

Trauma Narrative and Healing: A Post-traumatic Exploration of Toni Morrison's *Home*

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Abstract

This study explores traumatic effects and healing in Toni Morrison's *Home* based on Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma. By analyzing the novel's portrayal of trauma, it investigates the manifestations of trauma, the mechanisms of healing, and the interconnectedness between literary representations and academic trauma theory. The study enhances the understanding of the memories of war and struggles with feelings of guilt and shame. Reviewing existing literature, it identifies gaps in the application of Caruth's concepts in analyzing the novel, emphasizing the need for a more in-depth exploration. The methodology involves applying Caruth's theories to Morrison's narrative strategies, examining fragmentation, belatedness, and repetition related to characters' traumatic memories and healing. The research questions address how Morrison depicts the healing process, the narrative techniques employed to convey trauma effects, and the contribution of literary devices like flashbacks to trauma representation. By bridging trauma theory with literary analysis, the study concluded Morrison's novel *Home* indicates the traumatic experiences of Frank Money's Korean War and racial violence, which not only trigger personal traumas but also reflect historical traumas affecting African American experiences.

Keywords: trauma, healing, fragmentation, belatedness, repetition, Morrison, interdisciplinarity

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1. Introduction

Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize-winning novel, *Home* offers a profound literary portrayal of trauma haunted by the legacy of racism, violence, and the rupturing effects of war. The novel follows Korean War veteran Frank Money as he endeavors to rescue his sister Cee from a predatory doctor in 1950s America. Frank is plagued by traumatic memories that persistently return to hijack his consciousness: "He'd had lots of sad memories, but no ghosts or nightmares for two days, and he was desperate for black coffee in the mornings, not the wake-up jolt whiskey once gave him" (Morrison 2012: 106). As the storyline unfolds through fragmented recollections and nonlinear narration, the destructive impact of the siblings' childhood abuse also emerges. Both Frank and Cee exhibit core symptoms of post-traumatic stress, including involuntary recall, dissociation, hypervigilance, and profound difficulties in connecting with others. Yet glimmers of reconciliation emerge as they reconnect with each other and their ancestral hometown, suggesting the possibility of integration and healing from trauma's devastation.

This paper argues that Morrison's nuanced literary examination of trauma's consequences intensely resonates with many of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's significant concepts. Caruth's foundational analysis of the paradoxes of traumatic experience (Caruth 1996: 91-92), the dynamics of intrusive traumatic remembrance, and trauma's reverberations across time provides a highly compatible theoretical lens through which to interpret central themes in Morrison's text. Core traumatic patterns like the insistent return of the past into the present, shattering of memory and identity, dissociative states of being, and the urgent need for empathetic witnessing find expression in Morrison's psychologically complex characters. An interdisciplinary analysis blending Caruth's traumatic theories with Morrison's artistic investigation of trauma's impacts holds profound potential to enrich interpretation of both the mechanics and affective power of trauma's representation in literature.

2. The Significance of Study

Studying Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma in relation to *Toni Morrison's Home* offers several benefits. Firstly, it provides a deeper understanding of the novel's portrayal of trauma through the lens of trauma theory, allowing for insightful analyses of the manifestations of trauma in the story. Next, it sheds light on the mechanisms of trauma and healing within the narrative of the novel, particularly in regards to character's experiences with trauma symptoms, recovery, and integration. Moreover, it highlights the connections between literary representations of trauma and academic trauma theory, demonstrating how literature can provide powerful embodiments of theoretical concepts and vice versa. Finally, it enhances our comprehension of the construction of identity, place, and community in relation to trauma in the novel, especially in terms of the protagonist's fragmentation and quest for a sense of self and

belonging. Finally, this interdisciplinary approach enables a nuanced exploration of the trauma, memory, identity, and healing themes that form the core of Morrison's work, providing new perspectives on both the author's literary craft and the dynamics of trauma more broadly.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study has three main objectives. First, it aims to analyze the manifestations of trauma presented in Toni Morrison's *Home* through the applying of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory concepts, including belatedness, fragmentation, and repetition. Second, it seeks to indicate the representation of trauma, identity, memory, and healing in the novel by examining Morrison's *Home*. Finally, it intends to demonstrate the value of an interdisciplinary approach that integrates academic trauma theory and literary analysis for an enriched, nuanced interpretation of trauma representations in literature. Achieving these goals will further comprehension of the interconnectedness between theoretical conceptualizations of trauma and artistic embodiments of trauma's effects within the specific work of Morrison, while also gesturing toward the broader relationships between literary studies and trauma studies as interrelated disciplines. Ultimately, the synthesis of theory and literature holds promise for deeper apprehension of the affective power and mechanics of trauma within narrative.

