not only complicates the constitution of the self and black subjectivity, but also means that “the body becomes a place holder for memory and trauma, accounting for personal and cultural behavior (of both blacks and whites) and explaining why trauma persists, transferred from one generation to another.”¹¹² This transmission of trauma on successive generations is called generational, or transgenerational, trauma.

Beside the racial trauma’s complicated image of black subjectivity, abandonment trauma is also transmitted on other generations.¹¹³ Due to the forceful destruction of familial ties under slavery, and the associated separation, the traumatised parents unwittingly pass the trauma onto their children.¹¹⁴ Thus, the cycle of racial trauma begun in slavery continues to be perpetuated, not only in the personal experiences of trauma and distorted subjectivity, but also within the larger system. One of such traumatising forces of the system is the continuously perpetuated systemic racism, which is currently discussed and emphasised due to the efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement.

¹¹⁰ Irene Visser, “Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies,” *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, ed. Michelle Balaev (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 111-112.

¹¹¹ Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 1.

¹¹² Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 2-3.

¹¹³ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 109.

¹¹⁴ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 12-13, 15.

The necessity to acknowledge such forces is seminal for the potential understanding of the black experience. In order to comprehend the traumatic effects of slavery, the witnessing of racial trauma, and consequently trauma narratives, is crucial. Without the representation of black experience and trauma, the history of African Americans is under the threat of erasure. As Schreiber writes: “[the] erasure of black experience by white culture in essence erases any witness to the horrors of slavery.”¹¹⁵ The narratives of traumatic experience highlight the histories that have formerly been hidden, ignored, or silenced in the master narrative.

The master narrative, or the dominant cultural voice, not only ignores violence, but also reinscribes oppression by denying the testimonies which would threaten hegemony.¹¹⁶ According to Griffiths, the political implication of those testimonies in the context of the master narratives causes the regulation of bodies and voices, impacting the process of witnessing of trauma.¹¹⁷ Thus, trauma narratives, including African-American literary works, become necessary since, as Griffiths states, “in the performance and literary texts [...] the reconstitution of the self through testimony provides an opportunity to challenge the dominant symbolic order [...] or the cultural inscription that silences the voices of survivors.”¹¹⁸ However, the re-enactment of silenced histories through narrative, as Visser claims, “must not be considered as contesting for primacy, but rather as non-contesting and co-existing, from a recognition that collectively held traumatic memories resonate profoundly.”¹¹⁹ In this sense, literary trauma narratives offer the representation of the previously unheard experience in order to be heard and recognised.

For authentic representation of such experiences, postcolonial approach emphasises the

¹¹⁵ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 9-10.

¹¹⁷ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 8-9.

¹¹⁸ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma,” 253.

importance of indigenous forms of narrative for the distinction from the Western ideologies.¹²⁰ According to Visser, the term “magic realism,” sometimes used to describe *Beloved*, is point of discussion whether it “with its binary opposition between magic (as superstition) versus realism (as truth), can be adequate to the reading of postcolonial literature.”¹²¹ Similarly, narrative features often attributed to postmodernism, such as non-linearity, self-reflexivity, parody or disrupted causality, are identified as inherent to oral narratives, and their purpose is studied in relation to the indigenous traditions.¹²² As was previously mentioned, this is especially important for the expression of trauma in postcolonial texts, including African-American literary works. The awareness of the influence of both Western and African narrative traditions on African-American texts combined with the postcolonial approach to trauma as not only personal, but also a cultural phenomenon, justifies the application of trauma theory to Morrison’s texts to analyse the narrative strategies employed in her testimony to African-American trauma.

Trauma can be presented, represented, and dramatized in literature in many ways, without claiming to create a clear definition. Postcolonial trauma narratives frequently showcase that “resilience and growth are possible”, without denying the lasting impact of traumatic experience.¹²³ Therefore, the centuries spanning effects of slavery can be acknowledged in postcolonial approach to literary representation of trauma. Thus, African-American texts can be considered a public testimony to the trauma of black people in the United States. The aftermath of slavery can be traced not only through the time periods depicted in Morrison’s trilogy, but also in today’s American society. Racism is still a prominent issue in the United States, with more people drawing attention to institutionalised racism,

¹²⁰ Patrick Williams, “Post-colonialism and Narrative,” in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge, 2010), 455.

¹²¹ Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma,” 260.

¹²² Visser, “Trauma Theory,” 278.

¹²³ Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma,” 255.

microaggression, and the trauma it produces. The discussion regarding the lived experience of African Americans is alive even today, proving that the impact of the trauma of slavery and racism connected to it is far from being left in the past. Morrison, as will be discussed in the following chapters, focuses on the lived experience of African American people, and depicts personal overcoming of trauma while emphasising the reality of collective trauma. By utilising narrative strategies of African-American literary tradition, Morrison narrates the black experience in a distinctly black voice. The influence of African oral culture on African-American literary tradition, combined with the Western written tradition, and the narrative strategies that originated from it need to be acknowledged in order to avoid either exoticizing or whitewashing of African-American literature.

Chapter 2 *Beloved*: Keeping the Past at Bay

Beloved (1987), Morrison's fifth novel and the first book of the trilogy, is perhaps the most discussed piece of Morrison's oeuvre. Polarizing in every aspect, *Beloved* offers infinite space for interpretation, criticism and re-reading. Discussing Morrison's work, Keith Byerman states:

Morrison [...] creates narratives that reveal [repressed] past by breaking through the repression, by revealing the distorting effects of the 'white word,' and by reconstituting communities and individual identities based on revelation and witness.¹²⁴

This assessment of Morrison's work is generally agreed upon. Although the criticism of the novel is certainly copious, there is a surprisingly little attention given to the narrative representation of trauma in the novel. Trauma itself in *Beloved* is the object of numerous works by Gurleen Grewal, R. Clifton Spargo, or Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, among others. Similarly, the narrative strategies have been examined by, for example, Martha J. Cutter, Linda Koolish or Philip Page. However, since literary trauma theory questions precisely the narrative and textual representation of trauma, it is important to analyse the narrative strategies employed in the text. Sam Durrant considers *Beloved* in the context of the postcolonial trauma narrative and, though not focusing purely on narrative strategies, emphasises the potential of examining traumatic representation in the novel.¹²⁵

Beloved depicts the story of Sethe, a former slave who must come to terms with her past. The effects of slavery, and the ways the characters remember them and deal with them, are the primary focus of the novel. Since slavery is inarguably traumatic,¹²⁶ the novel thus becomes a narrative representation of trauma. By focusing on the experience of African Americans, Morrison's novel attempts to represent trauma and black experience in an authentic black voice.

¹²⁴Keith Byerman, *Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 28.

¹²⁵Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative*, 83.

¹²⁶Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xv.

To achieve this, Morrison combines strategies of Western literary tradition, and those typical for African oral narrative. Merely by presenting the story in the form of the novel and the narrative as a written text, *Beloved* is placed within the Western literary tradition. The voice of *Beloved*, or rather voices, collectively construct the narrative, much like the characters narrate the community's collective memory of the trauma of slavery. Furthermore, the non-linear structure of the novel introduces numerous embedded narratives, which consist of traumatic memories of the characters. The episodic manner in which the events are presented is evocative of oral narration, and enables the employment of anachronous story aspects, chiefly retroversion. Finally, the technique of repetition mimics not only oral storytelling, but also the recollection of traumatic memory. Memory, or "rememory" as it is called in *Beloved*, is an important but complicated aspect of any narrative, but especially when dealing with trauma.

The trauma of slavery affects the collective and individual identity and memory, and perpetuates trauma in successive generations.¹²⁷ To acknowledge those effects, remembering and reconstructing not only the personal past but also of the history itself is in order.¹²⁸ However, as Keith Byerman states, "[b]ecause historians are inherently limited in how to frame the African American narrative, artists must fill the gap of rendering subjective, individual experience."¹²⁹ Morrison revisits the past and recovers the social memory in her novels.¹³⁰ She employs the concept of remembering in attempts to recreate a lost history of people who are no longer able to tell their tale; the victims of slavery.¹³¹

In narrative theory, Bal defines memory as a narrative act in which elements are put together to create story, so they can be remembered and potentially told. Memories are,

¹²⁷ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 2-5.

¹²⁸ Melvin Dixon, "The Black Writer's Use of Memory," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Mally (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18-19.

¹²⁹ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 22.

¹³⁰ Gurleen Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison Southern Literary Studies* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 11.

¹³¹ Nellie Y. McKay, "The Journals of Charlotte L. Forten-Grimke: *Les Lieux de Memoire* in African-American Women's Autobiography," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Mally (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262.

however, unreliable, and to intelligibly articulate them, they need to be “rhetorically overworked.” Therefore, the story that is remembered is not identical to the one that was experienced. Bal points out that this discrepancy is especially paralysing in the case of traumatic experience, which obstructs the ability to comprehend the events as they occur. The incapability of remembering and working through the traumatic memories can be situated on both the story level and the text level. Memory is a glimpse of the past, but the act of remembering it is “situated in the present of the memory”¹³², complicating the temporality of the narrative. As was previously discussed, memory and remembering are crucial for dealing with trauma, although the process is certainly challenging. In the case of *Beloved*, as Gurleen Grewal states: “the memories are as complex as the people who tell, repeat, and improvise them; narrative becomes a collective, interactive enterprise.”¹³³

2.1 Trauma of the Characters

The characters each deal with their own trauma. Being born into slavery, Sethe’s trauma is manifold, although the underlying theme is denied motherhood.¹³⁴ Her mother, whom she admits she barely remembers,¹³⁵ could not mother Sethe properly, which causes Sethe to be proud of being able to keep and take care of her own children.¹³⁶ However, when her milk is stolen by the schoolteacher’s nephew, the ability to provide for her children is threatened.¹³⁷ Sethe, heavily pregnant, decides to run away, after the children she sent ahead, including a baby daughter for whom “[she] would get that milk to her baby girl if she had to swim.” (97) On the run, she undergoes a traumatic delivery of her youngest daughter Denver, which she survives only with the help of a white girl Amy (99). When she finally reaches Bluestone Road, Sethe

¹³² Bal, *Narratology*, 145-147.

¹³³ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 103.

¹³⁴ Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*, 99.

¹³⁵ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2016), 72. All future page references to this source will be included in parentheses in the text.

¹³⁶ Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*, 93.

¹³⁷ Greg Forter, “Colonial Trauma, Utopian Carnality, Modernist Form: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*,” in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, ed. Michelle Balaev (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 73.

is reunited with her children and can fulfil her role as a mother. But after only twenty-eight days of peace, the schoolteacher appears and Sethe, rather than see her children enslaved, attempts to kill them, succeeding only with the daughter known as Beloved: “I took and put my babies where they’d be safe.” (193) The event of Beloved’s murder is at the centre of the novel, as an action denying motherhood in itself. However, Beloved’s apparent resurrection demands Sethe to confront her memory, and effectively forces Sethe to articulate her trauma.¹³⁸ This, however, is only possible thanks to Paul D, who comes to Sethe’s life and reminds her of the past.

But Paul D himself carries substantial trauma, which is depicted as a tobacco tin in the place of his heart (86). Also a slave in Sweet Home, like Sethe, Paul D struggles with the denial of his manhood caused by slavery.¹³⁹ Although Mr. Garner calls his slaves ‘Sweet Home men,’ they are men only by his permission.¹⁴⁰ Paul D was even allowed to carry a gun which for him symbolised manhood: “Men who knew their manhood lay in their guns and were not even embarrassed by the knowledge that without gunshot fox would laugh at them.” (191) When the Schoolteacher comes to Sweet Home, he takes away the gun, and continually humiliates the Sweet Home men. When Paul D’s and Sixo’s attempt to run fails and Sixo is killed in front of Paul D, he tries to kill the slave-trader, which results in Paul D being sold and chained to the other slaves, where he undergoes further humiliation and trauma (128-130). Finally, he breaks free and wanders around till he arrives at 124 Bluestone Road, where he sees Sethe after eighteen years, and meets her daughter Denver.

Denver is the first of the family to be born free. She did not directly experience the traumas of slavery, and was too young to remember Beloved’s murder, therefore she relies on the stories people tell her.¹⁴¹ She is obsessed by the story of her own birth, because she is present

¹³⁸ Linda Krumholz, “The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *African American Review* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 402, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3041912>.

¹³⁹ Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 66-68.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*, 92.

¹⁴¹ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 35.

in it.¹⁴² For Denver, presence and absence are important themes, because after her brothers leave, she feels utterly alone: “I can’t live here. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I can’t live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don’t like me. Girls don’t either.” (17) This loneliness is the result of Sethe’s isolation from the community after the murder of the baby, and Denver, as a carrier of generational trauma, suffers because of it.¹⁴³ She is even scared that her mother will kill her too: “So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can’t happen again and my mother won’t have to kill me too.” (242) Furthermore, she hopes her father, whom she only knows from the stories, will come back, but his absence is still prominent to her: “That her own father’s absence was not hers. [...] Only those who knew him (‘knew him well’) could claim his absence for themselves.” (15) Isolated from the community, never knowing her father, left by her brothers and Baby Suggs, and afraid of her mother, Denver’s loneliness reaches such levels that she fixates on the ghost (45). But when Paul D chases the ghost away, she is alone again, until the character of Beloved appears.

Beloved is certainly the most divisive character in the book. Interpretations of this figure range from a ghost of the dead baby,¹⁴⁴ embodiment of the past,¹⁴⁵ or a woman that has escaped from captivity of white men.¹⁴⁶ Liza Krumholz identifies Beloved as a trickster figure,¹⁴⁷ which is certainly a suitable approach, given Beloved’s role in the novel and her behaviour towards the other characters. The narrative manipulates the interpretation of Beloved’s character from the beginning, immediately establishing that ghosts are a part of the world of the fabula, and one is present in 124 (3-4). Thus, when a mysterious woman of the same name as the recently exorcised ghost appears, the narrative continues to enable this interpretation. However, when

¹⁴² Claudine Raynaud, “*Beloved* or the shifting shapes of memory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Justine Tally (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55.

¹⁴³ Krumholz, “The Ghosts of Slavery,” 404.

¹⁴⁴ Raynaud, “*Beloved* or the shifting shapes of memory,” 54.

¹⁴⁵ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Martha J. Cutter, “The Story Must Go On and On: The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Jazz*,” *African American Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2901184>.

¹⁴⁷ Krumholz, “The Ghosts of Slavery,” 397.

the textual evidence is taken into account, namely Beloved's voice in the second part of the book, it presents the possibility that her traumatic memories are those of the Middle Passage.¹⁴⁸

Beloved narrates disjointed memories of the boat, of "men without skin" (248), of "those able to die are in a pile (249), of losing her own mother - "the woman with my face" (249), of being abused (251), of possibly escaping "again again night day night day I am waiting no iron circle is around my neck [...] no men without skin" (251)¹⁴⁹, and searching for the mother-daughter link that she has been denied (252). She finds this link with Sethe: "Sethe is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile" (252). Even though the text itself presents evidence to support the theory that Beloved is a survivor of the Middle Passage, it does not deny her function as a trickster figure. Moreover, Bal points out the fact that Beloved is narrated into being by the other characters, thus drawing attention to "the creative power of storytelling itself, as a life-giving act."¹⁵⁰ Beloved's function and origin, therefore, are ambiguous and so is her behaviour and her subsequent departure. Nonetheless, Beloved's fragmented story indicates a traumatic experience, leaving her afraid that she is "going to be in pieces" (251), whatever she is.

Lastly, introduced only through memories, Baby Suggs struggles with the erasure of selfhood under slavery.¹⁵¹ She is also denied her motherhood, and is only able to keep one child, Halle. Only after she is bought out of slavery by Halle, she realises her own self: "But suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, 'These hands belong to me. These my hands.'" (166) Her self-assertion continues when she claims her name: "Suggs is my name, sir. From my husband. He didn't call me Jenny." (167) Her self-realisation blossoms as she integrates into the community and becomes a kind of a preacher to the

¹⁴⁸ Cutter, "The Story Must Go On and On," 63.

¹⁴⁹ Beloved's voice is fractured, which is graphically presented in the text by the excessive spaces between the fragments.

¹⁵⁰ Bal, *Narratology*, 54.

¹⁵¹ Anita Durkin, "Object Written, Written Object: Slavery, Scarring, and Complications of Authorship in *Beloved*," in *Toni Morrison's Beloved*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 175.

community, evoking the Afro-Christian tradition of sermons and collective singing.¹⁵² However, after the incident with Sethe, Baby Suggs gives up her role in the community, and dies while blaming the white people for all that has passed (212). Even after her isolation and death, the members of the community, like Stamp Paid or Janey, still call her “Baby Suggs, holy” (298) which is repeated numerous times throughout the novel to emphasise her role. Presented through people’s memories (293), is her role in the community that convinces them to help Sethe. Baby Suggs not only illustrates the traumatic erasure of selfhood and motherhood under slavery, but in a way, Baby Suggs, though absent from it, still influences the primary narrative due to her former role as a preacher figure for the community.

2.2 Voice

As was previously assessed, *Beloved* evokes oral storytelling.¹⁵³ This fact can be assigned to the black vernacular language of the direct speech, which, according to Gates, “Signifies upon both formal language use and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle-class white people.”¹⁵⁴ This representation alone situates Morrison’s text within the African-American tradition of the trope of the Talking Book, which is further reinforced by the various techniques of oral tradition. The oral legacy in *Beloved* is further evident in the use of multiple focalizers and multiple voices. Such strategies are necessary for the expression of the collective trauma of slavery.¹⁵⁵

The identification of individual voices is obscured by the complicated employment of focalization. Though the majority of the primary narrative is related by an external focalizer, in this case identical to the external narrator, the thought processes, and most notably memories, shift the situation to an internal focalization, with character-bound focalizers and memories as

¹⁵² Lars Eckstein, “A Love Supreme: Jazzthetic Strategies in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” in *Toni Morrison’s Beloved*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009), 138.

¹⁵³ Durkin, “Object Written, Written Object: Slavery, Scarring, and Complications of Authorship in *Beloved*,” 176.

¹⁵⁴ Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 47.

¹⁵⁵ Eckstein, “A Love Supreme,” 146.

the focalized objects. This enables the story to be told in a collaborative manner as a blend of characters' stories, in order to reconstruct individual and collective history.¹⁵⁶ Although the internal focalizations are still mostly narrated by the external narrative voice, there are various instances when the voice shifts to a character-bound narrator. That is the case for *Beloved*, *Denver* and *Sethe*, all of which do, at some point, lend their voices to the text.

Similarly to the collective narration of the story of the trauma of slavery in *Beloved*, the voices of *Beloved*, *Denver* and *Sethe* together form a sort of a chorus (254-256), evocative of the call-and-response of African-American musical tradition.¹⁵⁷ Individually, the voices present the personal traumas of the characters. When separated from the chorus, *Beloved's* voice is textually represented as fragmented and chaotic, full of repetitions, and difficult to make sense of. As Sam Durrant claims: "Beloved's story, the story of the Sixty Million and more, is not a verbally transmissible story."¹⁵⁸ She is also the only one who does not heal, which can be attributed either to her unspeakable experience during the Middle Passage, or her narrative function as the figure of the past.

Denver, however, articulates her trauma understandably through her voice. *Denver's* situation is not only about loneliness per se; she struggles with the absence of her father, death of Baby Suggs, the fear of her mother and her own identity. Through numerous retroversions, *Denver* admits her fear of *Sethe*: "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it." (242) At the same time, *Denver* recognizes that *Sethe's* actions were more complicated than it seemed:

All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. (242)

¹⁵⁶ Lynda Koolish, "Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representations in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text," *African American Review* 29, no.3 (Autumn 1995): 421, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042392>.

¹⁵⁷ Koolish, "Fictive Strategies," 422-423.

¹⁵⁸ Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative*, 107 -108.

Through a memory of Baby Suggs, Denver even identifies the cause of Sethe's rampage: "The whitepeople came anyway. In her yard. She had done everything right and they came in her yard anyway." (247) Baby Suggs is the one who told Denver the stories about her father, and who explained to her that the baby ghost would not hurt her (247). The ghost, as Denver admits, made her feel less lonely, and with Beloved's arrival she finally has someone: "Beloved is my sister" (243) and "She's mine, Beloved. She's mine." (247) Through her voice, Denver speaks her lonely past and expresses her understanding of the reason for Sethe's behaviour, enabling her subsequent overcoming of personal traumas, namely the isolation from community, and the acceptance of Sethe's actions.

Sethe's voice appears even before the three fragments dedicated to their respective voices. It is the most prominent when Sethe allows the thought that Beloved is her dead daughter. Her reluctance to remember the past is evident from her address to Beloved, which is related via Sethe's interior monologue: "Thank God I don't have to rememory or say a thing because you know it. All. You know I never would a left you. Never." (226) Through another retroversion, Sethe begins to explain why she did what she did:

This is the first time I'm telling it and I'm telling it to you because it might help explain something to you although I know you don't need me to do it. To tell it or even think over it. You don't have to listen either, if you don't want to. (227 – 228)

It is the memory of the recognition that white people consider black people animals (228), and of realising her children would never be free, which forces Sethe to confront her motherhood, connected directly to her milk: "You remember that, don't you; that I did? That when I got here I had milk enough for all." (233) In the section dedicated solely to her voice, Sethe continues: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick." (236)

Although Sethe promises to explain why she killed her baby, her voice oscillates between

various retroversions, never fully narrating the murder. The section ends with the return to primary narrative, and indication of Sethe's state:

I couldn't lay down with you then. No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy. She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine. (341)

Durrant points out that those interior monologues, though referring to the other women, remain unspoken, and their personal histories therefore unshared.¹⁵⁹ Supporting this claim, Stamp Paid identifies the situation: "Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken." (235) Even if Sethe explained her motivations in this section, it would not be speaking it out loud. However, she does speak them out loud eventually, in a crucial point in the novel.

