

**SUPERVISOR'S REPORT**  
**MA THESIS**

Narrative Strategies and Traumatic Experience in Toni Morrison's Trilogy  
Bc. Magdalena Müllerová

"Narrative Strategies and Traumatic Experience in Toni Morrison's Trilogy" analyzes *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* with the objective to show "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" (2).

The first chapter begins with a section that introduces the scope of utilized narrative theories; this section is notable for its concise yet detailed overview of Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. The second section discusses selected theories of African-American narrative strategies and is based primarily on *The Signifying Monkey* by Henry Louis Gates. Here it is argued for example that "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" (17). The third section is devoted to trauma (with references mostly to the work of Judith L. Herman; Cathy Caruth, Dominic LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, among others, are mentioned as well). Bc. Müllerová also raises "the problem of analysis of non-Western postcolonial narratives through a Western theoretical lens" (22) but concludes that "[t]he 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" (25).

While connections with the fiction of Morrison are drawn already throughout the first chapter, detailed analyses of *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* are presented in chapters that follow. Each of these is a well-researched, astute analysis of these literary works. The focus is largely on the characters and their narrative strategies of dealing with trauma; Bc. Müllerová pays attention to the narrative structure of these novels, to multiple voices, retroversion and repetition.

In my view the thesis is excellently researched and carefully written although I personally remain unconvinced by the underlying combination of theories (i.e. narrative theories, trauma theories and theories about African-American [oral] narratives) and I do not understand how, for example, the trope of repetition and difference may be considered as both a mark of African-American narrative tradition and a sign of trauma. Could not the trope have a different, even contradictory, function in each of these traditions and theories?

Also, while the focus of the thesis is on "the undeniable trauma of slavery" (3) and "the trauma of racism" (3), the thesis mentions also the trauma of the Holocaust (21), of "the denial of selfhood" (44), of "denied motherhood" (46), of abandonment (55), and of racial and gender violence (56), among others. Would Bc. Müllerová view these as various forms of trauma or as distinct traumas?

**Proposed grade:** Výborně (1)

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