

## **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.