When Sethe fully interprets Beloved as her deceased daughter, she slips into the past, which gradually consumes her.¹⁶⁰ The situation is introduced as being overheard by Denver: "This and much more Denver heard her say from her corner chair." (296) Though reiterated through Denver's consciousness, Sethe, through reliving the atrocities that led to the murder of Beloved, further confronts the dehumanizing forces of slavery in an attempt to make Beloved understand her actions:

Before Sethe could make her realize that worse than that—far worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether the bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter's private parts, soiled her daughter's thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon. She might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter. (295)

¹⁵⁹ Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative*, 106.

¹⁶⁰ Raynaud, "Beloved or the shifting shapes of memory," 50.

Essentially summarizing the destructive forces of slavery upon the black people, Sethe finally speaks the unspeakable, and confronts her trauma. This is a critical moment in the story, since Sethe finally utters and, in a way, justifies to herself the killing of Beloved. But the expected absolution does not come: “It was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out.” (297) Denver’s recognition of the gravity of the situation is the turning point towards the eventual reconciliation of the novel. When speaking to Janey, Bodwin’s employee, Denver realises she will have to say what happened: “It was a little thing to pay, but it seemed big to Denver. Nobody was going to help her unless she told it—told all of it.” (298) In this moment, the text explicitly states the necessity of the retelling of the experience of black people in their voice, something the text has been attempting through the multiplicity of the voices. Moreover, this repetition of the events is what eventually saves 124. However, repetition cannot be realised in *Beloved* without retroversion.

2.3 Narrative Structure and Retroversion

The text is divided into three parts. The first significant event of the primary narrative is Paul D’s arrival to 124, and part one of the text ends with Paul D leaving. The second part begins with Stamp Paid regretting his actions and trying to interfere with what is happening in 124 and ends with him making Paul D understand Sethe’s actions. The last part begins with Denver realising something must be done to save her mother, and ends with this salvation, and Paul D’s subsequent return to 124. The narrative text – story – fabula relation in *Beloved* is certainly complicated. The text and the story are fragmented and non-linear. Only the fabula, when pieced together from the story, assumes a chronological order. The narrative structure is anything but chronological, mimicking the retrieval of traumatic memories¹⁶¹ as well as the episodic and digressive nature of oral storytelling.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

¹⁶² Philip Page, “Circularity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *African American Review* 26, no.1 (Spring 1992): 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042074>.

The primary narrative, in this case the start of the narrative text, is identified as the present of 1873 by the external narrator (3). But as soon as this fact is asserted, the narrative slips into events prior, explaining the departure of Howard and Buglar and the death of Baby Suggs:

Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more [...]. (3)

Even on the first page, the narrative diverts from the primary narrative time, employing what Bal terms as retroversion. This sets the tone for what is to come: a fragmented, anachronous narrative pieced from memories, presented as embedded narratives and episodes. The primary narrative, thus, can be considered a frame for the other narratives. The manner in which the text flows from the primary narrative to other narratives has an oral quality to it, which evokes the African storytelling tradition.¹⁶³ This tradition is reinforced in the text by the necessity of the characters' narration of their memories. The function of such non-chronological narrative situation, according to Greg Forter,

is a way of depicting the inner experience of traumatic disruption (rather than its surmounting); it reflects at the level of form the characters' fragmented inner experiences, and thereby gestures toward things that our national narrative has sought to elide.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, the narrative structure combines the oral storytelling of African tradition with representation of traumatic memories in order to illustrate the unique condition of black experience dealing with the aftermath of slavery.

As was previously mentioned, retroversion plays a significant role in the temporal structure of the novel. Internal retroversions rarely appear in the text; episodes that are not textually linked to the primary narrative, such as Paul D's experience of Sweet Home, being sold to a chain gang and almost drowning, can be identified as external retroversions. However, memories, although temporally outside the primary narrative, emerge or end within it, therefore

¹⁶³ Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Forter, "Colonial Trauma," 88-89.

they are mixed retroversions. In the first couple of pages the external narrator facilitates mixed retroversion as a part of exposition of the situation in 124, but it is already indicative of the function of remembering:

“No more powerful than the way I loved her,” Sethe answered and there it was again. The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I’ll do it for free. (5)

Embedded into the explanation of the house being haunted, Sethe’s memory of picking Beloved’s headstone ambushes her. It is also the first indication of Sethe’s guilt, and the trauma connected with the baby’s death. Delving deeper into the narrative past, as in a stream of consciousness,¹⁶⁵ the thought of the baby reminds Sethe of a conversation with Baby Suggs about remembering, explaining the story’s preoccupation with memories:

Unfortunately her brains was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her led. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin bucked like a washboard. [...] Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (6)

The invasive recollection of another traumatic event, presented as recurring by the words ‘might’, ‘would’ or ‘every time’, fluidly transitions into the primary narrative, as Sethe washes away the chamomile and finds Paul D on the porch: “As if to punish her further for the terrible memory.” (7) The shared history between Sethe and Paul D is gradually revealed in the text by the anachronous strategies.

Paul D’s appearance forces numerous retroversions, mostly related to Sweet Home. Throughout the conversation of Sethe and Paul D, the text hints towards the emergence of several notable traumatic memories, which need to be remembered and narrated: Paul D’s

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*, 89-90.

immobile face, Halle's fate and 'the churn' or Denver's birth: "A whitegirl helped me." (9) Furthermore, Paul D recollects Sethe in Sweet Home, calling her Halle's girl and Halle's woman (10), indicating his struggle with his own masculinity, and its denial by slavery. The fate of the Sweet Home men is also hinted at, and so is the role of the schoolteacher. Nonetheless, the first direct narration of the past occurs when Paul D asks Sethe about her trauma, ever-present in the form of the scars on her back, and even though Sethe tries to explain the trauma, Paul D fails to hear her:

"They used cowhide on you?"
"And they took my milk."
"They beat you and you was pregnant?"
"And they took my milk!" (20)

This is the first time the narrative presents this event; however, its significance becomes clear only when Sethe confronts more of her traumatic memories. Still, it underscores Sethe's emphasis on her role of a mother. Finally, the conversation ends when Paul D banishes the baby ghost, and sleeps with Sethe. This episode exemplifies both ways in which retroversion is employed in the text: as a memory happening in the consciousness of the characters, and as their direct narration, an utterance of the memory.

Paul D's arrival and subsequent stay offer a glimpse into Sethe's reluctance to remember.¹⁶⁶ When Sethe notices the change after Paul D moves in, she thinks: "He was responsible for that. Emotions sped to the surface in his company. Things became what they were [...] He was up now and singing as he mended things he had broken the day before." (48) Still, she refuses to deal with her traumatic memory, as the narrative presents: "To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay." (51) But Paul D questions her unwillingness to deal with the past and offers his support in dealing with it:

"What about inside?"
"I don't go inside."
"Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump,

¹⁶⁶ Giulia Scarpa, "Narrative Possibilities at Play in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *MELUS* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1991-1992): 95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/467270>.

if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. [...]" (55)

Though still refusing to express her trauma, Sethe feels the potential of positive remembering, and the future they could have with Paul D: "Sethe returned the smiles she got. Denver was swaying with delight. And on the way home, although leading them now, the shadows of three people still held hands." (59) Thus, Paul D is a positive figure of Sethe's past, and their relationship introduces the possibility of moving on from traumatic memories.

Sethe's memories are central to the novel. Her actions are the reason why the house is haunted, and when the ghost is exorcised, she thinks she will not need to remember the past. But with the appearance of Beloved, this is not possible for Sethe. When Beloved introduces herself, Sethe is immediately reminded of her daughter: "Sethe was deeply touched by her sweet name; the remembrance of glittering headstone made her feel especially kindly toward her." (63) Beside motherly feelings, Beloved demands stories from Sethe, and in a way, forces her to partly speak her traumas:

It became a way to feed her. [...] Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable; to Denver's inquiries Sethe gave short replies or rambling incomplete reveries. Even with Paul D, who had shared some of it and to whom she could talk with at least a measure of calm, the hurt was always there [...] But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it—in any case it was an unexpected pleasure. (69-70)

Through telling stories to Beloved, the narrative employs numerous retroversions as Sethe confronts the memories of her own mother (73). But what she speaks out loud is only a part of what she remembers, keeping the most traumatic and shameful parts of her story to herself: "Something privately shameful that has seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross." (73) It is only when Sethe fully accepts Beloved as her dead daughter and Paul D leaves 124 that the remembering of the past becomes destructive.

Paul D's departure is a significant break in the story. As was previously mentioned, he struggles with the trauma connected to his masculinity. His memories, similarly to Sethe's, are presented in the text through the process of remembering.¹⁶⁷ Usually, they are triggered by things that remind him of his masculinity, like Sethe's breasts (25), his own illiteracy (62), or even telling Sethe Halle saw the nephew steal her milk (83). Never telling anybody about his trauma before (85), he admits to Sethe: "But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub." (86) Still, he does not relate everything to Sethe: "[he] would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be." (86) What is buried in the tin is presented in the narrative in a disjointed episode, not framed by the primary narrative. Paul D's memories of being chained to other men and his subsequent flight reveal his own reluctance to deal with his trauma: "[put] one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open." (133) Paul D too insists on keeping certain parts of his past at bay, however, this is proven to be impossible in the following episode.

Returning to the primary narrative, Beloved's presence and its effect on Paul D is explained. When Beloved wants him to "touch [her] on the inside part and call [her] name" (137) Paul D's resolve to keep the past buried fails: "She moved closer [...] and he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin." (138) Similarly to Sethe, Beloved causes Paul D's confrontation with his trauma. Scared of what his encounter with Beloved means, Paul D remembers Sweet Home and questions manhood: "Is that where the manhood lay? [...] No. In their relationship with Garner was true metal: they were believed and trusted, but most of all they were listened to." (147) Wanting to admit to Sethe what happened, he is unable to say "I am not a man." (151) Instead, he tells her

¹⁶⁷ Page, "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," 37.

he wants her pregnant as a way to “document his manhood.” (151) Although this resolution seems to be hopeful, the narrative presents a sequence of devastating retroversions.

The retroversions introduce a compilation of different perspectives on the pivotal event of the novel, resulting in Sethe explaining the murder of Beloved.¹⁶⁸ Baby Suggs’ memories set the scene, narrating her self-realisation after being bought out of slavery by Halle and the gradual jealousy rising in the community, placing her right before the schoolteacher arrived: “Now she stood in the garden smelling disapproval, feeling a dark and coming thing, and seeing high-topped shoes that she didn’t like the look of at all. At all.” (173) The following reiteration presents the events with a focus on the schoolteacher and his nephews, creating a narrative distance from Sethe’s actions and opening the question of why she did it (177). Returning to the primary narrative, Stamp Paid tells Paul D what Sethe did, to his insistent refusal (185). However, Paul D confronts Sethe, who is forced to speak her trauma out loud. Oscillating between Sethe’s direct speech and inner monologue, the narrative revisits the previously told story for the third time, explaining Sethe’s motivations. Phillip Page interprets the kitchen scene in the following manner:

The telling of the novel replicates Sethe’s act of circling her subject in the kitchen with Paul D. Just as she cannot say directly what she did or why, so the narration does not tell the story directly.¹⁶⁹

Though Sethe’s inner monologue relates the story in a greater detail (192), Sethe manages to utter only a fraction of it: “I stopped him. [...] I took and put my babies where they’d be safe.” (193) Unable to understand, Paul D leaves and does not come back, ending the first part of the book. Besides presenting the pivotal event of the novel as a series of retroversions, consistent with oral storytelling strategies, the multiplicity of the narration of the murder presents another narrative strategy of *Beloved*, crucial for the acknowledgement of the African-American experience during and after slavery.

¹⁶⁸ Page, “Circularity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” 31.

¹⁶⁹ Page, “Circularity in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” 34.

2.4 Repetition

Repetition, together with the multiplicity of voices and a fragmented narrative pattern, contributes to the novel's oral effect, placing the text on the border of Western literary tradition and tradition of African oral expression. Repetition in the text works on various levels, similarly to African folk narratives.¹⁷⁰ There are words and motives which are repeated numerous times, such as the tree, the Sweet Home men, the chain, the stairs, or walking.¹⁷¹ The repeated images are usually connected to the characters' traumatic experiences and can serve as triggers or reminders of such trauma. Furthermore, the employment of the trope of repetition and difference, frequently used in African-American tradition, is most evident in the relation to the state of the house: "124 was spiteful" (3), "124 was loud" (199) and "124 was quiet." (281) Each sentence is written at the beginning of each part of the novel, connecting the fragmented narrative to the house. Furthermore, the changed state of the house indicates the state of the characters in it. 'Spiteful' can be attributed to the ghost, Denver's attitude towards Paul D, Paul D's attitude towards Beloved, and Sethe's attitude towards remembering. 'Loud' describes the commotion caused by Sethe, Denver and Beloved's voices in the second part. 'Quiet' represents Sethe's receding strength and Denver's increasing loneliness, and her necessary absence from the house. Denver also exemplifies another form of repetition in the novel, and that is the repetition of memories.

Denver, as the representation of the present and the future,¹⁷² only dwells on the story of her birth. The absence of her father and detachment of her mother combined with the generational trauma of the denial of selfhood caused by slavery¹⁷³ creates Denver's struggle with her own identity. Thus, she needs to repeat the story of her birth to overcome this trauma,

¹⁷⁰ Page, "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," 35.

¹⁷¹ The repetitions of those themes include but are not limited to: the tree (18, 25, 93), the Sweet Home men (11, 86, 147), the chain (127, 129, six times on 130), walking (36, 55, 90, 267), the stairs (118, 122, 242).

¹⁷² Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember*, 103.

¹⁷³ Durkin, "Object Written, Written Object," 175.

and to claim ownership of herself.¹⁷⁴ The narrations of Denver's birth, however, complicate the narrative situation. Her own birth marks her presence, since:

Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it. (74)

Thus, she is left with repeating her story. Though related to Denver by Sethe, it is usually told through Denver as the focalizer: "Easily she stepped into the told story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window." (36) But as the text presents it, "Sethe told Denver, she remembered thinking." (36) Narratively, the retroversion to Denver's birth cannot be presented in any other way, since Denver herself, for whom the story is a way of self-actualisation, does not possess the memory. The rest of the story, then, is Sethe's recollection of the events, presented by Denver's obsessive retelling of the story of her own birth; an analepsis within an analepsis.¹⁷⁵ In this instance, the text signals the fact that it is Sethe's narration by quotation marks and other indicators: "That's what was on her mind and what she told Denver. Her exact words." (37) Bringing the awareness to the narrative situation makes it easier to distinguish on which level the narrative operates, however, this is not always the case.

Because the first relation of Denver's story is not completed, it is repeated for the second time, after Beloved appears and they collaborate on the story. The narrative situation is similar; Denver repeats the story Sethe told her, but this time, Beloved, who has never heard the story, participates as well:

Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it and the time afterward to shape it: the quality of Amy's voice, her breath like burning wood. (92)

The collaborative aspect is not only evocative of communal storytelling, it is also reminiscent of the necessity of enabling personal trauma narratives to be heard and witnessed. Once that the

¹⁷⁴ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "Narration, Doubt, Retrieval: Toni Morrison's '*Beloved*,'" *Narrative* 4, no. 2 (May 1996): 113, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20107077>.

¹⁷⁵ Rimmon-Kenan, "Narration, Doubt, Retrieval," 111.

collective effort of Denver and Beloved is asserted, the text does not indicate the various levels through which the story is related. Rather, it is presented through Sethe's thoughts: "Sethe never expected to see another thing in this world, so when she felt toes prodding her hip it took a while to come out of a sleep she thought was death." (97) The birth story, this time, ends with the origin of Denver's name: "That's pretty. Denver. Real pretty." (100) The name, as a sign of self-identity, is the reason why the story is narrated for the second time. Through repetition of it, Denver takes possession of her story and her previously absent origin, and therefore of herself.¹⁷⁶

Similarly, the repetition of memories helps the other characters to face their own trauma. Paul D consistently repeats the memories of his various escapes and the atrocities he experienced, connected to the denial of his manhood. Only when he regrets leaving Sethe ["He cares about how he left and why" (315)], and once again recedes into the memories of his numerous flights, does he realise that running away is not always the solution:

In five tries he had not had one permanent success. Every one of his escapes (from Sweet Home, from Brandywine, from Alfred, Georgia, from Wilmington, from Northpoint) had been frustrated. Alone, undisguised, with visible skin, memorable hair and no whiteman to protect him, he never stayed uncaught. (316)

As he approaches 124 the final time, "his coming is the reverse of his going" (318), employing repetition and difference even in his actions. When he finally faces Sethe, he remembers Sixo's words about women: "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind." (321) Realising Sethe is no longer 'Halle's woman', Paul D is able to lose the insecurity about his masculinity connected to his traumatic experience, accept Sethe and her actions and imagine a future with her.

Likewise, Sethe's trauma of denied motherhood is encompassed in the event of killing

¹⁷⁶Rimmon-Kenan, "Narration, Doubt, Retrieval," 113.

her daughter. It is not only narrated several times in the text, but also repeated with a critical difference in the last part of the book. The importance of community in *Beloved* has been discussed numerous times, for example by Nancy Jesser or Steven V. Daniels, and its involvement in healing traumatic past and narrating of the traumatic experience in *Beloved* is crucial. Moreover, the community's contempt of the people living in 124, asserted at the beginning of the novel, is reversed by their readiness to help Denver and Sethe. Notably, the women chase away Beloved by performing a chant (307), which emphasises the importance and healing potential of musical expression for black diaspora.¹⁷⁷ In terms of the narrative and African-American tradition, the help of the community enables the scene of the murder of Beloved to be repeated with a difference.

As the community of thirty women gathers outside 124, they repeat their presence during the original event (204), and Bodwin appears instead of the Schoolteacher. Sethe's thoughts of the original event "Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew" (192) are repeated: "No no. Nonono. She flies." (309) The difference from the original scene is twofold: not only does Sethe attack the person causing her the trauma (the schoolteacher/Bodwin) instead of her children,¹⁷⁸ she is also stopped by the community before she can hurt anyone. Therefore, she is not taken into jail, leaving her remaining children behind, but can cultivate her link to her daughter: "Denver. She's still with me, my Denver." (320) Her motherhood is not doubly denied by the act of killing her own child and the inability to take care of the other. Thus, the repetition and difference allows Sethe to break out of the past which consumed her, and rewrite, or rather retell, her story. The oral trope of repetition contributes to narrative telling and retelling of the past which, according to Page, results in healing.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, the narration and retelling of traumatic events is a crucial step in healing of trauma patients, making Morrison's text not

¹⁷⁷ Eckstein, "A Love Supreme," 134.

¹⁷⁸ Linda J. Krumholz, "Reading and Insight in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *African American Review* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2903362>.

¹⁷⁹ Page, "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," 37.

only an authentic expression of African-American oral legacy, but also a narrative of witnessing, if not possibility of healing, trauma.

Lastly, the final passage of the novel presents the community's response to *Beloved's* disappearance in fragments with repeating interruption of "It was not a story to pass on" (232), once again evoking a chorus.¹⁸⁰ Byerman interprets the conclusion as the community's repression of the events.¹⁸¹ However, Durrant claims the story "is passed on to us as that which refuses to pass on, that which can never be laid to rest precisely because it can never be adequately told."¹⁸² Furthermore, Christopher Peterson reads the repeating sentence as an insistence that the story should not to be rejected or neglected.¹⁸³ Durrant's and Peterson's interpretations correlate with the overall message of the novel as well as dealing with traumatic memory; the past needs to be remembered and told, not ignored and forgotten.

Beloved is the story of the importance of remembering the past but not being consumed by it. The traumatic past of slavery is something that needs to be acknowledged, remembered, narrated, and witnessed in order to reconcile, if not heal, oneself. As Morrison said,

no one speaks, no one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don't want to talk, they don't want to remember, they don't want to say it, because they're afraid of it - which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it, and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they're two, and three, and four, you know, the collective sharing of that information heals the individual – and the collective.¹⁸⁴

The collective, in this case, is not only the collective of the characters in the novel. Through narrating the usually ignored effects of slavery on individuals and communities, Morrison recovers the lost past, lost histories. As Byerman claims, Morrison's novel is

a deconstruction of the historical narrative, with all that that implies for the present. Black history, and more generally American history, is not a saga of great individuals and democratic institutions [...] it is the story of oppressive and

¹⁸⁰ Marilyn Sanders Mobley, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History and Meaning in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," in *Toni Morrison*, ed. Harold Bloom (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), 75.

¹⁸¹ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 33.

¹⁸² Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative*, 107-108.

¹⁸³ Christopher Peterson, "Beloved's Claim," in *Toni Morrison's Beloved*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 167.

¹⁸⁴ Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations*, 148.

repressive practices engaged in and endured by ordinary people. Their exceptionalism is the product of trying to be ordinarily human in a context that denied black humanity (and, in another sense, white humanity as well).¹⁸⁵

Finally, according to Alan J. Rice, Morrison “signif[ies] on Anglo-American superiority, exposing it as a sham concealing its own bestiality. After all, it is white civilization that created the most brutalising form of chattel slavery.”¹⁸⁶ This places the novel within what Gates identified as Signifyin(g), one of the central tropes of African-American literary tradition.

The usage of black vernacular language and overall oral quality of the text further situates *Beloved* into the African-American tradition of the Talking Book. Moreover, the narrative strategies of multiple voices, fragmented structure, retroversion and repetition, are evocative of African-American storytelling tradition, stemming from African oral cultures. The same narrative strategies are identified as constituents of the recollection and reconciliation of traumatic memory. Thus, *Beloved*, as a story of slavery in the United States, related by Morrison through a combination of the Western literary tradition of written narrative, and African and African-American tradition of oral narrative, becomes a narrative of distinctly African-American trauma, narrated through distinctly African-American expression. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison thus narrates the largely unspoken history of her people, opening the space for acknowledgement and witnessing of the traumatic effects of slavery even after its abolition.

¹⁸⁵ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 30.

¹⁸⁶ Rice, “Jazzing It up a Storm,” 432.

Chapter 3 *Jazz*: Make Me, Remake Me

The second instalment in the trilogy, *Jazz* (1992), similarly to *Beloved*, was inspired by a real-life love triangle resulting in a murder of a young girl.¹⁸⁷ Like in the previous novel, Morrison's project of illustrating the prevailing influences of racism on black people, according to Byerman, continues in *Jazz*:

By creating a Renaissance narrator bent on telling a certain kind of tale, she can foreground the false images of blackness that persistently were projected. By creating a Jazz Age narrative, she can explore the constructions of the exotic and the Other that shaped American attitudes on race and gender in the 1920s. In doing so, Morrison offers not only a historical critique but also an analysis of the present.¹⁸⁸

But unlike *Beloved*, the narrative strategies of *Jazz* seem to be at the centre of the criticism. By the very title, the novel calls into attention the unique property of the narrative style, which has been described by Rice as 'jazzy prose style' and applied to Morrison's other works.¹⁸⁹ Although this approach to Morrison's style, at least in *Jazz*, seems to be generally agreed upon,¹⁹⁰ there are certain limitations to this interpretation, which will be explored below. Strikingly, the examination of trauma in *Jazz* is much more restricted than *Beloved*, even though Byerman has identified it as the narrative of "traumas of personal, gendered, and racial history."¹⁹¹ Despite the fact that critics such as Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, Gurleen Grewal, or Michael Nowlin consider the traumatic experience of the characters in their analysis of *Jazz*, the narrative strategies employed to convey such an experience are largely overshadowed by the focus on the jazz-like style. Nonetheless, the potential for the analysis of the narration of trauma in *Jazz* is as extensive as in *Beloved*.

Jazz is essentially the story of Joe and Violet Trace, a married couple trying to repair their relationship after Joe's affair and subsequent murder of eighteen-year-old Dorcas.

¹⁸⁷ Taylor-Guthrie, *Conversations*, 207.

¹⁸⁸ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 79.

¹⁸⁹ Rice, "Jazzing It up a Storm," 421.

¹⁹⁰ For example Anthony J. Berret, Veronique Lesoinne, or Roberta Rubenstein.

¹⁹¹ Byerman. *Remembering the Past*, 77.

Although the traumas of the characters are not as overt as in *Beloved*, the novel deals with the memories of racial trauma and loss of parental connections as the aftermath of slavery.¹⁹² As in the rest of the trilogy, Morrison mediates both Western literary tradition and African oral tradition to convey the traumatic experience of black people in the United States, influenced by the racial implications created by slavery, in an authentic black voice. Just like in *Beloved*, the Western tradition is implied by the medium of a written text and the form of a novel, while oral storytelling is represented through the various narrative strategies. Despite the strong presence of a unique voice of the narrator, the text also oscillates between the characters in an imitation of a song, with emphasis on conversation as an oral technique. The narrative structure is again non-linear, with various retroversions and embedded narratives of traumatic events and memories, evoking oral storytelling as well as the recollection and narration of trauma. Lastly, repetition is employed not only to emphasise the oral quality of the text, but also to create space for the African-American literary trope of repetition and difference, as a possible strategy for the characters to overcome their trauma, as well as a critique of larger narratives.

The trauma in *Jazz* is perhaps not as readily identifiable as in *Beloved*, largely due to the temporal distance from the initial traumatic experience. However, the trauma of slavery has not ended with abolition, and in the case of *Jazz*, the novel represents the profound effects of slavery by fragmentation of personal identity,¹⁹³ dispossession, and abandonment.¹⁹⁴ The story is not set in the South, as the primary narrative takes place in a big city, presumably Harlem.¹⁹⁵ Grewal explains that “the history of economic oppression and racial violence is internalized, made visible in the interiority of lives lived within the dynamic allure of a restless city.”¹⁹⁶ A place

¹⁹² Shirley Ann Stave, “Jazz and *Paradise*: pivotal moments in black history,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, ed. Justine Tally (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61.

¹⁹³ Jennifer Andrews, “Reading Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*: Rewriting the Tall Tale and Playing with the Trickster in the White American and African-American Humour Traditions,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 29.1 (1999): 102.

¹⁹⁴ Roberta Rubenstein, “Singing the Blues / Reclaiming Jazz: Toni Morrison and Cultural Mourning,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31.2 (June 1998): 155, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029776>.

¹⁹⁵ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma and Home*, 107-108.

¹⁹⁶ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 123.

of work opportunities as well as an escape from racist South and lynching,¹⁹⁷ the city is a fascinating subject for not only the characters and the narrator, but also for literary critics. Schreiber sees the city as a surrogate parent for the characters, a place where they can reinvent themselves, combat the displacement and uprootedness of slavery and their trauma.¹⁹⁸ The economic effects of slavery are not the only traumatic experience the characters have to deal with, as Schreiber describes:

The generationally inherited trauma of slavery and the abandonment it produced resurfaces again and again. *Jazz* repeatedly relates this abandonment narrative, interweaving stories of pain and loss. A refrain emerges: we are all orphans. Each character's personal story provides the solo improvisation on the riff.¹⁹⁹

All of the characters have been, in a sense, abandoned; they are either orphans, have lost or never knew a parent, or are children of distant or disinterested parents. Combined with the psychological and economic implications of racism, the effects of racist systems on the families cause the vast majority of characters of *Jazz* to battle racial trauma.

3.1 Trauma of the Characters

The beginning of the text places the focus on Violet, and her decision to mutilate Dorcas' body at her funeral. Obscured by the narrative structure, the story is not immediately clear, but the narrator utters the source of Violet's trauma in the first pages of the novel: "but the children of suicides are hard to please and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really here."²⁰⁰ This claim hints at the core of Violet's trauma: abandonment, which has been in her family for generations.²⁰¹ After being brutally dispossessed and abandoned by her husband, Rose Dear, Violet's mother, commits suicide by jumping into a well (99), leaving Violet an orphan in the hands of her grandmother True Belle, who was forced to leave her family (142).

¹⁹⁷ Linda Wagner-Martin, *Toni Morrison: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2015): 82.

¹⁹⁸ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 108 – 109.

¹⁹⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 109.

²⁰⁰ Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (London: Vintage, 2016), 4. All future page references to this source will be included in parentheses in the text.

²⁰¹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma and Home*, 109.

Rose Dear's suicide informs much of Violet's behaviour, and the image of the well is what haunts her: "Violet never forgot Rose Dear or the place she had thrown herself into—a place so narrow, so dark it was pure, breathing relief to see her stretched in a wooden box." (100-101) This repeats the cycle of abandonment and the feeling of being unlovable, which started with Rose Dear, and is transmitted to Violet.²⁰²

As a result, Violet's psyche is fragile, with the possibility of her having a split personality.²⁰³ It manifests by cracks, which Violet sees in her mind: "Not openings or breaks, but dark fissures in the globe light of the day. She wakes up in the morning and sees with perfect clarity a string of small, well-lit scenes." (22) Further, the actions she does when '*that* Violet' (90) takes over point to a possible disassociation or disembodiment: "She sees them being done." (23) Her behaviour in those moments is exemplified with abruptly sitting in the middle of the street, unresponsive (17), or with moments of accidentally admitting to her insecurities (24), which causes her to stop talking about them with her husband.

Furthermore, Violet's emotional deprivation can be connected to the fact that she had never had children.²⁰⁴ During another possible psychotic break, she even attempts to steal a child:

When the baby was in her arms, she inched its blanket up around the cheeks against the threat of wind too cool for its honey-sweet, butter-colored face. Joe will love this, she thought. Love it. And quickly her mind raced ahead to their bedroom and what was in there she could use for a crib until she got a real one. (19-20)

However, she is stopped and does not mention the incident to Joe. Instead, she compensates by keeping birds, one of which is trained to say "I love you." (92) The birds represent love and something to take care of,²⁰⁵ until she attacks Dorcas' body and releases her bird because "she ran home from the funeral, [...], "I love you" was exactly what neither she nor *that* Violet could

²⁰² Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 112.

²⁰³ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 179.

²⁰⁴ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 82.

²⁰⁵ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 117.

bear to hear.” (92) The absence of motherhood, of her own mother, and Violet as a woman, is the core of her trauma. Besides her birds, Violet compensates for the absence of children by buying a doll, because “that was when she bought herself a present; hid it under the bed to take out in secret when it couldn’t be helped. She began to imagine how old that last miscarried child would be now. A girl, probably.” (108) Violet’s behaviour, and her silence, is what effectively leads Joe to find someone else, with tragic consequences resulting from his own trauma.

Joe Trace is portrayed as a gentle, sympathetic man, whose actions are surprising, if not shocking. However, the affair and the murder are fuelled by Joe’s traumatic search for his mother. Again, his trauma is obscured by the structure of the novel, but his childhood memories of picking out his name expose Joe’s abandonment: “I said, ‘They got to pick me out. From all of you all, they got to pick me. I’m Trace, what they went off without.’” (124) Thus, Joe’s identity is connected to the absence of his parents. But he finds out that his mother is not entirely anonymous:

From then on he wrestled with the notion of a wildwoman for a mother. Sometimes it shamed him to tears. Other times his anger messed up his aim and he shot wild or hit game in messy inefficient places. (176)

This woman is the character of Wild. Though some critics do not fully subscribe to the notion that Wild is truly Joe’s mother,²⁰⁶ other critics are firm in this interpretation.²⁰⁷ Joe himself searches for the confirmation: “so what makes him think he can see her hand even if she did decide to shove it through the bushes and confirm, for once and for all, that she was indeed his mother.” (36) Besides the actual trauma of being abandoned, as Schreiber claims “Joe’s quest is not only for his mother but also for the ability to verbalize his trauma in order to name his own desire.”²⁰⁸ The verbalization of his trauma is central to his affair with Dorcas, as his and Violet’s inability to talk about their traumas together leads to Joe searching for someone to talk

²⁰⁶ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 111.

²⁰⁷ Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 78.

²⁰⁸ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 114.

to²⁰⁹: “But the quiet. I can’t take the quiet. She don’t hardly talk anymore, and I ain’t allowed near her. Any other man be running around, stepping out every night, you know that. I ain’t like that. I ain’t.” (49) In remembering his time with Dorcas, Joe’s need to speak about his struggle is described as “the inside nothing he traveled with from then on, except for the fall of 1925 when he had somebody to tell it to.” (37) This, however, does not last, as Dorcas also abandons him, leading to the events of the novel.

Dorcas, like her friend Felice, represents another generation of slavery’s racial trauma, abandonment and loss.²¹⁰ Some critics, like Carolyn M. Jones, identify Dorcas with Beloved in Morrison’s previous novel, claiming Dorcas is a mirror figure for Joe’s mother and Violet’s lost child.²¹¹ But like Beloved, she too carries trauma from her past, most importantly the loss of her parents in a riot-caused fire.²¹² Her memories of losing her mother, just like her surrogate children/dolls, encompass her inability to change the situation and the realisation of the loss: “she ran to get them, and yelled to her mother that the box of dolls, the box of dolls was up there on the dresser can we get them? Mama?” (37) Like Joe and Violet, Dorcas is not able to narrate her trauma.²¹³ Instead, she internalizes it: “Dorcas never let it out and never put it out. At first she thought if she spoke of it, it would leave her, or she would lose it through her mouth.” (61) This internalization of the trauma of abandonment manifests in Dorcas’ search for attention, particularly at parties, which is not successful: “Dorcas has been acknowledged, appraised and dismissed in the time it takes for a needle to find its opening groove.” (67) But then she begins an affair with Joe, and as a result, Dorcas essentially abandons her friend.

²⁰⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 114.

²¹⁰ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 116.

²¹¹ Carolyn M. Jones, “Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *African American Review* 31, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 483, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042574>.

²¹² Philip Page, “Traces of Derrida in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *African American Review* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042428>.

²¹³ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 116.

Felice's trauma, similarly to the other characters, stems from parental abandonment. Although she is the only character whose parents are still in her life, they are absent nonetheless: "Thirty-four days. I'm seventeen now and that works out to less than six hundred days. Less than two years out of seventeen. Dorcas said I was lucky because at least they were there." (200) Although the assertion that at least they were there seems correct, it is not entirely true: "When they'd come home, they'd kiss me and give me things, like my opal ring, but what they really wanted to do was go out dancing somewhere (my mother) or sleep (my father)." (198) Felice has to come to terms with minimal attention from her parents, and she combats her loneliness with the friendship with Dorcas. But their friendship diminishes when Dorcas' affair with Joe begins: "Some friend she turned out to be." (205) The abandonment Felice feels from Dorcas mirrors the abandonment of Felice's parents.²¹⁴ This becomes obvious as Felice talks about Dorcas' final moments: "'See? You were the last thing on her mind. I was right there, right there. Her best friend, I thought, but not best enough for her to want to go to the emergency room and stay alive.'" (213) The loss of Dorcas touches most characters in *Jazz*, like her aunt Alice.

Alice suffers multiple losses in her life. Her husband dies after having an affair (86), her sister and brother-in-law die in the riots (57), and her niece is murdered. Furthermore, she suffers the trauma of racial and gender violence, as she is concerned with sexual violence against black women.²¹⁵ By her strict rules, she attempts to save Dorcas from this, but she ultimately fails and loses her surrogate daughter to a crime of passion. She is alone with dealing with the loss, until she lets Violet in and relates to her inability, or unwillingness, to have children: "Growing up under that heated control, Alice swore she wouldn't, but she did, pass it on. She passed it on to her baby sister's only child. And wondered now would she have done so had her husband lived or stayed or if she had had children of her own." (77) Throughout their

²¹⁴ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 117.

²¹⁵ Jones, "Traces and Cracks," 485.

conversations, Alice not only realises the absence of her own child, but also voices her opinions on the position of black women in society.²¹⁶ Though it is certainly a concern of the novel, the women are not the only victims of racial politics in *Jazz*, as the figure of a biracial man is introduced.

Golden Gray creates a surprising connection between Joe and Violet, and his story presents their issues of abandonment as well as the image of blackness. Golden is brought up as a white man and believes in the inferiority of black people.²¹⁷ Thus, when he learns of his origin, he has to reconcile with the fact that he is partially a black man. However, his learned opinions are not easily overcome, and upon meeting Wild in the forest the bizarreness of his racism is exposed:

When he picks up the reins he cannot help noticing that his horse is also black, naked and shiny wet, and his feelings about the horse are of security and affection. It occurs to him that there is something odd about that: the pride he takes in his horse; the nausea the woman provoked. (144)

Likewise, his racism is in conflict with his need for his father. First, he wants to discredit the importance of his father's identity: "Henry Lestory or LesTroy or something like that, but who cares what the nigger's name is." (148) But when he arrives at his father's home, he struggles with the fact that his father has seemingly abandoned him: "Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one-armed, like me." (158) Upon meeting his father, Golden expects wholeness (159), but he accuses Henry of abandoning him, to which he replies: "I never knew you were in the world [...]." (170) Finally, the conversation turns to the question of race:

"I don't want to be a free nigger; I want to be a free man."
"Don't we all. Look. Be what you want—white or black. Choose. But if you choose black, you got to act black, meaning draw your manhood up—quicklike, and don't bring me no whiteboy sass." (173)

²¹⁶ Jones, "Traces and Cracks," 486.

²¹⁷ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 117.

Henry's statement questions not only Golden's race, but also his manhood, something he struggles with, "and there is nothing to prevent Golden Gray from believing that an exposed woman will explode in his arms, or worse, that he will, in hers." (153) When his father confronts him, he makes up his mind to kill him and leave. But ultimately, it is Wild that convinces him to stay: "It must have been the girl who changed his mind." (173) Golden's abandonment issues, racial views and struggle with identity summarize the traumas present in the novel, which need to be voiced by the characters in order to move past them.

3.2 Voice

The title of the novel alone immediately evokes musical genre, and the voice of the novel contributes to the musical property of the text. The primary voice, and consequently the narrator, has been widely interpreted as jazz itself. As was previously mentioned, Rice contributed to this view substantially, identifying repetition as the narrative strategy foregrounding the musicality of Morrison's novels, as well as the devices of riff, pause break, and call-and-response, typical for jazz music.²¹⁸ Schreiber too identifies jazz as the narrative mode, which "articulates the desire of black culture in response to the white master narrative."²¹⁹ This interpretation of the voice is undeniably useful, however it is important to remember that it is still a written text. As Alan Munton points out, it is difficult to establish relationship between music and prose, and he even claims that "the critics concerned show themselves to be unaware of the basic formal structures of jazz."²²⁰ This is startling especially in the omission of the fact that jazz music is informed by both African and European traditions.²²¹ Although this might undermine some interpretations of the novel, it supports the claim that Morrison uses a combination of African oral tradition and Western literary tradition

²¹⁸ Rice, "Jazzing It up a Storm," 424-426.

²¹⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 108.

²²⁰ Alan Munton, "Misreading Morrison, Mishearing Jazz: A Response to Toni Morrison's Jazz Critics," *Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 2 (August 1997): 235, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27556263>.

²²¹ Munton, "Misreading Morrison," 244.

in her novels. For the purpose of this analysis, the interpretation of the narrative voice as jazz will be used only as an evidence of the orality of the text and the influence of African oral tradition.

From the beginning, the primary narrative voice, identical to the narrator, seems to be involved in the events of the fabula: “Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too.” (3) The first sentence evokes people gossiping,²²² contributing to the orality of the novel. In a way, the book speaks to the reader, placing *Jazz* within the tradition of a Talking Book.²²³ The voice soon reveals that it does not belong to a physical being: “I haven’t got any muscles, so I can’t really be expected to defend myself. But I do know how to take precaution. Mostly it’s making sure no one knows all there is to know about me.” (8) The voice does not belong to a physical character in the book, and thus creates the illusion of an omniscient observer, but the voice betrays this by commenting on the events and characters and expressing personal opinion.²²⁴

Thus, the expectations of omniscient narrator, or in Bal’s terms external narrator facilitating external focalization, are disrupted by the disembodied voice, especially when it becomes self-reflexive.²²⁵ This is most striking in the Golden Gray episode, with the voice admitting: “What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? [...] I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) how unreliable I am.” (160) At this point, the voice subverts not only expectations placed on a narrator, but calls into question the authenticity of the narrative. In a way, the narrative Signifies on the Western literary tradition as well as on the assumed reliability and truthfulness of the master narrative of

²²² Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 118.

²²³ Nancy J. Peterson, “‘Say make me, remake me’: Toni Morrison and the Reconstruction of African-American History,” in *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 216.

²²⁴ Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 90.

²²⁵ Veronique Lesoinne, “Answer Jazz’s Call: Experiencing Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *MELUS* 22.3 (Autumn, 1997): 154, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/467660>.

Anglocentric culture.²²⁶ The tradition of Signifyin(g), connected especially to the primary voice, is perhaps more evident in *Jazz* than in *Beloved*.

The narrator, by revealing their²²⁷ unreliability, has essentially been playing tricks on the reader, making the primary voice a trickster.²²⁸ Beside the aforementioned example, this trickery is also evident in the statement “that’s how that scandalizing threesome on Lenox Avenue began. What turned out different was who shot whom.” (6) The narrator hints at the end of the story, by implying that Violet, Joe and Felice will repeat the murder. This creates a certain expectation from the narrative, which is subverted at the end of the novel:

I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. [...] That’s what I wanted to believe. It never occurred to me that they were thinking other thoughts, feeling other feelings, putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of. (220-221)

This confession Signifies on storytelling practices, essentially making *Jazz* a trickster tale.²²⁹ Thus, Morrison Signifies upon the assumed authority of the narrative voice over the events of the story, and again draws attention to the accepted truthfulness of cultural narratives. The oral quality of the jazzy style, the narrator as a trickster, and the Signifyin(g) emphasise the text’s connection to the African-American tradition while interrogating the concept of narrative itself.

The final chapter of the book, narrated through the primary voice, underscores not only the healing potential of storytelling, but also its fallibility. Through the confession that the characters have changed the narrative, the voice admits that “I missed the people altogether.” (220) When taken out of the context of that particular text and applied to larger, cultural narratives, the sentence brings attention to the unheard, personal histories of the people. As

²²⁶ Rice, “Jazzing It up a Storm,” 431.

²²⁷ The gender of the narrator has been discussed in the critical sphere. Byerman and other critics refer to the narrator as ‘she/her’, however Paula Gallant Eckard claims that the narrator is both male and female. The narrator is often interpreted as the voice of Jazz, making the argument of the gender futile. Furthermore, the unique voice/narrator of the novel is considered as a narrative strategy, thus the gender of the narrator is irrelevant for the purpose of this thesis and shall be referred to by the gender-neutral pronouns ‘they/them.’

²²⁸ Marjorie Pryse, “Signifyin(g) on Reparation in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *American Literature* 80, no. 3 (September 2008): 600, 10.1215/00029831-2008-023.

²²⁹ Andrews, “Reading Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” 103.

Grewal claims: “The narrator confesses she cannot seem to grasp that her traumatized characters have survived the double plot of destruction, both the destructive plot of history and her own narrative plotting of fatal pain.”²³⁰ If the voice of the novel is interpreted as a voice of narrative as such, it serves as a criticism of the assumption of truthfulness and authenticity of larger cultural and historical narratives, which ignore individual experiences:

They knew how little I could be counted on; how poorly, how shabbily my know-it-all self covered helplessness. That when I invented stories about them—and doing it seemed to me so fine—I was completely in their hands, managed without mercy. (220)

The dismissal of the personal experience of larger narratives, which creates the space people necessarily inhabit, is at the core of the novel. The lives of the characters are defined by the racist notion of the master narrative; thus, the novel is a collection of personal histories of the community, which must work together to combat the master narrative.²³¹ The text itself pleads:

But I can’t say that aloud; I can’t tell anyone that I have been waiting for this all my life and that being chosen to wait is the reason I can. If I were able I’d say it. Say make me, remake me.
You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now. (229)

The final lines of the novel are generally interpreted as an invitation for the reader to remake the text.²³² But if the voice is considered as a voice of narrative as such, and potentially a historical narrative, the final words become a reminder of the responsibility of individual people to tell, re-tell and share unheard stories, to change the larger narrative. Such responsibility is emphasised by the novel’s inclusion of voices different from the primary narrative voice, while simultaneously questioning the narrative authority.²³³ Those voices include Violet, Joe, Dorcas and Felice.

²³⁰ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 135.

²³¹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 107.

²³² Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 117.

²³³ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 80.

Violet is the first focalized character in the novel, and she is also the first one to be granted a voice. But unlike the rest, her voice is not presented as direct speech, but as a stream of consciousness, triggered by the thought of Joe and Dorcas together:

[He] bought her underwear with stitching done to look like rosebuds and violets, VIOLETS, don't you know, and she wore it for him thin as it was and too cold for a room that couldn't count on a radiator to work through the afternoon, while I was where? [...] Wherever it was, it was cold and I was cold and nobody had got into the bed sheets early to warm up a spot for me or reached around my shoulders to pull the quilt up under my neck or even my ears because it got that cold sometimes it did and maybe that is why the butcher knife struck the neckline just by the earlobe. That's why. (95)

Violet's voice explains the reason why she has attacked the girl's body and how it connects to her abandonment trauma. The emphasis on the violets on Joe's gift to Dorcas underscores the irony of the situation as well as Joe's apparent disregard for Violet, contributing to her feeling of not being loved. The love Violet seemingly lost reminds her of the past, as she ponders meeting Joe:

Who was he thinking of when he ran in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Somebody golden, like my own golden boy, who I never ever saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers? [...] Which means from the very beginning I was a substitute and so was he. (97)

Alluding to Golden Gray, whom she knew from True Belle's stories, Violet expresses doubt over the genuineness of her and Joe's love. The reason why Golden is so important to her, as Jones explains, is because he represents the ideal for black people.²³⁴ However, this ideal is created by the dominant culture, as Felice points out: "Reminds me of the tricky blond kid living inside Mrs. Trace's head. A present taken from whitefolks, given to me when I was too young to say No thank you." (211) The negative role of social and cultural images in the construction of black identity is explored by Morrison in her novels,²³⁵ as the ideal image of Golden fractures Violet's identity and emphasises the feeling of unlovability caused by her mother's suicide.

Although Violet does not overcome this haunting image of Golden until the end of the

²³⁴ Jones, "Traces and Cracks," 489.

²³⁵ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 83.

novel, her healing of fractured self begins during her conversations with Alice. Alice feels she is able to talk to Violet freely (89), and their conversations soon assume healing property.²³⁶ When Violet finally tells Alice the traumatic impact Joe's affair had on her subjectivity, Alice offers valuable advice:

“Fight what, who? Some mishandled child who saw her parents burn up? Who knew better than you or me or anybody just how small and quick this little bitty life is? [...] and the people standing around wouldn't understand how could anybody's eyes go so flat, how could they? Nobody's asking you to take it. I'm sayin make it, make it!” (113)

Though the narrative structure obscures the chronology of the fabula, the conversation with Alice initiates Violet's self-realisation and healing of past traumas, uttered in the conversation with Felice, which will later be examined. Nonetheless, by including Violet's voice and conversation with Alice, the narrative underscores not only Violet's abandonment trauma and Joe's betrayal, but the necessity of narrating and witnessing trauma.

Unlike Violet, Joe's voice is introduced as a direct speech signalled by quotation marks, as if he was allowed to speak by the narrator.²³⁷ The section begins with Joe's statement that “‘It's not a thing you tell to another man.’” (121) What follows is the description of his time with Dorcas, and Joe repeatedly stresses the fact that he could talk to her: “But since Victory, I never got too close to anybody. [...] couldn't talk to anybody but Dorcas and I told her things I hadn't told myself.” (123) Through the memories of his earlier life, Joe's confessions to Dorcas become an articulation of Joe's abandonment trauma, as well as his unfixed identity: “Before I met her I'd changed into new seven times.” (123) The first time Joe changes is when he realises his parents left him, and names himself: “The way I heard it I understood her to mean the ‘trace’ they disappeared without was me.” (124) Each subsequent time he changed is connected either to his masculinity (126), or the racially charged difficulties he and Violet had

²³⁶ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 115.

²³⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Jazz,” in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr and K.A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press Inc., 1993), 54.

to face (126,128). Ultimately he admits the cause of his affair: “Then Violet started sleeping with a doll in her arms. Too late. I understood in a way. In a way.” (129) Though expressing his regret over what he caused Violet, his voice breaks and when it begins again, he is speaking about, and eventually to, Dorcas.

In the second part dedicated to his voice, Joe begins describing his killing of Dorcas: “But if the trail speaks, no matter what’s in the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it’s the heart you can’t live without.” (130) Then, his speech addresses Dorcas: “I had the gun but it was not the gun- it was my hand I wanted to touch you with:” (130-131) Describing the hunt for her, Joe uncovers the reason why Dorcas was important to him: “I *chose* you. Nobody gave you to me. [...] I picked you out.” (135) Beside an assertion of subjectivity and masculinity, later emphasised by him being proud of his hunting skills (135), the declaration betrays his attempt to relinquish his abandonment trauma. Since Dorcas and Wild are connected by Joe’s hunt (130), the claim he makes upon Dorcas is his resistance to the fact that his mother has never claimed him.²³⁸ But when even Dorcas, the one he chose, leaves him, his trauma is repeated and results in a bodily re-enactment of his trauma, a release of his anger towards his mother,²³⁹ in the murder of Dorcas. Although he is addressing Dorcas, she is already dead, and thus the reader becomes the witness to his trauma. Dorcas’ voice is presented similarly.

The voice of Dorcas is also constituted as a direct speech, as if she was narrating her own murder. It takes time immediately before she is killed and begins with “[h]e is coming for me.” (189) Her voice then explains Dorcas’ complicated relationship to her own identity:

I could be anything, do anything—and it pleased him. Something about that made me mad. I don’t know. [...] He worries about me that way. Joe never did. Joe didn’t care what kind of woman I was. He should have. I cared [...] I wanted to have a personality and with Acton I’m getting one. (190)

²³⁸ Jones, “Traces and Cracks,” 482

²³⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 114.

Unlike Joe, her new boyfriend Acton makes demands of Dorcas, shaping her behaviour, appearance, and therefore, identity. That is the reason why Dorcas breaks up with Joe, because “he will see I’m not his anymore. I’m Acton’s and it’s Acton I want to please. He expects it. With Joe I pleased myself because he encouraged me to.” (191) Joe’s unconditional love threatens Dorcas’s refusal to create an identity for herself. As Byerman states:

he seems to require only that she truly become a self. But to do so in a world in which being black and female inhibit self-realization is to risk failure and powerlessness. [...] Through this character, Morrison challenges cultural projections of black womanhood and forms of desire associated with it.²⁴⁰

In this context, Dorcas’ reluctance to become her own person is a critique of the contradictory expectations placed on black women. Her voice presents the fractured identity caused by racialization only moments before her death, placing the role of the witness of her trauma on the reader. Her death, however, is not only significant to Joe and Violet, but also to her friend.

The final character given a voice is Dorcas’ friend Felice. She too speaks in an address to someone elusive, like the rest of the characters, although she mostly narrates conversations with Violet and Joe. However, she still speaks of her abandonment trauma caused by her parents’ lack of attention and, as was previously mentioned, repeated by the loss of Dorcas. Moreover, Felice articulates the racial trauma that underlines the stories of all the characters:

Not the boys but the girls in my school bunched off according to their skin color. I hate that stuff—Dorcas too. So me and her were different that way. When some nastymouth hollered, ‘Hey, fly, where’s buttermilk?’ or ‘Hey, kinky, where’s kind?’ we stuck our tongues out and put our fingers in our noses to shut them up. (200-201)

Resonating with the story of Golden Gray, and forecasting the issues of racial ‘purity’ that is discussed in *Paradise*, Felice and Dorcas exemplify the generationally transmitted racial trauma of the youngest generation of the novel. Furthermore, Felice also speaks of the systemic racism present in the society. Eerily resembling the events of the year 2020 in America, she relates the

²⁴⁰ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 83.

memory of her father getting angry over the newspaper reporting the arrest of a police officer who killed black people. The meaning of her father's anger is explained as "what he meant: that for the everyday killings cops did of Negroes, nobody was arrested at all." (199) Her father's anger, subsides over time, as he seemingly accepts the reality in Felice's later memory of him:

'And all the kinds of whitepeople there are. Two kinds,' he says. 'The ones that feel sorry for you and the ones that don't. And both amount to the same thing. Nowhere in between is respect.' [...] It tickles him that white people are scared to compete with Negroes fair and square. (204)

Finally, Felice also refuses what is expected of women when it comes to competing for a man: "how to get, then hold on to, a guy and most of that is having friends who want you to have him, and enemies who don't. I guess that's the way you have to think about it. But what if I don't want to?" (216) Felice instead seeks friends and role models in other women, signalling that she understands how to combat the racial and gender constructs imposed on her by the environment she lives in.²⁴¹ Through her voice, Violet becomes one of those role models, helping to heal not only Felice's trauma, but also her own relationship with Joe.

All the characters narrate their stories, although the addressee is never clearly identified. Essentially, the reader thus becomes the witness to the characters' traumas. Through telling their stories, they are also verbalising their trauma, and although the resolve of such traumas is not present in the narrations, the negotiation of the past is a necessary step in their attempts to break the cycle of destructive behaviour. Similarly to *Beloved*, the individual stories create a compilation, which is often compared to the improvisation of jazz,²⁴² contributing to the oral quality of the novel. Moreover, the voices, encompassed in the primary narrative voice, can be identified as the voice of the whole African-American community,²⁴³ presented through a text

²⁴¹ Stave, "Jazz and Paradise," 62.

²⁴² Carmen Gillespie, *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Facts On File, Inc. 2008), 79.

²⁴³ Lesoinne, "Answer Jazz's Call," 158.

evocative of oral storytelling. The orality of Jazz is further reinforced by the fragmented structure and anachronous strategies.

3.3 Narrative Structure and Retroversion

The text consists of ten main parts, which are divided into smaller episodes and embedded narratives. The unequal chapters, which are not numbered or titled, are signalled by blank pages, which slow down the fast-paced narrative.²⁴⁴ Interestingly, the primary narrative time is almost static; the narrator already knows that Felice visited Joe and Violet, calling them a scandalous threesome and claims that someone gets shot (6). Thus, the majority of the story seems to be unveiled as a form of elaborate, fragmented retroversion. The non-linearity and episodic manner are reminiscent of the retrieval of traumatic memory, and numerous fragments of the narrative are the characters' memories, presented either by the narrator's voice or their own. Other parts consist of the narrator's meditations upon the City, the events, or self-reflexive confessions. Together, they comprise the story, evoking oral storytelling as well as jazz improvisation.

The aforementioned jazz aesthetic of the text, according to Robert Small-McCarthy, "allows the character and the narrative persona to freely move between various streams of consciousness inspired and linked by images that trigger memories of the past and inevitable returns to the present."²⁴⁵ The necessity of the movement between characters' consciousnesses and past and present is explained by Grewal, "in order to release the present from the grip of the past, the characters and the reader are compelled to collectively audition the dissonance, to acknowledge the traumatic nature of the past."²⁴⁶ Thus, the memories of individual characters, as well as their articulation of trauma, not only explain their motivations and enable the

²⁴⁴ Eusebio L. Rodrigues, "Experiencing Jazz," in *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 256.

²⁴⁵ Robin Small-McCarthy, "From 'The Bluest Eye' to 'Jazz': a retrospective of Toni Morrison's literary sounds," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 16, no. 3 (July, 2006): 385, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630950160307>.

²⁴⁶ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 119.

characters to move forward, they also comprise the collective narrative of the traumatic past of the African-American community.

The present of the primary narrative is 1926, however the events of the story go back as far as 1828.²⁴⁷ The first section of the novel is a vague summary of the events preceding and following Dorcas' death, with Violet being the focalized figure. Her mental state is asserted through various retroversions, which not only reveal parts of the plot, but also emphasise the importance of memories. As Violet carries out her job, she becomes a character-bound focalizer, as the hair is a trigger for memories:

Not the kind of baby hair her grandmother had soaped and played with and remembered for forty years. The hair of the little boy who got his name from it. Maybe that is why Violet is a hairdresser—all those years of listening to her rescuing grandmother, True Belle, tell Baltimore stories. (17)

Similarly to *Beloved*, memory serves the important function of confronting trauma in the novel. Establishing the influence that the past has on the present, Violet's memories also hint at the importance of Golden Gray to her. The memory fluidly transforms into the primary narrative voice judging Violet's mental state, presenting the retroversion of Violet attempting to steal the baby (18) and the moment she stopped speaking to Joe (24). The most important stream of memories is embedded in a section of Violet's contemplation of what has passed.

Through the embedded narrative of Violet's memories, her odd behaviour is assigned to her other personality, who she calls '*that* Violet' (90). The funeral incident is blamed on *that* Violet and brings on the memories of Dorcas and Joe's affair. Questioning their time together, the narrative voice shifts to Violet's and utters the reason why she stopped talking to Joe:

I got quiet because the things I couldn't say were coming out of my mouth anyhow. I got quiet because I didn't know what my hands might get up to when the day's work was done. The business going on inside me I thought was none of my business and none of Joe's either because I just had to keep hold of him any way I could and going crazy would make me lose him. (97)

²⁴⁷ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 423 - 425.

After this confession, the voice shifts back to the narrator, perhaps implying that Violet is not ready to verbalise her trauma yet, because “[her] mother. She didn’t want to be like that. Oh never like that.” (97) The thought of her mother triggers another stream of retroversions, which further explains her abandonment trauma, struggle with lost motherhood and love. Those memories include her mother’s suicide and her absent father, explaining her childlessness: “The important thing, the biggest thing Violet got out of that, was to never never have children.” (102) The restlessness Violet experiences after the loss of her mother is a bridge to a memory of how she and Joe met and how “Violet claimed him? Hadn’t he stayed? [...] All through the night, taking her sass, complaining, teasing, explaining, but talking, talking her through the dark.” (105) As their relationship progresses, they move to the City and Violet is unable to have children, her mental state causes her to buy the doll, and finally to see Dorcas as her child: “When she woke up, her husband had shot a girl young enough to be that daughter whose hair she had dressed to kill.” (108-109) This realisation is articulated in a conversation with Dorcas’ aunt: “‘Another time,’ she said to Alice Manfred, ‘another time I would have loved her too. Just like you did. Just like Joe.’” (109) Thus, Dorcas is not only a rival to Violet, but also a child.²⁴⁸ But realising this after Dorcas’ death does not allow Violet to fully overcome her trauma yet, and impedes the reparation of her relationship with Joe.

The first thing the text reveals about Joe is that he killed his young lover (3). The lack of information about his motivations opens the space for various expectations, and the narrative presents his feelings through retroversion: “Now he lies in bed remembering every detail of that October afternoon when he first met her, from start to finish, and over and over.” (28) The memory of his love with Dorcas is juxtaposed with his inability to remember his love for Violet: “For when Joe tries to remember the way it was when he and Violet were young, when they got married, decided to leave Vesper County and move up North to the City almost nothing comes

²⁴⁸ Jones, “Traces and Cracks,” 485.

to mind.” (29) But afterwards, he is reminded of the happiness he and Violet experienced when meeting and moving to the City. However, after twenty years and the lack of communication between them, he is “[c]onvinced that he alone remembers those days, and wants them back, aware of what it looked like but not at all of what it felt like, he coupled himself elsewhere.” (36) Being unable to share his memories of his absent mother (37) with Violet, and therefore articulate his abandonment trauma, Joe searches for somebody else to talk to. With Dorcas, they share their painful memories: “But she did remember, and told him so, about the slap across her face, the pop and sting of it and how it burned.” (38) The connection between Dorcas and Joe is on display here; however, the reason for her murder is not revealed until Joe is given a voice, and finally speaks his trauma out loud.

As was described in the section dedicated to Joe’s voice, it deals heavily with his childhood trauma. At the centre of this is his absent mother, who he suspects is Wild: “I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her.” (130) Later on, again through Joe’s memories, it is revealed that he has hunted Wild even before knowing she was his mother, speculating what it would take to kill her, to which Henry replies: “Now, learn this: she ain’t prey. You got to know the difference. [...] “You know, that woman is *somebody’s* mother and *somebody* ought to take care.” (175) What follows is a series of memories of unsuccessfully trying to locate his mother, struggling with her wildness: “He left then, disgusted, and not a little afraid.” (177) But his desperation over the absence of his mother is stronger than shame: “He begged, pleaded for her hand until the light grew even smaller. “You my mother?” Yes. No. Both. Either. But not this nothing.” (178) The frustration Joe experiences over his mother explains the reason why Violet’s silence is insufferable to Joe, reminding him of the lack of connection with his absent mother: “He would have chosen any one of them over this indecent speechless lurking insanity.” (179) Mirroring Wild’s abandonment of Joe with Dorcas’, the narrative then

oscillates between Joe's other attempts to find his mother and his hunt for his young lover (181-183), which will be examined later.

Narratively, Dorcas' story is mostly told by other characters. Beside the previously discussed segment of Dorcas' voice, the most information about her is related through the memories of her aunt Alice. She is introduced in a retroversive episode beginning nine years before the primary narrative time (55). Alice remembers the death of Dorcas's parents, and exposes the extensive violence of the East St. Louis riots, an actual historical event:

As a matter of fact, he wasn't even in the riot; he had no weapons, confronted nobody on the street. He was pulled off a streetcar and stomped to death, and Alice's sister had just got the news and had gone back home to try and forget the color of his entrails, when her house was torched and she burned crispy in its flame. (57)

Following the riots, Alice takes care of Dorcas and attends the Fifth Avenue march, a response to the violence of the East St. Louis riots. The incomprehensibility of the racial divide and the violence connected to it is expressed by Alice's thoughts:

[The] Colored Boy Scouts passing out explanatory leaflets to whitemen in straw hats who needed to know what the freezing faces already knew. [...] She read the words and looked at Dorcas. Looked at Dorcas and read the words again. What she read seemed crazy, out of focus. Some great gap lunged between the print and the child. She glanced between them struggling for the connection, something to close the distance between the silent staring child and the slippery crazy words. (58)

The disconnection between racial subjugation and the actual individual people affected by it further emphasises the racist environment the characters have to negotiate. The parade, reminding Alice of the racial injustice, introduces Dorcas to music: "She remembered them as a beginning, a start of something she looked to complete." (60) It commences Dorcas' stream of retroversions, as she remembers the death of her parents, the parties she attended, and meeting Joe. All of these events play a seminal role in Dorcas' simultaneous search for and refusal of her own identity, resulting in her death.

The final moments and last words of Dorcas are narrated by Felice. The retroversions enabled by Felice's voice and explain not only her own abandonment trauma and the impact

Dorcas' death had on her, but also systemic racism and microaggression toward black people. Echoing Alice's awareness that even if she called the police on Joe they would never help (74), Felice, against Dorcas' wish, calls the ambulance, which does not come "until morning after I had called twice." (210) The lack of recognition of black lives underscores the dominant culture's disregard of black people.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, Felice remembers going to Tiffany's with her mother, and being forbidden to try the rings on because "[i]t's just policy. We have to be careful." (203) The next day, Felice's mother gives her the ring and claims it was a present from her boss, however, "I know my mother took it from the velvet tray. Out of spite, I suppose." (203) The ring is symbolic of her mother's retaliation against racism, since Felice describes her as someone who does not break the law, or unspoken rules. Felice, in her awareness of the social space she inhabits, is able to recognise, "[h]ow proud she was of breaking her rules for once. But I'll tell her I know about it, and that it's what she did, not the ring, that I really love." (215) Here, Felice also realises the importance of talking, which enables her to help Joe and Violet repair their broken relationship. But before that can be done, each of them must confront the haunting figures of their past.

The seemingly disconnected part of the novel focuses on Golden Gray and Wild. Introduced through True Belle's memories, the aftermath of slavery and generational trauma is exposed through brutal dispossession and the unacceptability of interracial relationship. Vera Louise, Golden's mother and True Belle's mistress, has an affair with a black man, and as a result is disowned and expelled by her parents (141). She moves to a big city and takes True Belle with her, forcing her to abandon her family (142). When Vera's son is born, and his skin is light and his hair golden (139), he is bought up as a white man, with a revenge, since "he was a young man and went to find, and then kill, if he was lucky, his father." (143) However, as was previously discussed, his plan changes upon his encounter with Wild, a pregnant black

²⁴⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 114-115.

woman. What follows is his struggle with his own identity and abandonment trauma. The retroversion to Golden and Wild's story is necessary for understanding Violet's and Joe's individual traumas, as well as the social forces informing the lives of black people, linking the present and the past. As Carmen Gillespie states, "[t]he unresolved story of Wild and Golden Gray is the deeply rooted and buried tale of the country—a story whose ambiguity and uncertainty continues to affect and haunt all Americans."²⁵⁰

Wild and Golden embody the polar opposites of the images of blackness created by the majority, as "the black Wild woman (the so-called savage) and the light, hyper-civilized man (the mulatto)."²⁵¹ For Violet, who hears stories of Golden throughout her childhood, he becomes an ideal man, and further intensifies her trauma of absence.²⁵² Wild is the racialized image of wildness that Joe struggles with, as well as the mother who has abandoned him, resulting in trauma and fractured identity. Finally, the last sentence from the Golden narrative is: "It must have been the girl who changed his mind." (173) The voice reacts by: "Girls can do that," (173) and proceeds to connect Golden's situation to Joe's affair with Dorcas. In a way, the encounter of Golden and Wild is repeated by Joe and Dorcas, promoting the narrative strategy of repetition, and the African-American trope of repetition and difference.

3.4 Repetition

Alongside the multiple voices and fragmented narrative, the oral quality of the text is achieved through repetition, employing strategies from both Western literary tradition and African oral tradition. Besides frequently repeating motives, connected to the trauma of the characters, like cracks, traces, her parrots and birds, or the knife,²⁵³ the text repeats scenes and events. Though there are scenes which are repeated through memories and expanded upon to

²⁵⁰ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 80.

²⁵¹ Jones, "Traces and Cracks," 489.

²⁵² Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 113.

²⁵³ The repetitions of those themes include but are not limited to: cracks (22,23,96), traces (124, 171, 178), the parrots and birds (24, 93, 214), or the knife (11, 24,85).

explain the plot, for example Violet attacking Dorcas' corpse, there are particular scenes which are repeated with significant difference. Most strikingly, the Golden Gray and Wild episode is repeated in order to be retold in a different manner. Furthermore, Joe's hunt of Wild is mirrored in his hunt of Dorcas, and the original love triangle of Joe, Violet and Dorcas is repeated with Felice. However, those repetitions are different from their original events, employing the African-American trope of repetition and difference, as well as enabling the characters to break away from their traumatic cycles. The repetition of the Golden Gray and Wild episode, however, also serves another function.

The first rendition of Golden meeting Wild exposes his racist views as well as his supposed hatred towards his father. Before the events are first introduced, the text states: "Came all the way to insult not his father but his race." (143) The unfolding episode reveals this mostly through Golden's stream of consciousness narrated by the external narrator. The voice of the narrator steps into the story, repeats the scene of Golden travelling: "like to think of him that way. Sitting straight in the carriage" (150), and comments on his behaviour: "That is what makes me worry about him. How he thinks first of his clothes, and not the woman. How he checks the fastenings, but not her breath." (151) Through Golden's behaviour, the dehumanizing forces of racism upon the racialised objects are exposed.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, Golden's attempts to rewrite the narrative of what happened to justify his inadequate behaviour are pointed out by the narrator: "I know he is a hypocrite; that he is shaping a story for himself to tell somebody, to tell his father, naturally. [...] He thinks his story is wonderful, and that if spoken right will impress his father with his willingness, his honor." (154) This passage signifies on the unreliability of narrative and storytelling itself,²⁵⁵ and can be interpreted as a comment on the creation of the larger cultural narrative full of contradictions and hypocrisy, previously pointed out in *Beloved*.

²⁵⁴ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 78.

²⁵⁵ Andrews, "Reading Toni Morrison's *Jazz*," 103.

Similarly, the repetition of Golden's story brought on by the narrator's admission of unreliability overtly comments on the storytelling practices and expectations of truth connected to narratives. The narrator laments: "What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly?" (160) This is not only an admission of wrongdoing and injustice to Golden's character, but also a subversion of the expectation of truth from a seemingly omniscient narrator. Furthermore, it initiates the repetition of the story, but this time "I have to alter things" (161), to create a difference in order to explain that "the hurt that was not linked to the color of his skin, or the blood that beat beneath it. But to some other thing that longed for authenticity, for a right to be in this place." (160) As was previously explained, Golden struggles with masculinity as well as his racial identity. Golden's initial conflict over whether to leave Wild or stay is resolved in "there is no reason to stay but he does." (161) Possibly, he does not want to abandon Wild the way he was abandoned by his father. Even his previous fear of Wild humanizing herself by returning his gaze is subverted: "Golden Gray watched and he thought he was ready for those deer eyes to open." (162) The repetition and difference of his story indicates that his trauma of fractured identity as well as abandonment, which is confirmed in the previously discussed altercation with his father, shall not be repeated by the abandonment of Wild.

However, Wild, who is never given a voice and can be read as a figure of the past,²⁵⁶ does abandon her son Joe, which causes him to hunt for her. He tracks her throughout his life, as is explained in his speech, in an attempt to relinquish his abandonment trauma, shame and his struggle with his identity, caused by the fact that his mother might be a wild woman. In the chapter where Joe's hunt for Wild is paralleled with his hunt for Dorcas, Joe finds a hideout with signs of someone's presence, and more significantly a confirmation that it is Wild's abode, in a green dress Golden covered her with (161). But his hunt is unsuccessful, since Wild is still

²⁵⁶ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 134-135.

absent: “But where is *she*?” (183). The absence of his mother is repeated by Dorcas’ abandoning him, resulting in Joe’s hunt of Dorcas:

Take my little hoof marks away? Leave me with no tracks at all? In this world the best thing, the only thing, is to find the trail and stick to it. I tracked my mother in Virginia and it led me right to her, and I tracked Dorcas from borough to borough. I didn’t even have to work at it. (130)

The first difference, beside the fact that it is not his mother but his lover, is that the hunt for Dorcas is through the City, and the tracks she leaves are information Joe gathers from the community (131), emphasising the difference between the country Joe comes from and the City he moved to. But Joe does not alter his hunt to the city, since “while hunting a gun is as natural a companion as Victory” (180), which has fatal consequences. Therefore, the second and the most significant difference is the result of the hunt. Unlike Wild, Joe is successful in locating Dorcas, and even though he does not plan on hurting her, he kills her. Schreiber identifies Dorcas’ murder as Joe’s means of verbalization of the trauma caused by his mother.²⁵⁷ However, this does not create the significant difference that Joe needs to overcome his past and change his present.

The healing of the characters in order to move on from their past traumas is encompassed in the repetition and difference of the ‘scandalous threesome.’ The expectation of a similar result is set by the narrator in the first chapter of the book, and it is further enforced by describing Felice’s arrival as follows: “she easily believed that what was coming up the steps toward her was another true-as-life Dorcas, four marcelled waves and all” (197) and “She is disturbing me [...] Climbing the steps now, heading for Violet.” (198) But the conversations Joe and Violet have with Felice disrupt this expectation, enabling them all to express their feelings. Violet particularly is able to repair her self-identity through telling Felice about her mother abandoning her, Golden and her struggle with her own mental state:

²⁵⁷ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 114.

“‘Now I want to be the woman my mother didn’t stay around long enough to see [...] My grandmother fed me stories about a little blond child. He was a boy, but I thought of him as a girl sometimes, as a brother, sometimes as a boyfriend. He lived inside my mind. Quiet as a mole. But I didn’t know it till I got here. The two of us. Had to get rid of it.’
 [...]
 “‘Killed her. Then I killed the me that killed her.’
 “‘Who’s left?’
 “‘Me.’ (208-209)

Violet claims her own identity, no longer fractured, and combats the imperatives imposed on her by racist society. Violet’s self-assertion has a particular impact on Felice, who recognises the importance of the act: “The way she said it. Not like the ‘me’ was some tough somebody, or somebody she had put together for show. But like, [...] Somebody who wouldn’t have to steal a ring to get back at whitepeople and then lie and say it was a present from them.” (210) Consequently, as Schreiber states:

Violet symbolically adopts Felice to replace the child she never had, which suggests that childlessness is not the proper way to end the cycle of loss. Mothering mutually assists both Violet and Felice; community parenting relies on one generation’s teaching the next.²⁵⁸

Thus, Violet is also able to overcome her trauma of childlessness, and through talking with Felice, she is able to release herself from the past. Similarly, Joe is able to move past his actions and sorrow when Felice reveals that Dorcas thought about Joe as she was dying and did not blame him (213). This enables both Violet and Joe to start repairing their relationship, thanks to Felice.²⁵⁹ Therefore, the toxicity of the Dorcas-Joe-Violet relationship is not repeated, as Felice symbolically becomes their child, and resolves their issues through talking.

The difference of their relationship from the original one is surprising to the voice of the novel, which admits: “I was so sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen.” (220) The reason the narrator believed it would happen was because of the presumed repeatability of the past, and therefore the repeatability of trauma:

²⁵⁸ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 118.

²⁵⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 117.

“That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle.” (220) However, the characters are able to overcome the past because “[it] never occurred to me that they were thinking other thoughts, feeling other things, putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of.” (221) Joe’s and Violet’s relationship at the end of the novel is different in that they are finally able to talk about and share their past, emphasising the healing potential of telling one’s traumas: “A lot of the time, though, they stay home figuring things out, telling each other those little personal stories they like to hear again and again, or fussing with the bird Violet bought.” (223) The text then presents a memory of Violet and Joe early in the relationship (225-226); however, unlike the other memories, this one is not assigned to either of the characters. Rather, it focalizes both Violet and Joe, implying their relationship, based on sharing, is repaired.

Similarly to *Beloved*, *Jazz* becomes a collection of personal histories and past traumas. The importance of remembering the past, but not surrendering to it, is explored through the traumatic experience of the characters, who need to learn to speak their trauma to move past it. As Jones states, “memory and storytelling are the exercise of an imaginative faculty that helps one to live harmoniously with the self, the human community, and the past.”²⁶⁰ Through speech, revisiting of the past, and communication with others, the characters are able to understand themselves and each other, and they are able to move toward wholeness.²⁶¹ The characters of *Jazz* learn to “verbalize and acknowledge personal and cultural trauma in order to mature and function in daily life,”²⁶² and the text itself becomes a verbalization of racial trauma of the African-American community.

Perhaps more than Morrison’s other novels, the style of *Jazz* is discussed for its musicality. The title alone implies the importance of the genre of jazz, which was conceived in

²⁶⁰ Jones, “Traces and Cracks,” 483.

²⁶¹ Stave, “*Jazz and Paradise*,” 65-66.

²⁶² Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 107.

the oppressed situation of African Americans in South,²⁶³ much like the traumas of the characters. The obvious orality of the unique voice of the novel secures its place within the African-American tradition of the Talking Book. Similarly, the narrative strategies of multiple voices, fragmented structure, retroversion and repetition add to the text's oral quality. Moreover, those strategies mimic the retrieval of traumatic memory as a way to move past it. *Jazz*, therefore, becomes a narrative of traumatic experience of the black community presented in the novel. Morrison relies on the combination of Western literary tradition with tradition of African and African-American oral storytelling to narrate the traumatic past of African Americans through unique African-American expression. Therefore, Toni Morrison draws attention to the unspoken histories of black individuals in the US and the unreliability of the master narrative, proving that the trauma of slavery needs to be narrated, witnessed, and acknowledged even long after slavery was abolished.

²⁶³ Rice, "Jazzing it up a Storm," 427.

Chapter 4 *Paradise*: Remembering Their Spectacular History

Paradise (1997), the last novel of the trilogy, also took inspiration from real life events. Based on the story from Brazil about black schoolgirls living in a convent and practicing African-Brazilian religion, who were shot by the police when they were discovered,²⁶⁴ *Paradise* foregrounds the issues of race and patriarchy.²⁶⁵ In relation to those concepts, the criticism of *Paradise* is mostly focused on the interrogation of the larger historical narrative. Questioning the legitimacy of mythological and foundational narratives,²⁶⁶ the novel is read as a reworking of New England Puritans and the Founding Fathers,²⁶⁷ or a Christian allegory.²⁶⁸ Those narratives are presented in the novel as the almost mythical story of the founding of all-black towns of Haven and Ruby. Through those stories Morrison, according to Byerman, “problematizes the invention of communal narrative by showing its oppressive and ultimately self-destructive effects.”²⁶⁹ Thus, to fully understand the relation to the larger historical narrative, the trauma of the characters needs to be considered. Although some critics, such as Andrew Read, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, or Richard L. Schur analyse trauma in the novel, and for example Marni Gauthier or Philip Page examine the structure and style, the narrative strategies used to express the traumatic experience in *Paradise* are usually backgrounded. However, similarly to the rest of the trilogy, the analysis of those strategies opens wider interpretative possibilities.

Paradise introduces two very different communities. One is the residents of the all-black town Ruby, with Deacon and Steward Morgan as the self-proclaimed leaders. The

²⁶⁴ Wagner-Martin, *Toni Morrison*, 125.

²⁶⁵ Stave, “Jazz and Paradise,” 67.

²⁶⁶ Marni Gauthier, “The Other Side of *Paradise*: Toni Morrison’s (Un)Making of Mythic History,” *African American Review* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 396. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40033671>.

²⁶⁷ Tessa Roynon, *Toni Morrison and the Classical Tradition Transforming American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45-46.

²⁶⁸ Carola Hilfrich, “Anti-Exodus: Counteremory, Gender, Race, and Everyday Life in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 20 (Summer 2006): 327. Project Muse.

²⁶⁹ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 194.

opposite is the Convent, a group of women living in a mansion outside of Ruby. Through juxtaposing the two communities, and showcasing the conflicts within them, Morrison emphasises the fact that all African Americans cannot be seen as automatically sharing the same values.²⁷⁰ Though the imminent conflict between the men of Ruby and the women of the Convent is the focus of the story, the novel also examines the personal stories and traumas of the characters from either group, which is reflected in the structure of the novel.²⁷¹ Once again combining Western literary tradition with the orality of African tradition, Morrison produced a text of African-American trauma through African-American expression. The oral quality of the text is achieved through the multiplicity of voices, which also contributes to the narration of collective trauma of racism. Further, the non-linear structure and employment of various retroversions mirrors the orality of storytelling, as well as the fragmentation caused by trauma, and the recollection of traumatic memories. Lastly, repetition with, or in this case, without a difference, not only honours the African-American literary tradition, but also warns against the blind belief in larger narratives and the rigid repetition of the past.

Paradise, perhaps more overtly than *Beloved* and *Jazz*, critiques the master narrative. The allusions to the suspiciousness of foundational narratives are scattered throughout the novel, and the belief of the Ruby men in those narratives is identified as the basis for the eventual violence against the Convent women.²⁷² Through rumours of their behaviour, which does not abide by the rules of the Ruby community, the women are judged by their difference from the majority and identified as the dangerous Other.²⁷³ The connection to the issue of racism through the conception of the Other is clear, and thus *Paradise* can be seen as a critique of the racist master narrative. However, in the continuation of the trilogy's project, *Paradise* still

²⁷⁰ Stave, "Jazz and Paradise," 68.

²⁷¹ Richard L. Schur, "Locating *Paradise* in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Toni Morrison and Critical Race Theory," *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 293, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593567>

²⁷² Gauthier, "The Other Side," 403.

²⁷³ John N. Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 142.

presents the narration of personal histories and traumas as a way to not only overcome traumatic past, but also to create space for the unspoken histories to be heard. Essentially *Paradise*, like *Beloved* and *Jazz*, interrogates and destabilises the master narrative by introducing the stories of characters whose lives have been shaped by the trauma caused by racism.

4.1 Trauma of the Characters

Unlike the previous novels, *Paradise* does not focus solely on an individual or a small group. The Convent alone consists of five women, although the inhabitants change over time. Moreover, the focus on different people in Ruby complicates the identification of a protagonist. Thus, the traumatic experiences are numerous, and sometimes obscure. However, the trauma at the root of the novel's conflict is the transgenerational trauma of the Disallowing.²⁷⁴ Based on the historical development of African-American migration from the South after the Civil War and the consequent creation of all black towns,²⁷⁵ the foundation of Haven, and later Ruby, is engraved into the memory of Ruby's population. The Disallowing is often remembered and told by the twins, Deacon and Steward Morgan, who take pride in what they and their ancestors accomplished, but realise the hardships: "Seventy-nine. All their belongings strapped to their backs or riding on their heads. Young ones time-sharing shoes. Stopping only to relieve themselves, sleep and eat trash."²⁷⁶ The impact of dispossession and the racial trauma connected to it is not exclusive to Ruby, and Deacon is aware of the fact:

What they saw was sometimes nothing, sometimes sad, and Deek remembered everything. Towns that looked like slave quarters, picked up and moved. Towns intoxicated with wealth. Other towns affecting sleep—squirreling away money, certificates, deeds in unpainted houses on unpaved streets. (108)

²⁷⁴ Andrew Read, "'As If Word Magic Had Anything to Do with the Courage It Took to be a Man': Black Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *African American Review* 39, no 4 (Winter 2005): 531. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40033691>.

²⁷⁵ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 135.

²⁷⁶ Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (London: Vintage, 2016), 96. All future page references to this source will be included in parentheses in the text.

Thus, the story of the Disallowing exposes not only the physical and tangible results of racism, but also the trauma and shame²⁷⁷ transmitted on younger generations.

Even though they carry the traumatic history of repeated rejection, Deacon and Steward see the past all the more valuable for the difficulties, and constantly compare present-day Ruby with Haven: “It was a far cry from the early days of Haven and his grandfather would have scoffed at the ease of it—buying property with dollars ready to hand instead of trading years of labor for it.” (111) Most of the Ruby men from the Morgans’ generation refuse to acknowledge that the idolised history of Haven is no longer adequate for the new generations: “So understand me when I tell you nobody is going to come along some eighty years later claiming to know better what men who went through hell to learn knew” (86) and:

“They don’t want to give it nothing. They want to kill it, change it into something they made up.”

“It’s our history too, sir. Not just yours,” said Roy.

“Then act like it. I just told you. That Oven already has a history. It doesn’t need you to fix it.” (86)

Their insistence on not changing anything about Ruby, together with the disdain they have for the younger generation (99), confirms their obsession with the past. Thus, in their attempts to recreate the idealised Haven in Ruby, the Morgans recreate the trauma as well.

Since the Disallowing was racially based, the trauma connected to skin colour is transmitted onto the next generation. Attempting to counter the trauma of rejection, both Haven and Ruby reinforce a sense of control through controlling the population of the towns.²⁷⁸ The 8-rock, also considered the founding families of the towns, are all dark-skinned African Americans. Throughout the novel, the insistence on racial purity becomes apparent, especially through Patricia’s examination of the towns’ shared history: “The sign of racial purity they had taken for granted had become a stain [...] They consolidated the 8-rock blood and, haughty as

²⁷⁷Channette Romero, “Creating the Beloved Community: Religion, Race, and Nation in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” *African American Review* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 418, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40033672>

²⁷⁸Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 54.

ever, moved farther west. The New Fathers.” (194 - 203) Exposing that the powerful people of Ruby are prejudiced against people with lighter skin colour, *Paradise*, according to John N. Duvall, explains the subsequent violence on the Convent:

Haven and Ruby stand as displaced representations of early American exceptionalism [...] This need for racial purity, of course, explains why the men pay such careful attention to the morality of their women and why a man must own his woman’s sexuality.²⁷⁹

The exceptionalism and racial purity the Ruby men insist on protecting is on display in Steward’s memory of a white man hitting a black prostitute: “He did not sympathize with the whitemen, but he could see their point, could even feel the adrenaline, imagining the fist was his own.” (95) Such views reinforce the trauma created by racism and sexism. The control of women, resulting from the need of control of the racial purity of the town, is evident not only from the aversion the men have to openly sexual women and the Convent, but also from their behaviour towards the women of the community.

Despite the women of Ruby not being violently abused as the Convent eventually is, the disregard with which they are treated is telling. Although the men take pride in the fact that the women can walk alone at night through Ruby, they refuse to acknowledge that the women are also oppressed.²⁸⁰ The women are completely left out of the discussion regarding the town’s issues. When K.D. hits young Arnette, the men of Ruby gather to discuss the affair. However, neither Arnette nor any other woman are present (56). Similarly, the Oven argument is between the men of the older and the younger generation (84-87). Before the Convent is attacked, it is the men who decide to take action (273 – 274). The inability of the women to express their opinion is admitted by Dovey, Steward’s wife, who “in discussion with others, including Steward, she tended to agree with whomever she was listening to.” (87) Soane, Dovey’s sister, also chooses silence rather than telling Deacon he is wrong:

²⁷⁹ Duvall, *Identifying Fictions*, 144.

²⁸⁰ Romero, “Creating the Beloved Community,” 421.

She had not meant that she didn't understand what he was talking about. She'd meant she didn't understand why he wasn't worried enough by their friends' money problems to help them out. [...] But Soane didn't try to explain; she just looked closely at his face. (107)

Moreover, the women are scapegoated for the presumed failures of the community. Billie Delia is labelled as a loose woman despite being a virgin (151), for her light complexion and an incident when she was a child; Lone, a midwife, is blamed for ill babies: "She had delivered the Fleetwood babies and each of the defectives had stained her reputation as if she had *made* the babies, not simply delivered them." (271) The ultimate scapegoat, however, is the Convent.

Located in a remote area outside of Ruby, the Convent inhabitants grow and sell produce to survive. Throughout the story, it becomes a place for the healing of traumatic past.²⁸¹ The people who come to the Convent are troubled women, running from their lives. First to arrive is Mavis, who escapes her abusive husband after accidentally killing her twin babies (22-25). Second is Gigi, who flees from violent riots, her absent parents and boyfriend, who turns out to be a liar (64-68). Then comes Seneca, who was abandoned as a child, placed in foster homes, where she endured sexual abuse and as a result harms herself, and is abused and humiliated by a rich woman (126, 136, 261). Last to arrive to the Convent is Pallas, running away from the betrayal from her lover and her mother, who begin an affair together. On the run Pallas is raped (163, 176). All the women have suffered traumatic experiences, and they all seek refuge in the Convent because "[t]hey took people in—lost folk or folks who needed a rest." (11) All of this is enabled by the original inhibitor of the Convent.

Connie, or Consolata, is the constant of the Convent. She is there to receive everyone who needs help. She was brought to the Convent by Mary Magna, who took her of the streets of Brazil (223). Through her affair with Deacon, it is revealed that Consolata has been sexually abused as a child: "But never, after the white hand had enclosed her filthy paw, did she know

²⁸¹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 52.

any male or want to, which must have been why being love-struck after thirty celibate years took on an edible quality.” (228) Dealing with the trauma of being on the streets and abused as a child, Connie grows attached to Deacon. However, he ends the affair without a word (239), and she is left abandoned. Finally, when Mary Magna dies a day before Gigi’s arrival, Consolata “fifty-four years old, was orphaned in a way she was not as a street baby and was never as a servant.” (247) This causes her to drink (69), being unable to cope with the repeated trauma of abandonment.

But Consolata has a gift, which she uses to help others, even people from Ruby. The introduction of spiritual powers into the fabula is similar to the introduction of ghosts in *Beloved*, and Connie too has some spectral abilities, such as moving “[l]ike an apparition.” (43). For this reason, and for her ability to interpret other people’s thoughts, Page identifies her with the African deity Legba,²⁸² who is the trickster figure of both African and African-American traditions. Though initially reluctant to use her gifts, she saves Soane’s son’s life (246). But after Mary Magna falls ill, she becomes sceptical:

Gray-haired, her eyes drained of what eyes were made for, she imagined how she must appear. Her colorless eyes saw nothing clearly except what took place in the minds of others. [...] He had burned the green away and replaced it with pure sight that damned her if she used it. (248)

Connie’s inner conflict about her powers is eventually resolved, as she experiences a transcendental moment of meeting her supposed male twin,²⁸³ reminding her of her younger self (252). Realising the potential of her powers, Consolata is once again aware of the healing she is able to do and precedes to help the girls with their trauma because “[s]cary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside.” (39) The healing ritual that follows her enlightenment is based on the communal sharing of traumatic experience, which employs the multiplicity of voices.

²⁸² Philip Page, “Furrowing All the Brows: Interpretation and the Transcendent in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*,” *African American Review* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 641, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2903286>.

²⁸³ Stave, “Jazz and Paradise,” 70.

4.2 Voice

Like the previous two novels, the multiplicity of voices in *Paradise* contributes to the orality of the text and affirms the collective memory against the totalization of the master narrative.²⁸⁴ But *Paradise* relies significantly less on the voices of the characters, not featuring sections dedicated to their individual voices other than conversations and direct speech. The multivocality is thus achieved mostly through focalizations on various characters, while retaining the non-intrusive voice of the external narrator.²⁸⁵ Even though the narrative voice presents the characters' motivations, opinions and traumas mostly through conversations, contributing to the oral quality of the text, there are some instances when individual and collective voices are foregrounded, for example the blend of the men's voices when discussing the attack on the Convent, or Patricia's address to her father and mother. Moreover, there is a particular emphasis on the loss of voice, through the inability to voice one's opinion like the women of Ruby, to speak of their traumas like Mavis, or speak at all like Pallas. The voicelessness connected to trauma is overcome through the Convent's spiritual loud-dreaming, which features a synthesis of multiple voices as a way of healing, while the voices of the Ruby women remain unheard. Perhaps due to the focus on community and the lack of a clear protagonist, the voices of the characters are presented mostly in conversations.

Although each chapter carries the name of one of the women, contributing to the multivocality of the text²⁸⁶ and signalling the importance of their experience, there are still identifiable male voices. Mostly through the conversations, the opinions and values of the men are presented, but as Marni Gauthier claims "the women's stories consistently reveal the men's perspectives to be skewed."²⁸⁷ However, there are statements by the men that reveal the irony

²⁸⁴ Katrine Dalsgård, "The One All-Black Town Worth the Pain: (African) American Exceptionalism, Historical Narration, and the Critique of Nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *African American Review* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2001): 238, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2903255>.

²⁸⁵ Tally, *The Cambridge Companion*, 73.

²⁸⁶ Schur, "Locating *Paradise*," 293.

²⁸⁷ Gauthier, "The Other Side," 407.

and hypocrisy of their approach. For example, when discussing K.D. and Arnette in Arnette's absence, the absolute control the men want to have over the women is exposed: "I'm her father. I'll arrange her mind." (61) Furthermore:

"She's the key. My wife's the key."
Deek smiled outright for the first time that evening. "Women always the key, God bless 'em." (61)

Since the eventual attack on the Convent is already established in the text at that point, and the previous conversation asserts the control men want to have over the women, Deacon's statement underscores the way things run in Ruby: the older men decide everything, including the matters of the younger generation and the women,²⁸⁸ while remaining oblivious to their self-righteousness.

Their disregard for the opinions of the younger generation is fully displayed in the altercation about the Oven. Discussing the writing on the Oven, the older generation insists on 'Beware the Furrow of His Brow' while the younger argues for 'Be the Furrow of His Brow.' (85-87). As was previously mentioned, the older generation disregards the opinions of the younger generation as a disrespect to their history, especially the hardships endured by their ancestors during the Disallowing. But the discussion touches upon earlier history:

"Sorry, sir. But what kind of message is that? No ex-slave who had the guts to make his own way, build a town out of nothing, could think like that. No ex-slave—" [...]
"Everybody born in slavery time wasn't a slave. Not the way you mean it."
"There's just one way to mean it, sir," said Destry.
"You don't know *what* you're talking about!" (84)

Assuming the ultimate authority due to their role in the continuation of Haven in Ruby, Deacon and Steward refuse to acknowledge any change or admit any failure of their history,²⁸⁹ and essentially values. Even when Reverend Misner suggest that "[they]'re here not just to talk but to listen too" (86), the reaction supports this refusal to change: "The gasps were more felt than

²⁸⁸ Rob Davidson. "Racial Stock and 8-Rocks: Communal Historiography in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 357, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3176022>

²⁸⁹ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 194-196.

heard.” (86) But Anna questions the self-importance of the ‘New Fathers’, especially the Morgan twins. When talking to Reverend Misner, who assumes the Morgans founded the town, Anna corrects him and tells him it was fifteen families who founded it, and thus exposes the control the Morgans have over the town due to their wealth (115). She is also aware the conflict in Ruby is rooted in the control over it: “Any problem brewing sure ain’t money.” (117) The problem is the town’s insistence on racial purity, moral superiority, and seclusion from the outside world, which eventually culminates in the attack on the Convent.

When a family of white people gets lost in Ruby, Steward’s reaction is hostile. Since the previously discussed racial purity of the town is fully explored later in the novel, Steward’s reaction seems purely as hatred toward white people:

“God has one people, Steward. You know that.” Misner rubbed his hands, then blew on them.

“Reverend,” said Steward, “I’ve heard you say things *out* of ignorance, but this is the first time I heard you say something *based* on ignorance.” (123)

However, in the context of the 8-rock families, Steward’s insistence on the difference of people includes even black people who do not fit Steward’s conception of blackness. Ultimately, Steward exemplifies the way Ruby’s older men refuse otherness on the basis of colour, age, gender and behaviour. As Patricia explains in a conversation with Misner:

“Well help me figure this place out. I know I’m an outsider, but I’m not an enemy.”

“No, you’re not. But in this town those two words mean the same thing.” (212)

The rumours the men hear about the Convent (11) strengthen their interpretation of the Convent women as a dangerous embodiment of the complete otherness, which, at least for the men, justifies their eventual lynching.²⁹⁰ When they prepare for the attack during a secret meeting, the voices Lone overhears blend together to the point they are indistinguishable:

Can’t nobody tell me they left the road and got themselves lost in a field with a big old house less than two miles away. They would have seen it. Had to. The man would have got out and walked to it, see what I mean? [...] These here sluts out there by themselves never step foot in church and I bet you a dollar to a fat nickel

²⁹⁰ Gauthier, “The Other Side,” 398.

they ain't thinking about one either. They don't need men and they don't need God.
Can't say they haven't been warned [...]. (276)

Creating a unified voice speaking for the male community of Ruby, the men's anxiety regarding the control is uttered. This need originates, as was previously stated, from the transgenerational trauma of dispossession. However, their self-righteousness does not allow the speaking of trauma to have a healing effect. Moreover, Lone witnesses this but is unable to interrupt them, knowing she would not be heard (281). After the attack, Soane feels guilty for not speaking out: "If only she had talked twenty-two years ago. Just talked." (288) This exposes the lack of voice of the Ruby women. But *Paradise* does feature a section dedicated to a woman's voice.

In a chapter dedicated to her, Patricia discovers the racial purity in Ruby through the excavation of the history of the Ruby and Haven families. Through rereading the story of Disallowing, Patricia traces the events and values that shaped Ruby.²⁹¹ Realising that her family is a victim of the untold rule of racial purity, she begins to address her father and mother in her writing. Through this, she creates a confession that critiques not only the community for its values, but also herself for adopting them,²⁹² especially when it comes to her daughter Billie Delia, whom she sees as a liability (203). Her voice, expressed through writing, explains the mechanics of the town:

Daddy, they don't hate us because Mama was your first customer. They hate us because she looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me, and although I married Billy Cato, who was an 8-rock like you, like them, I passed the skin on to my daughter, as you and everybody knew I would. (196)

Shifting to addressing her dead mother, believing she could have been saved were she not light skinned, Patricia notes the helplessness of the women:

The women really tried, Mama. They really did. Kate's mother, Catherine Jury, you remember her, and Fairy DuPres (she's dead now), along with Lone and Dovey Morgan and Charity Flood. But none of them could drive then. (197)

At the same time, the hypocrisy of the scorn for light skin is countered with the help the Ruby

²⁹¹ Davidson, "Racial Stock," 364.

²⁹² Duvall, *Identifying Fictions*, 148.

community got from Patricia's mother: "Remember how they needed you, used you to go into a store to get supplies or a can of milk while they parked around the corner? That was the only thing your skin was good for. Otherwise it bothered them." (200) Mirroring the Convent's selling of peppers to the people of Ruby as well as offering help in various situations, Patricia's mother is used for profit and punished at the same time. Similarly, Patricia's father is scorned: "They think Daddy deserves rebuke because he broke the blood rule first, and I wouldn't put it past them to refuse to die just to keep Daddy from success." (199) By writing what she found out, Patricia presents the potential counterhistories to the accepted narrative.²⁹³ Though voicing her thoughts at least in writing, Patricia realises the Morgans are in control of Ruby, and eventually burns the papers, saying: "Dear, dear God. I burned the papers." (217) By this, Patricia chooses to erase her research as well as her voice, returning to silence.

The women of Ruby have no voice when it comes to the matters of the town. Moreover, the people who were essentially oppressed by the town's values also remain silent. But silence is something that connects the Ruby women with the women in the Convent, since they are also unable to verbalise their trauma.²⁹⁴ Mavis, the first to arrive, is asked about her children but "Mavis could not speak." (47) Later, when asked about her children again, "Mavis did not answer, partly because she couldn't speak of it [...]." (48) Gigi too refuses to speak about her past, only reliving it in her mind (256). Seneca verbalises her trauma through self-harm, as a way to get sympathy (261). The most striking example of the inability to verbalise trauma is Pallas, who is unable to speak after being raped (162). But her voice returns as she talks to Consolata: "It was wine-soaked and took an hour; it was backward and punctured and incomplete, but it came out—little one's story of who had hurt her." (173) Still, Pallas is not fully able to narrate her trauma, as Connie discovered: "I asked who hurt you. You telling me who helped you. Want to keep that other part secret for a little longer?" (176) It is also Connie,

²⁹³ Gauthier, "The Other Side," 411.

²⁹⁴ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 62.

who gives them their voices back, and with them the ability to tell their trauma.

The moment of the healing of trauma is preceded by the text shifting focalization between each girl's thoughts about their past, interrupted by short fragments describing Consolata's cooking. When she is done, she proclaims: "I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for." (262) In this moment, according to Duvall, Consolata attempts to "appropriate the power to name and narrate."²⁹⁵ Through a ritual, Consolata encourages them to trace their bodies on the floor and speak, which results in a synthesis of their voices:

That is how the loud dreaming began. How the stories rose in that place. Half-
tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering
candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles. And it was never important to know
who said the dream or whether it had meaning. [...] "They don't seem to want to
wake up, Sal. Sal? Look here. They don't seem to want to." They kick their legs
underwater, but not too hard for fear of waking fins or scales also down below.
The male voices saying saying forever saying push their own down their throats.
Saying, saying until there is no breath to scream or contradict. Each one blinks
and gags from tear gas, moves her hand slowly to the scraped shin, the torn
ligament. Runs up and down the halls by day, sleeps in a ball with the lights on at
night. Folds the five hundred dollars in the foot of her sock. Yelps with pain from
a stranger's penis and a mother's rivalry—alluring and corrosive as cocaine. [...] They
spoke to each other about what had been dreamed and what had been drawn.
Are you sure she was your sister? Maybe she was your mother. Why? Because a
mother might, but no sister would do such a thing. (264-265)

Similarly to their voices, their stories blend together. The drawing of their bodies and the narration of their past are means of verbalisation of their trauma.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, the women enter into the stories of the others, offering support and empathy,²⁹⁷ essentially becoming the witnesses of the narration of trauma. This collective ritual enables the Convent women to overcome their traumatic past,²⁹⁸ promising a future devoid of pain. But this idyllic state will be interrupted, as is established in the novel through the use of fragmented narrative structure and retroversion.

²⁹⁵ Duvall, *Identifying Fictions*, 144.

²⁹⁶ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 59.

²⁹⁷ Page, "Furrowing All the Brows," 642.

²⁹⁸ Dalsgård, "The One All-Black Town," 245.

4.3 Narrative Structure and Retroversion

Like the multiplicity of voices, the non-linearity of *Paradise* represents Morrison's approach to storytelling: using fragmented narrative structure to emphasise the oral quality of the text, as well as the retrieval of personal and collective traumatic memory. Presented by an external narrator, the text is divided into nine chapters, each chapter named after one of the women. The fact that the chapters carry the names of the women, however, foregrounds how the women disrupt the official story of Ruby.²⁹⁹ Each chapter comprises of fragments and episodes focalized on different characters, unveiling the fabula through various retroversions.

The primary narrative begins with the men entering the Convent: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time." (3) The date of the attack is said to be in July 1976, which, according to Duvall, "[as] the month of America's Bicentennial, surely serves to remind the reader that the land of the free historically depended on those who were not."³⁰⁰ The date in itself is a reference to previously unheard histories, and similarly, as Page states, the narrative "circles backward to provide the context for the central event, in this case sweeping broadly to incorporate the histories of the Convent women."³⁰¹ Thus, the majority of the story is an embedded narrative, framed by the attack on the Convent women, making the story a series of internal and mixed retroversions. The context of the attack is composed of the memories of the characters and extensive retroversions into the history of the town. The story of the Disallowing, the conflicts within the Ruby community, personal pasts of the Convent women, and the contact between Ruby and the Convent illuminate the pivotal event of the novel while questioning the authority of the historical narrative through a circular narration reminiscent of oral storytelling.

²⁹⁹ Gauthier, "The Other Side," 408.

³⁰⁰ Duvall, *Identifying Fictions*, 144.

³⁰¹ Page, "Furrowing All the Brows," 640.

Paradise emphasises the oral narrative tradition through the retelling of the Disallowing story.³⁰² The central figures of the orally transmitted history are the Morgan twins, who rely on their memory when telling the stories.³⁰³ Connected to the first Disallowing by their ancestor Zacharia, the Morgan twins take on the responsibility of continuing his legacy in both telling Haven's and Ruby's history, and reproducing Haven's values:

The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened—things they witnessed and things they have not. [...] And they have never forgotten the message or the specifics of any story, especially the controlling one told to them by their grandfather—the man who put the words in the Oven's black mouth. A story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves. (13)

Through Deacon's and Steward's memories and the employment of mixed retroversion, the story of a dispossession of a community of black people is narrated, presenting a mystical man appearing to Zacharia to lead the way to the place where Haven is eventually established (97). Similarly, the continuous traumatic effect of dispossession on other all-black towns are presented through Deacon's "prophetic wisdom. His total memory [...]" (107), emphasising the role of memory and narration.

Moreover, the trauma of the Disallowing is still alive in the minds of the men, and used as an excuse for the attack:

From Haven, a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory, to Haven, a ghosttown in Oklahoma State. Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948. [...] That is why they are here in this Convent. To make sure it never happens again. That nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain. (5)

Set on reproducing the glory of Haven in Ruby by protecting it from what they deem dangerous, the men do not allow any questioning of their approach, even in the community's internal affairs: "There was no need to wonder if moving the Oven had been a mistake; whether it

³⁰² James M. Mellard, "The Jews of Ruby, Oklahoma: Politics, Parallax, and Ideological Fantasy in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 353, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26287693>.

³⁰³ Gauthier, "The Other Side," 406.

needed its original soil as foundation for the respect and wholesome utility that was its due. No. No, Big Papa. No, Big Daddy. We did right.” (112) The twins rely solely on the history engraved in their memory to justify their dismissive, oppressive, and eventually violent behaviour. But as Gauthier states: “Memory is related as both subjective - shaped and forged partly by imagination - and unreliable as an indicator of historical truth.”³⁰⁴ The twins’ obliviousness to this fact is confronted by the young people of Ruby questioning the legitimacy of the Oven’s motto.

The young people point out that the only source is the word of a woman, who was five and could not read at the time she felt the words to be “Beware the Furrow of His Brow.” (83) With generational distance from the story of Haven’s origin, the younger people want to reconsider the static narrative and participate in the creation of meaning in the community, which threatens the elder men and their need for control.³⁰⁵ Thus, the younger generation is aware of the possibility of different view of the past, as Jan Furman claims:

[The] past should inform present and future, but it cannot replace them. [...] This fourth generation envisions history as encompassing more than the town’s past. History is inclusive, fluid, and immeasurable. [...] History is national, cultural, personal, and racial. It is primordial, Africa, slavery, freedom.³⁰⁶

Furthermore, as was previously assessed, the history the twins reinforce is idealized, and omits important factors, which are uncovered by Patricia Best.

The personal implications of Patricia’s examination of the past have already been discussed; however, the effect of her historiographical excavation on the controlling narrative expose the fallibility of orally transmitted histories. Patricia’s aim in tracing the history is

to record accurately the relationships among the fifteen families of Ruby, their ancestors in Haven and, further back, in Mississippi and Louisiana. [...] Any footnotes, crevices or questions to be put took keen imagination and the persistence of a mind uncomfortable with oral histories. Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match the stories, and where proof was not available she

³⁰⁴ Gauthier, “The Other Side,” 401.

³⁰⁵ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 138.

³⁰⁶ Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 95.

interpreted—freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required emotional distance. (188)

Through revisiting the past, she comes to realise that her distrust of the told stories is justified:

An abbreviation for eight-rock, a deep deep level in the coal mines. Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them. [...] This time the clarity was clear: for ten generations they had believed the division they fought to close was free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always, white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew there was a difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, serious consequence, to Negroes themselves. (193-194)

Interpreting both oral and written sources, Patricia discovers that there is an unspoken racial rule, which has real impact on the lived experience of the Ruby population, exemplified by the scrutinization of her family. The revelation of exclusion within the community destabilises the ideal image³⁰⁷ of Ruby the older men strive to maintain, exposing the details too unacceptable to be spoken.³⁰⁸ Thus, Morrison, contrary to her previous novels, questions the legitimacy and limits of both oral and written historical narratives, while still admitting the potential of counterhistories.³⁰⁹ The counterhistories are illustrated not only by the experience of the Best family, but also by the women of the Convent.

The first description of the Convent is presented through focalizing on the thoughts of the attackers, offering the interpretation of the women as evil:

Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brothers shot each other on New Year's Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common. And what went on at the Oven these days was not to be believed. [...] The proof they had been collecting since the terrible discovery in the spring could not be denied: the one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women. (11)

However, Morrison employs numerous retroversions to the women's pasts and traumas to create an alternative way of understanding them.³¹⁰ The stories of Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, Pallas, and Consolata are explained through their traumatic memories and retroversive episodes, which

³⁰⁷ Dalsgård, "The One All-Black Town," 233.

³⁰⁸ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 197.

³⁰⁹ Gauthier, "The Other Side," 411.

³¹⁰ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 197.

recount their arrival at the Convent. As was previously mentioned, Mavis arrives after accidentally killing her babies. This is related through her memories, as she undergoes her journey, that eventually leads her to the Convent: “Mavis Albright left the Convent off and on, but she always returned, so she was there in 1976.” (49) Gigi’s arrival is first introduced through K.D.’s eyes (53) but her motivations and past are also uncovered through her memories. One of those memories is that of a riot: “Over a hundred injured, the newspaper said, but no mention of gunfire or a shot kid. No mention of a neat little colored boy carrying his blood in his hand.” (170) Echoing the newspaper form *Jazz*, this memory not only emphasises Gigi’s personal trauma, but also the physical and psychological trauma of racially charged violence, which is left unnoticed. Similarly, through Seneca’s memory of Norma, the humiliating and dehumanizing effects of abuse and objectification are foregrounded:

She didn’t have to stay there, moving from peacock feathers to abject humiliation; from coddling to playful abuse; from caviar tartlets to filth. But the pain framed the pleasure, gave it edge. The humiliation made surrender deep, tender. Long-lasting [...] But like a pet you wanted to play with for a while—a little while—but not keep. Not love. Not name it. Just feed it, play with it, then return it to its own habitat. (137-138)

The extreme objectification and violation of rape Pallas is subjected to is so traumatic that it overshadows the memories of the affair between her mother and Carlos (179). The Convent, however, provides them with space to deal with their trauma,³¹¹ thanks to Consolata.

Connie’s memories, through narrating her traumatic childhood, also introduce the Convent’s history of helping women, her affair with Deacon and her friendship with Soane and Lone. Interestingly, Deacon’s infatuation with her is a striking opposite to how he behaves later on: “He kisses her lightly, then leans on his elbow. ‘I’ve traveled. All over. I’ve never seen anything like you. How could anything be put together like you? Do you know how beautiful you are? Have you looked at yourself?’” (231) Their affair is intense and passionate, and Connie

³¹¹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 59.

even makes future plans for them. But when she accidentally bites his lip, Deacon stops seeing her. Realising what had happened, she exclaims: “Dear Lord, I didn’t want to eat him. I just wanted to go home.” (240) Though heartbroken, Consolata overcomes it with the help of Mary Magna. Realising she does not need Deacon to validate her,³¹² Connie assumes the role of a caretaker. Through the memories of helping the Convent girls, Mary Magna and eventually Soane and Lone, Connie fulfils her potential and thus helps Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas to accept their past and become their authentic selves.³¹³ Moreover, those retroversions become narratives of hidden past that connects the Convent with Ruby on intimate level. Those unspoken stories exemplify unheard histories, and thus, according to Richard L. Schur, “reproduce the layers of memory that haunt any effort at social reform and social justice.”³¹⁴ However, those personal histories are unavailable to the Ruby community, leading to misinterpretations of the women’s behaviour and the eventual attack on them.

Although there is limited contact between the Convent and Ruby, the people often encounter the Convent women, even seeking their help. Some of them contribute to the misinterpretation of the women as the source of all evil, especially Sweetie. Sleepwalking through the town on a winter day, she is taken by Seneca to the Convent to warm up. But Sweetie changes the story when explaining what happened: “They made me, snatched me.” (130) Similarly, Arnette’s encounter with the Convent is misunderstood. After claiming to be raped, Arnette seeks their help with the pregnancy (77). The Ruby community insinuates the women killed the baby (113). However, through retroversion, it is revealed that it was Arnette herself who caused the baby’s death (250), but she does not admit this. Sweetie and Arnette contribute to the animosity the community feels towards the Convent, but some people understand the women.

³¹² Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 98.

³¹³ Wagner-Martin, *Toni Morrison*, 130.

³¹⁴ Schur, “Locating *Paradise*,” 296.

Billie Delia, who herself is wrongly interpreted as “the fastest girl in town” (59), is one of the few people who somehow understand the Convent. After spending time in the Convent, she even helps Pallas to get there, as is presented through Pallas’s memory, explaining the positive healing space of the Convent:

“This is a place where you can stay for a while. No questions. I did it once and they were nice to me. Nicer than—well, very nice. Don’t be afraid. I used to be. Afraid of them, I mean. Don’t see many girls like them out here.” She laughed then. “A little nuts, maybe, but loose, relaxed, kind of. [...] Anyway you can collect yourself there, think things through, with nothing or nobody bothering you all the time. They’ll take care of you or leave you alone—whichever way you want it.” (175-176)

Billie Delia also recognises the hypocrisy and destructive forces in Ruby and decides the only way to escape is to leave (153). Like Billie, Soane accepts the Convent, becoming a friend of Consolata after she saves her son and provides medicine for her:

She wanted to get her tonic properly steeped before her husband returned. One of Connie’s preparations lay at her fingertips, a tiny cloth bag folded into a waxed paper packet. Its contents representing the second time Connie had saved her. (100)

Through this friendship, however, Soane indirectly contributes to the false image Ruby creates for the Convent women. Inviting them to Arnette and K.D.’s wedding reception, Soane realises too late what she has done:

The reception at her house would be a further digest of the problem, and most disturbing, Soane, unbeknownst to others, had made the mistake of inviting Connie and the Convent girls to the wedding reception. Having misread the warning, she was about to hostess one of the biggest messes Ruby had ever seen. (154)

Although Ruby’s perception of the women is already unfavourable, the wedding reception solidifies the hatred of the men towards them.

The appearance of Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas at the reception appears to confirm what the town has thought about them. Since K.D.’s affair with “one of the strays living out there where the entrance to hell is wide,” (114) was public knowledge, their presence is scandalous. As the women play with the children, dance, and enjoy themselves, the people confirm their judgements:

He knew about such women. Like children, always on the lookout for fun, devoted to it but always needing a break in order to have it. A lift, a hand, a five-dollar bill. [...] He exchanged glances with his wife who nodded and left the window. She knew, as he did, that fun-obsessed adults were clear signs of already advanced decay. (157)

Reverend Pulliam's opinion is agreed on by the Morgans, resulting in the women being asked to leave. The women do not take offence since "[n]one of the passengers had high expectations of men in suits, so they were not surprised to be asked to leave the premises." (162) Mavis, however, scorns Gigi about their behaviour and a fight breaks out, contributing to the rumours about them:

The driver slowed, maybe to get around the Cadillac hogging the road, maybe to offer help, but he stayed long enough to see outlaw women rolling on the ground, dresses torn, secret flesh on display. And see also two other women embracing in the back seat. For long moments his eyes were wide. Then he shook his head and gunned the motor of his truck. (168)

The assumed sexual depravity of the women and their way of living are enough for the older men to decide they are the source of moral decay in the town, but they only take action after a scandalous discovery.

When the bodies of a white family are discovered, the community faces a dilemma, which is resolved by scapegoating the women:

The problem was whether to notify the law or not. Not, it was decided. Even to bury them would be admitting to something they had no hand in. [...] When some of the men went to look, much of their attention was not on the scene at hand but west on the Convent that loomed in their sight line. She should have known then. (273)

Revealed in Lone's chapter as a stream of memories as she tries to stop the attack, the culmination of the hatred towards the women is displayed. Through focalization between Steward and Deacon, their personal reasons for the attack emerge. Alluding to their memory of ladies that symbolised perfect womanhood for them (109-110), Steward's aversion is described: "The women in the Convent were for him a flaunting parody of the nineteen Negro ladies of his and his brother's youthful memory and perfect understanding." (279) Embodying what he

cannot control, Steward seeks to kill the women for tarnishing his ideal memory. Deacon, on the other hand, wants to destroy the women to destroy his shameful memories:

[Lone] could not have fathomed his personal shame or understood how important it was to erase both the shame and the kind of woman he believed was its source. An uncontrollable, gnawing woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed; (278-279)

For Deacon, recreating the glory of Haven in Ruby is more important than the woman he was once close with. Structurally circling back to the beginning of the novel, illuminating the motivations and contradictions, the men, under Deacon and Steward's leadership, set out to repeat the trauma their people once experienced.³¹⁵ Repetition, with or without difference, is another significant strategy employed in *Paradise*.

4.4 Repetition

The oral quality of *Paradise* is achieved by the use of focalization and voice, fragmented structure, retroversion and repetition. Morrison facilitates repetition for emphasis, evocative of oral tradition, as well as the African-American trope of repetition and difference, and Signifyin(g). Similarly to the previous novels, repetition in *Paradise* works on several levels. Significant motives connected to the trauma of the characters are repeated throughout the novel, for example trees, the sound of 'Sha sha sha',³¹⁶ the Oven, or the Cadillac. Moreover, the story of the Disallowing is repeatedly presented and told, as well as repeated in the founding of Ruby. The exclusion which traumatised the Haven community continues in Ruby, resulting in the scapegoating of the Convent women. Lastly, the attack on the Convent is repeated with significant difference, presenting several versions of the events. Those repetitions not only contribute to the authentic expression of the traumatic experience of the black community, but

³¹⁵ Krumholz, "Reading and Insight," 22.

³¹⁶ The interlocking trees significant for Gigi are echoed by the fig trees remembered by Consolata during her affair with Deacon, and their repetitions are included but not limited to the following pages: 66,164,234,236,257. 'Sha sha sha' is connected to Connie's memory of seeing Deacon (226) or her childhood, and is later changed to "Sh sh sh" when Mary Magna consoles her after Deacon leaves Connie (241), symbolising the change Consolata undergoes.

also comment on cultural and historical narratives. Perhaps the most prominent repeated image in the novel is the Oven.

The Oven, a symbol of the past, embodies for the Ruby community the hardships their ancestors had to endure and survive.³¹⁷ This insurmountable significance of the Oven is assigned mostly by the older men. As was previously discussed, they insist on the motto not changing, and they were the ones who insisted on moving the Oven from Haven to Ruby. But through numerous repetitions of the image,³¹⁸ the meaning of the Oven is shown to be different to the women and the young people. Through the focalization on Soane, the Oven is described as such:

Minus the baptisms the Oven had no real value. [...] The women nodded when the men took the Oven apart, packed, moved and reassembled it. But privately they resented the truck space given over to it—rather than a few more sacks of seed, rather than shoats or even a child's crib. (103)

Claiming that a “utility became a shrine” (103), its meaning and importance assigned by the men is destabilised, exposing the men's control over the women and the narrative of the town, and at the same time showcasing the existence of different stories. The men's devotion to the Oven, as the text presents, is what destroys it: “Nobody better to make the point than the wayward young who turned it into a different kind of oven. One where the warming flesh was human.” (104) Although it can be seen as an act of disrespect, the graffiti on the Oven underscores the value assigned to it in the past as no longer relevant to the present. But as the men attack the Convent, the memory of their traumatic past symbolised by the Oven³¹⁹ is repeated, and by it, the Oven's meaning is different again: “The graffiti on the hood of the Oven now was ‘We Are the Furrow of His Brow.’” (298) Thus, at the end of the novel, the Oven is

³¹⁷ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 140.

³¹⁸ The repetition of the image is included but not limited to the following pages: 7,15,62, 84, 117, 143, 269, 273, 287.

³¹⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 52.

no longer a symbol of the glorious past, but a reminder of the pain the men's rigid repetition of the past caused.

The repetition and difference also connects to the Convent. Beside the actual building of the convent, the women are connected to the Cadillac. It is presented as the place of the death of Mavis's children (23), and as the property of her abusive husband, essentially making the car a symbol of Mavis' trauma. But the car is changed both physically and metaphorically. When Mavis steals the Cadillac and changes its colour, it becomes a means of escape and the possibility of freedom (42). The meaning of the car for the people of Ruby is different, as the Cadillac becomes synonymous with the Convent. Its noticeable presence symbolises the presence of the depravity of the women (156, 169, 275). The Cadillac's meaning thus changes depending on who is presented as the focalizer, further contributing to the argument of different perspectives, depending on who is telling the story. After the Convent is attacked: "No bodies. Nothing. Even the Cadillac was gone." (292) Once again, the Cadillac repeats its function as an escape from an oppressive situation for the women, but its absence also signals the continuation of Ruby's rigid repetition of the past.

The obsessive repetition of the past as well as the telling of the story of the Disallowing is a prominent theme of *Paradise*. As was previously shown, the Morgan twins relish the memories of the history of Haven, and physically repeat it with Ruby:

Should have been over and done with. The rejection, which they called the Disallowing, was a burn whose scar tissue was numb by 1949, wasn't it? Oh, no. [...] and recognized the Disallowing, Part Two. [...] So they did it again. (194)

When Ruby is established, according to Krumholz: "The New Fathers of Ruby attempt to reconstruct the town without any difference from the (remembered and idealized) original Haven created by the Old Fathers sixty years and two generations earlier."³²⁰ The discrepancy between the idolised past and the lived present is on display in this section:

³²⁰ Krumholz, "Reading and Insight," 23.

Over and over and with the least provocation, they pulled from their stock of stories tales about the old folks, their grands and greatgrands; their fathers and mothers. Dangerous confrontations, clever maneuvers. Testimonies to endurance, wit, skill and strength. Tales of luck and outrage. But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates. (161)

This is further supported by Patricia's findings, and the repetition of the telling of the stories suggest that there are more versions of the narrative, and thus more interpretations.³²¹ The discovered narrative reveals that the reconstruction of the past leads not only to the repetition of the 'spectacular history,' but also the repetition of trauma, which is therefore transmitted on the successive generations.³²² Furthermore, this repetition without a difference also means the duplication of exclusion, which is what eventually destroys the seemingly idyllic town.³²³ The exclusion and need for control resulting from this repetition motivates the scapegoating of the Convent women.

The juxtaposition of the Ruby community and the Convent women is clear not only from the physical distance, but also from the way they live. The different approach to life of the women is the reason for Ruby's reaction, as Channette Romero claims:

That the women at the Convent become a convenient scapegoat because their acceptance of different ideas, behaviors, races, and ethnicities while retaining economic autonomy calls into question the necessity of Ruby's rigid code of behavior and politics of exclusion.³²⁴

The previously discussed need of the older men for control of Ruby's inhabitants is challenged by the Convent women. The inability to control women culminates as rumours spread, and the resulting hunt Signifies upon the Salem Witch trials,³²⁵ while being reminiscent of the racial stereotypes used as justification of violence against black people at the same time. However, the repetition of exclusion and control is not evident in the first description of the hunt at the

³²¹ Page, "Furrowing All the Brows," 640.

³²² Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 52.

³²³ Krumholz, "Reading and Insight," 22.

³²⁴ Romero, "Creating the Beloved Community," 419.

³²⁵ Dalsgård, "The One All-Black Town," 237.

beginning of the novel. But through retroversions and memories, the text circles back to the hunt, employing repetition and difference in the description.³²⁶

Unlike the first introduction of the event, the second rendition is not only informed by the context revealed in the text, but it also begins with the perspective of the women before the attack, showcasing the close community they created: “Mavis and Pallas, aroused from sleep by its aroma, rushed to tell Consolata, Grace and Seneca that the longed for rain had finally come.” (283) As they dance in the rain, their contentment is evident. They all participate in activities, promoting cooperation: “At four in the morning they wake to prepare for the day. One mixes dough while another lights the stove.” (285) Unlike the demonised image of the women created by the first description of the hunt, they are depicted as peaceful, until the men attack, and the women defend themselves (286). By changing the perspective, Morrison employs repetition and difference to create a different perception of the hunt. Moreover, by exploring the stories not known in the first narration and thus changing the meaning of the event, Morrison highlights the existence of hidden histories, and proposes the way they can change the master narrative. But in *Paradise*, the change of the master narrative is not explored.

After the attack is finished, what the men have done cannot be hidden. Yet, the control the men have over the narrative continues:

Pat gave him the two editions of the official story: One, that nine men had gone to talk to and persuade the Convent women to leave or mend their ways; there had been a fight; the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air. [...] that five men had gone to evict the women; that four others—the authors—had gone to restrain or stop them; these four were attacked by the women but had succeeded in driving them out, and they took off in their Cadillac. (296-297)

Though another repetition and difference, this time the result is hurtful, purposefully omitting incriminating facts. Lone, who witnessed the discussion prior to the hunt and tried to warn the women, is aware of this since “she became unhinged by the way the story was being retold;

³²⁶ Krumholz, “Reading and Insight,” 21.

how people were changing it to make themselves look good.” (297) The town’s attempts to discredit the more accurate versions and therefore erase the crime are also emphasised:

Had it not been for Luther Beauchamp—who told the most damning story—and Pious, Deed Sands and Aaron—who corroborated much of Lone’s version—the whole thing might have been sanitized out of existence. (298)

The men, thus, change the narrative to protect themselves, repeating what Golden attempts in *Jazz*, and essentially what the master narrative does in order to justify itself. Although the rest of the town appears to be satisfied with the explanation, Patricia is aware of the true cause:

Pat left Richard to choose for himself which rendition he preferred. What she withheld from him was her own: that nine 8-rocks murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at the least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could—which was what being an 8-rock meant to them and was also what the “deal” required. (297)

Patricia’s interpretation is an articulation of what the story gradually reveals. Furthermore, the people of Ruby, who were willing to repeat the trauma of Disallowing once again, created their own trauma in the process.³²⁷ Deacon and Steward especially perpetuate past trauma.

The twins are not the first twins in the family, as becomes evident in the story of Tea and Coffee (Zacharia), presented through Deacon’s memories. The original twins were forced to dance at gunpoint by white men, with Coffee refusing and Tea dancing for them. Afterwards, Coffee denounces Tea and excludes him from the journey to found Haven (302). The irreconcilable difference between the twins is repeated by Deacon and Steward after Steward kills Consolata despite Deacon’s attempt to stop him (289). Conflicted, Deacon seeks the help of Reverend Misner:

I’m thinking Coffee was right because he saw something in Tea that wasn’t just going along with some drunken whiteboys. He saw something that shamed him. The way his brother thought about things; the choices he made when up against it. Coffee couldn’t take it. Not because he was ashamed of his twin, but because the shame was in himself. It scared him. So he went off and never spoke to his brother again. Not one word. Know what I mean? (303)

³²⁷ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 52.

Indirectly, Deacon not only admits to being ashamed of what they had done at the Convent, but also of the intolerable shame that made him murder the women.³²⁸ Misner offers him the following advice: “Lack of words, [...] Lack of forgiveness. Lack of love. To lose a brother is a hard thing. To choose to lose one, well, that’s worse than the original shame, wouldn’t you say?” (303) Warned not to behave like the original twins, Deacon replies: “I got a long way to go, Reverend [...]” (303), suggesting a possibility of escaping the cycle of repeating the past. Thus, in the possibility of Deacon learning to deal with the trauma, the novel implies positive changes to the community, reminiscent of the healing of the Convent women.

The disappearance of the women and the conclusion of the novel open the space for different interpretations. When Reverend Misner and Anna come to the Convent, they make a peculiar discovery:

Who saw a closed door; who saw a raised window. Anything to avoid reliving the shiver or saying out loud what they were wondering. Whether through a door needing to be opened or a beckoning window already raised, what would happen if you entered? What would be on the other side? What on earth would it be? What on earth? (305)

These questions remain unanswered, but the text indicates several possible interpretations. Although the women are presumed dead, their bodies disappear. Moreover, the untitled epilogue focalizes the girls’ relatives, who seem to interact with the girls. They also see the other women and the car (312). Those encounters suggest the women finding peace after resolving their traumatic memories.³²⁹ But the question remains, how did they survive the attack, or did they even survive? The women, therefore, occupy a space between life and death, reminiscent of African religions.³³⁰ Their status as spirits or ghosts, according to Katrine Dalsgård, serves a specific function: “Real and unreal, the women may be said to inhabit a gap in other people’s narratives, though not in the way of filling it up and closing it.”³³¹ In a text

³²⁸ Read, “As If Word Magic,” 537.

³²⁹ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 63.

³³⁰ Page, “Furrowing All the Brows,” 646.

³³¹ Dalsgård, “The One All-Black Town,” 244.

focused on historical narratives, the women become the victims whose stories are not heard.

The novel concludes with Connie in paradise:

There is nothing to beat this solace which is what Piedade's song is about, although the words evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home—the ease of coming back to love begun. [...] Now they will rest before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in paradise. (318)

As Justine Tally claims, “[t]he stunning conclusion of the novel accentuates the recurrence of events that cannot be explained through the premises of Western culture epistemology.”³³² This, and the intolerance and exclusion presented in the novel, suggests that Western tradition alone is not sufficient to understand the stories of people of different cultural origin, encouraging the acknowledgement and acceptance of different modes of thinking, unspoken stories, unheard histories. Without this coexistence, communities can become violent, and self-destructive.³³³

Like the previous novels of the trilogy, *Paradise* is a narrative of trauma. Through the memories of the characters, *Paradise* uncovers not only personal trauma, but also transgenerational trauma of discrimination reinforced by Ruby's historical narrative. The Convent thus represents not only the simultaneously hidden and revealed history, but also the project of Morrison's trilogy: the revelation and revision of historical texts whose originals are irretrievably lost.³³⁴ Historical narratives and what they exclude are at the centre of the novel. By remembering and sharing narratives, the community must acknowledge and renegotiate the past in a way that benefits the future generation.³³⁵ As Andrew Read claims:

An unresolved traumatic African American heritage must be confronted and worked through, in ways incompatible with patriarchal forms of identity, if black people are to escape the cycles of trauma and violence that plague their communities.³³⁶

³³² Stave, “Jazz and Paradise,” 71.

³³³ Gillespie, *Critical Companion*, 139.

³³⁴ Krumholz, “Reading and Insight,” 29.

³³⁵ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 58.

³³⁶ Read, “As If Word Magic,” 538-539.

The traumatic history needs to be acknowledged, narrated, and witnessed to create the possibility to change the present. Similarly to the previous novels, *Paradise*, according to Romero, “attempts to bring about material change by encouraging its readers to view themselves as part of a collective history of oppression and resistance that extends beyond the boundaries the novel, the ethnic community, and the nation-state.”³³⁷ The text, thus, becomes a trauma narrative of the African-American community, to be read and therefore witnessed.

Culminating in *Paradise*, Morrison’s trilogy explores consecutive eras of African-American experience.³³⁸ The focus on historical narratives is perhaps the strongest in *Paradise*, inspiring a plethora of critical readings. In the last novel of her trilogy, Morrison questions both oral and written histories through the combination of Western literary tradition and the tradition of African and African-American oral storytelling. Although *Paradise* does not utilise different voices as strongly as the previous novels, the emphasis on orally transmitted history, conversations, and the inclusion of blended communal voices evoke oral storytelling. Furthermore, the non-linear structure, fragmentation, use of retroversion, and repetition contribute to the oral quality of the text. At the same time, those narrative strategies mirror the remembering and the narration of traumatic memory. Thus, *Paradise* becomes a trauma narrative of the experience of the black community of Ruby and the Convent women, while simultaneously questioning the master narrative and what is erased from it. Through the usage of African-American narrative strategies, Toni Morrison continues to highlight the unheard histories of black people in the United States, proving that unless those histories are acknowledged and witnessed, the system built on slavery will continue to perpetuate racial trauma even a century after its abolition, if not longer.

³³⁷ Romero, “Creating the Beloved Community,” 425-426.

³³⁸ Furman, *Toni Morrison’s Fiction*, 104.

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's prose offers an insight into the lives of African Americans in the United States. Concerned with race, gender, and class, Morrison's novels portray the influences that shape the experience of black people across time and space.³³⁹ This is the most prominent in the historical trilogy, consisting of *Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Paradise*. *Beloved* depicts the aftermath of slavery in the 1870's Reconstruction, *Jazz* recounts the migration to Northern cities through 1920's Harlem, and *Paradise* explores the social tension of the 1970's while drawing on the narrative of western all-black towns.^{340,341} In the trilogy, Morrison foregrounds memory as a way of recovering the past and thus acknowledging the trauma caused by slavery, which still informs racism in American history, society and culture.³⁴² In order to narrate the collective traumatic experience of African Americans in an authentic way, she combines narrative strategies of Western literary tradition with the orality connected to African storytelling emphasised in African-American tradition. Those strategies include multiplicity of voices, non-linear and fragmented narrative structure, retroversion, and repetition. Thus, each of the novels utilises those narrative strategies to narrate traumatic experience.

In *Beloved*, the characters must deal with the traumatic memory of slavery. By introducing the struggle with the trauma of dehumanization, denial of motherhood, masculinity, and self-identity directly caused by slavery, Morrison exposes the implications of racism in America. In *Jazz*, the lasting impact of transgenerational trauma of dispossession, abandonment, destruction of familial ties, and fractured self-identity on the characters serves as a reminder that racism did not disappear with the abolition of slavery. Lastly, *Paradise* explores the transgenerational trauma of racism and dispossession of a whole community, whose inability to negotiate the glorified past and allow change causes the repetition of the destructive

³³⁹ Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, 4.

³⁴⁰ Wagner-Martin, *Toni Morrison*, 122.

³⁴¹ Furman, *Toni Morrison's Fiction*, 105.

³⁴² Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*, 150.

patterns of exclusion and violence. Each novel depicts the struggle of the characters with their traumatic past in order to illustrate the continuous trauma of African Americans rooted in slavery, still present even in the twentieth century. To express this matter in a black voice, Morrison employs narrative strategies typical of African-American expression.

The multiplicity of voices contributes to the oral quality of the novels. Through focalization, each novel presents the stories of multiple characters, giving prominence to the collective traumatic experience of African Americans. Morrison also utilises voice to enable individual characters to express themselves, creating a break in the external narrative voice. In *Beloved*, this strategy allows the voices of Beloved, Denver, and Sethe to speak their trauma to confront their past. Furthermore, a portion of the text features the blend of their voices, contributing to the orality and communality of the novel. Similarly, *Jazz* also features parts dedicated to the voices of the characters, including Violet, Joe, Dorcas and Felice. The characters also narrate their traumatic experience and emphasise the healing potential of sharing and witnessing traumatic memories. But *Jazz* also features a unique narrative voice evocative of jazz music, which, unlike the other two novels, comments on the events presented on the novel and manipulates the story to signify upon the narrative process as such. *Paradise*, however, does not feature a prominent narrative voice and the focus on the whole community obstructs the inclusion of distinct voices of the characters. Still, evocative of *Beloved*, *Paradise* utilises blending of voices in the ritual healing of the Convent women, underscoring the collective effort to move beyond trauma, mirrored by the blend of voices of the men repeating the gossip as a justification of their attack on the Convent. Further, Patricia's voice confronts the unspoken history of exclusion in the Ruby community. Thus, *Paradise* signifies on rigid historical narratives, and presents the necessity of allowing unspoken stories, and histories, to be narrated, witnessed, and acknowledged for the traumatic past to not be repeated. The past is seminal in all novels, complicating the temporality and narrative structure of the texts.

All three novels are non-linear and fragmented, mimicking the oral storytelling tradition. The stories are related through episodes, relying on retroversions to narrate the characters' past. Mostly exploring memories, the retroversions in the trilogy stress the necessity of acknowledging the past, including the trauma, as a way of reclaiming power, self-identity and the ability to move forward. In *Beloved*, the primary narrative depicts how the characters, especially Sethe and Paul D, resist the full recollection of their past, refusing to narrate their trauma. However, through the confrontation of their memories with the help of others, they are able to come to terms with their experience and accept the possibility of better future. In *Jazz*, the primary narrative is almost static, making the story a complex web of retroversions. Similarly to *Beloved*, the retroversions uncover the past as the characters' memories are presented, and the individuals are able to share those memories with others. Thus, they negotiate their past and avoid the repetition of trauma, subverting the expectations created by the narrator in the beginning of the novel. *Paradise* employs retroversions and memories to a larger extent, presenting not only the personal stories and traumas of individual characters, but also the history of the Ruby community. Most of the narrative is framed by the attack on the women, unveiling the motivations of the characters only after the attack is first presented. By this, Morrison demonstrates how context and previously unknown stories can drastically change the understanding of certain events. This point is also explored through repetition.

Repetition is another common narrative technique in all three novels. While it is used for emphasis by repeating certain images or motives, it is also utilised as a strategy to come to terms with traumatic events. In that case, Morrison employs repetition and difference to overcome trauma, like Denver claiming her identity through repeating the story of her birth to explain the origin of her name, or Sethe finally attacking the white man instead of her daughter and thus reclaiming her motherhood in *Beloved*. Interestingly, the beginning of *Jazz* predicts repetition without a difference, commenting upon the presumed repeatability of the past.

However, instead of repeating the devastating relationship of Violet, Joe, and Dorcas, Violet, Joe, and Felice share their experience with each other, enabling them to overcome the traumatic past and thus not repeat it, Signifying upon the assumed authority of the narrative. Emphasising the point of the previous novels, *Paradise* depicts the dangers of repetition without a difference. Although the hunt is repeated differently at the end of the novel, the only difference is in the perspective and the context, not in the event itself. Due to the glorification of the Ruby's past, the men repeat the exclusion and violence inherent in the history of African Americans. Revealing the misrepresentation of the Convent women, Morrison Signifies upon the othering and scapegoating by the master narrative. Thus, the trilogy highlights the dangers of not acknowledging different perspectives, stories, and histories, which can lead to the repetition of damaging behaviour and trauma.

Beside *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, Morrison depicts the trauma resulting from racism in similar manner in her other novels as well. The analyses of all Morrison's novels would provide a valuable addition to the examination of narrative strategies and traumatic experience, especially *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), or *Song of Solomon* (1977). Each of those novels deals with the generational and individual trauma caused by racial discrimination, and the resulting fractured self-identity.³⁴³ I decided to focus on the trilogy due to its depiction of the immediate effect of slavery as well as its historical reach to the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the analysis of the trilogy in the context of Morrison's other novels would offer deeper insight into the issues, the limited range of this thesis prevented this ambitious project.

Similarly, the scope of the thesis impeded additional research into both the theory of narrative and trauma theory. The potential approaches to narrative applicable to Morrison's texts are plentiful, for example, Gérard Genette, Mikhail Bakhtin, or Jacques Derrida, among

³⁴³ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, 65.

others. I chose Bal's approach to narrative for its relevance to postcolonial texts, as well as for its definition of retroversion and memory in a way relevant to the project of this thesis, even considering traumatic memories and their effect on narrative strategies.³⁴⁴ Furthermore, I considered the tradition of African storytelling and its relation to literature to avoid examining Morrison's text through exclusively Western literary tradition. Not acknowledging the African influences is essentially what Morrison warns against: erasing history. I relied on Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s theory African-American literature to provide sufficient background to African influences on African-American text. For this reason, I did not examine the narrative strategies in relation to postmodernism or magic realism, since such an approach would disregard the origin of narrative strategies, like non-linearity, self-reflexivity, and parody³⁴⁵ in African-American texts. Similarly to the approaches, different narrative strategies could be explored, such as style, language, punctuation etc. Voice, narrative structure, retroversion and repetition were chosen for their resemblance to oral storytelling, inspired by African oral tradition, the connection to African-American literary tropes and the relevance to the retrieval, narration and witnessing of traumatic memories.

Likewise, the trauma in the trilogy could be explored through the purely psychoanalytical approach of Sigmund Freud, or Jacques Lacan, among others. Furthermore, literary trauma theory offers numerous other theoretical approaches, for example, Cathy N. Davidson, Geoffrey Hartman, or Kali Tal. As was previously explained, I chose Judith Herman's work not only for its suitability to postcolonial texts, but also due to the recognition of durative traumas, like slavery, and their impact on the victims. Furthermore, the recovery process and witnessing proposed by Herman can be applicable to wider society, and she relates it directly to the issue of racism in the United States.³⁴⁶ Although the traumatic experiences presented in

³⁴⁴ Bal, *Narratology*, 145.

³⁴⁵ Visser, "Trauma Theory," 278.

³⁴⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 244-245.

the novels could be analysed in isolation, the way trauma is narrated and related is a crucial part of the recovery process, and thus contributes substantially to the understanding of trauma.

The applications of the selected concepts of narrative and trauma on the selected texts would not be possible without consulting secondary literature. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* informed the basis for the analysis of trauma in all three novels. Schreiber's identification of the traumatic effect of slavery on the characters in *Beloved* is echoed by Linda Krumholz in her essay "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," and by Martha J. Cutter in "The Story Must Go on and on: The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Jazz*," which contributed to the understanding of trauma specifically in *Beloved*. Furthermore, Gurleen Grewal's *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle in the Novels of Toni Morrison* provides the understanding of importance of personal and historical memory for the novel, which Lynda Koolish connects to the narrative strategies employed in *Beloved* in her essay "Fictive Strategies and Cinematic Representations in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postcolonial Theory/Postcolonial Text." In "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Phillip Page confirms the connection of the tradition of oral storytelling to the narrative structure of the novel, emphasising Sethe's struggle with her memories. The necessity of narrating traumatic memories is explained by Sam Durrant in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*, supporting the conclusion that *Beloved* stresses the need to share the untold, traumatic histories of African Americans. Although Keith Byerman reads the final assertion "It was not a story to pass on" as an incentive to not tell the story again,³⁴⁷ the utterance, as was claimed in this thesis and is agreed on by Michelle Balaev,³⁴⁸ is the exact opposite: it is not a story to be dismissed.

³⁴⁷ Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 33.

³⁴⁸ Forter, "Colonial Trauma," 89.

Yet, Byerman in *Remembering the Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction* provides the connection between the traumas of the characters of *Jazz*, explored by Schreiber, and their relevance to the historical context of racism. This is generally agreed upon by Carolyn M. Jones in “Traces and Cracks: Identity and Narrative in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” in which Jones insists on the role of memory and past in the recovery of trauma. Similarly to the previous chapter, Gurleen Grewal supports this view, and foregrounds the narrator’s inability to understand their characters, contributing to the conclusion that *Jazz* Signifies upon the master narrative. The discussion of the musicality of the narrative voice in Morrison’s prose, including *Jazz*, is attributed to Alan J. Rice’s “Jazzing It up a Storm: The Execution and Meaning of Toni Morrison’s Jazzy Prose Style,” however, the stylistic effect, besides orality of the text, were not focused on in this thesis. Rather, the function of the narrator as a trickster, based on Jennifer Andrews’s interpretation in “Reading Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*: Rewriting the Tall Tale and Playing with the Trickster in the White American and African-American Humour Traditions,” is considered as way of Signifying upon the narrative process itself, subverting expectations and commenting upon the narrative of Anglo-American superiority, which is, according to Rice, a central concept to jazz aesthetic.³⁴⁹

The criticism of master narrative continues in *Paradise*, and the analysis of this is informed by Marni Gauthier’s essay “The Other Side of *Paradise*: Toni Morrison’s (Un)Making of Mythic History,” besides others. Gauthier also acknowledges the importance of memory and the presentation of counterhistories, exemplified by the women’s stories. Based on Schreiber’s assessment of generational trauma in *Paradise* and supported by the examination of its influence in “Creating the Beloved Community: Religion, Race, and Nation in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*” by Channette Romero and *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* by John N. Duvall, the repetition and

³⁴⁹ Rice, “Jazzing It up a Storm,” 431-432.

reinforcement of destructive patterns in the Ruby community is presented. The analysis of the narrative structure in connection to those patterns is based on Philip Page's essay "Furrowing All the Brows: Interpretation and the Transcendent in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," with valuable addition by Linda Krumholz in "Reading and Insight in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*," providing the foundation for the examination of repetition without a difference in the novel. The conclusions drawn from the repetition of exclusion and violence, are supported by Carmen Gillespie in *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference*, who underscores the damaging effect of not acknowledging different viewpoints, unheard traumas, and alternative histories, thus like *Jazz*, Signifyin(g) upon the master narrative.

Although the criticism regarding Morrison's work is abundant, and some essays used in this thesis were published in the 2010s, there is an unfortunately limited amount of current critical works regarding narrative structures and trauma. However, that does not mean that critics disregard those topics. Irene Visser, for example, considers traumatic experience in Morrison's *Home* (2012) in her essay "Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison's *Home*," published in 2014. Similarly, trauma studies, especially in postcolonial texts, are presently discussed in literary theory. Possible reasons why there is little current criticism of Morrison's trilogy is the focus on her later novels, or the assumption that the trilogy has limited relevance to the present. But due to the current social developments in the United States, the increase of interest in literary representation of the traumatic experience of African Americans can be expected. Research analogous to this thesis could be applied to all Morrison's novels, which would present extensive analysis of the narrative strategies and traumatic experience in Morrison's work. Although certainly offering valuable results, the thorough examination of such a high amount of publications would not be possible due to the insufficient space provided by the format of the thesis. Thus, the trilogy was selected to represent Morrison's literary efforts of conveying the black experience in the United States across time.

The adequate representation of the experience of African Americans even in current times heavily depends on the acknowledgement of the past. This is, according to Grewal, emphasised in Morrison's publications:

The work of recovery in Morrison's fiction entails not only the representation of a knowledge excised from dominant understanding, but also the healing from a history that has visited trauma upon its subjects. The function of collective memory in Toni Morrison's work is political as well as therapeutic.³⁵⁰

Beside following this concept in her own work, Morrison also insisted on modern African-American writers having a responsibility toward the past and needing to expose the facts of black experience that have been obstructed or ignored.³⁵¹ The aim of revisiting and remembering the past is, according to Byerman, "not simply literary and historical primacy but rather a reconceptualization of black experience as a survivor narrative and thus a rewriting of the American grand narrative."³⁵² American grand narrative, naturally, includes literature.

The racial divide influences even the literary sphere, evidenced by Barbara Christian's concern regarding the production and reach of texts of African-American imagination, which were significantly limited by societal structures.³⁵³ Even in literary theory, the African-American tradition has often been omitted, proving that the racial divide did not end with slavery, and infiltrated every sphere of American society, including literary criticism. As Barbara Christian writes:

For people of color have always theorized-but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow*, 15.

³⁵¹ Robert O'Meally and Genevieve Fabre, "Introduction," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Mally (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

³⁵² Byerman, *Remembering the Past*, 1.

³⁵³ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177999>.

³⁵⁴ Christian, "The Race for Theory," 68.

Although the narrative forms and study of African-American expression has advanced significantly since the publication of Christian's text, the reality of those exclusions should not be forgotten, since it remains relevant.

The importance of recovering the traumatic past, not only of slavery, and demonstrating its influence on the society even today is brilliantly explained by Judith Herman:

Our own society faces a similar dilemma with respect to the legacy of slavery. The unhealed racial divisions of our country create an ongoing potential for violence. The worst civil disturbance of the past few years, the Los Angeles riots³⁵⁵, were provoked by the failure of the justice system to hold armed white police officers accountable for the severe beating of an unarmed black man. Within the African-American community, it was widely understood that such abuses were political crimes, carried out as part of a systematic pattern of racial oppression. The issue at trial was whether the larger society would condone the most flagrant of these human rights abuses. The responsibility to bear witness fell to the jury in the criminal trial. In their refusal to see the crime that was documented before their eyes, we can recognize the familiar defenses of denial, distancing, and dissociation. As is so often the case, the bystanders chose to identify with the perpetrators rather than with the victim, and it was this betrayal, not simply the violence of the police, that unleashed a communal outbreak of murderous rage.³⁵⁶

Thus, the writing and reading trauma narratives even in contemporary times is witnessing of trauma. Consequently, it enables the acknowledgement and understanding of the experience of marginalized groups, and a possible move towards a more equal society. Thus, the examination of narrative strategies and traumatic experience in the works of other African-American authors, such as Ralph Ellison, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, or Richard Wright, among many others, would provide much needed insight into the effects of racism on American Society.

Due to the vast scope of possible examination of narrative strategies and traumatic experience in Toni Morrison's work, this thesis concentrated on an inevitably narrow scope of research. Nonetheless, it presents a comprehensive analysis of the narrative representation of

³⁵⁵ Though Herman's book was published in 1992 and thus refers to 1992 Los Angeles riots, the relevance of this quote to current issues connects to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, which took place not only in the US, but all over the world.

³⁵⁶ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 244-245.

racial trauma of slavery, and its influence on the lives of African Americans even long after the abolition of slavery, while acknowledging the influence of African oral tradition as well as Western literary tradition on Morrison's texts. Thus, the objective of this thesis was achieved, offering a valuable insight into the narrative strategies used to convey traumatic experience in Morrison's trilogy, contributing not only to the discussion of Morrison's work, but also to the current discussion of racial issues in the United States through emphasising the reproduction of trauma caused by racism across time.

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Key Words

Abandonment trauma
African American experience
African American literature
Beloved
Generational trauma
Jazz
Narrative strategies
Narrative structure
Oral narrative
Oral tradition
Paradise
Racial Trauma
Repetition
Repetition and a difference
Retroversion
Signifyin(g)
Toni Morrison
Trauma
Trauma narratives
Trauma theory
Voice

Klíčová slova

Afroamerická literatura
Afroamerická zkušenost
Generační trauma
Hlas
Jazz
Milovaná
Narativní strategie
Narativní struktura
Opakování
Opakování a rozdíl
Orální vyprávění
Orální tradice
Ráj
Rasové trauma
Retroverse
Signifikace
Teorie traumatu
Toni Morrisonová
Trauma
Trauma narativy
Trauma opuštění