4. Research Questions

1. How does Morrison depict the process of healing from trauma in *Home*?
2. What narrative techniques does Morrison employ to portray the effects of trauma and convey the fragmentation of traumatic memories?
3. How do literary devices like flashbacks, repetition, and nonlinear storytelling contribute to representations of trauma in *Home*?

5. Review of Literature

Cathy Caruth explores how trauma becomes encoded in language and narrative. She argues trauma initially resists capture in words or story, as the victim cannot fully comprehend the event. Only after a period of latency, as the trauma repeats in flashbacks and intrusive memories, can the person reconstruct a narrative. For Caruth, narrative emerges from piecing together these intense fragments. Thus "history arises where immediate understanding may not" as trauma narratives coalesce over time (Caruth 8). Caruth suggests individual traumatic repetitions converge into collective history and identity, stating "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24). So, she theorizes a profound gap between trauma's wound and its eventual voice.

Several scholars have explored the manifestations of trauma and pathways to

healing in Toni Morrison's *Home* through the lens of trauma theory. Visser (2016) analyzes the novel using fairy tale tropes, noting the protagonists must undergo symbolic death and rebirth to integrate their traumatic memories. The study suggests *Home* depicts the possibility of recovery through communal witnessing and care.

Expanding on trauma and healing, Ramírez (2017) argues the novel subverts the home/house binary to advocate generative spaces that foster resilience. The work centers ancestor connection and reclamation of identity in overcoming trauma. Meanwhile, Ibarrola (2014) examines the text via theories of individual and cultural trauma, underscoring the lasting collective impacts of oppression and violence. Each study enriches understanding of Morrison's nuanced portrayal of trauma's legacy. Whitt (2023) provides deeper insight into the narrative techniques in *Home* that convey traumatic experience through unreliable narration and fractured mind style. The research fruitfully analyzes textual gaps, uncertainty, and repetition as literary manifestations of characters' trauma. However, in-depth application of Caruth's theoretical concepts remains lacking in analysis of the novel to date.

This study addressing Caruth's notions of wound and voice, belated trauma, indirection, and working-through alongside Morrison's literary craft would significantly enrich interpretation of trauma and healing in the text. It promises deeper investigation of the mechanics and language of trauma within *Home*'s narrative strategies. The examination of Caruthian theories like traumatic temporality and fragmentation would profoundly advance understanding of Morrison's skillful, affective portrayal of trauma's impact. Thus, focused research applying Cathy Caruth's foundational concepts to *Home* remains needed to fully illuminate the presence of trauma.

6. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This analysis examines manifestations of trauma and healing in Toni Morrison's *Home* through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, building on Freud's original formulations. The primary source is Morrison's novel *Home*, selected for its nuanced portrayal of individual and cultural trauma that lends itself to analysis through Caruth's framework centered on wounding, repetition, indirection, belatedness and working-through. Caruth expands on Freud's notions of trauma's representability and intrusive recurrence in symptoms. In *Home*, Caruthian concepts like the paradox of trauma's immediacy yet belated comprehension. Narrative techniques including mind style, retrospection, and fragmentation that align with Caruth's views on trauma's indirection and repetition are also analyzed. The text demonstrates wound, voice, latency, triggers, and testimony relating to characters' traumatic memories and healing. By applying Caruth's theories, this research elucidates how *Home*'s modernist, nonlinear narrative strategies manifest Caruth's academic constructs regarding traumatic memory and the emergence of self-narrative.

6.1. The History of Trauma: Insights from Freud to Caruth

Freud initially conceptualized trauma in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), co-authored with Josef Breuer. Their work revealed the intricate workings of the human psyche, highlighting the origin of mental distress in repressed desires. Freud's notion of traumatic memory evolved in response to external factors, such as the Nazi persecution, reshaping his comprehension of this phenomenon. Lenore Terr asserts that, —psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind (2001: 8) A significant observation from Freud underscored the correlation between mental processes and physical expressions:

A quite unbiased observer might have arrived at this conclusion: if I find someone in a state which bears all the signs of a painful affect weeping, screaming and raging, the conclusion seems probable that a mental process is going on in him of which those physical phenomena are the appropriate expression (Freud and Breuer 2001: 13).

Similarly, they asserted that the trauma does not lie in the events themselves but rather in the act of remembering. Consequently, the process of recollection induces psychological distress, assigning significance to the suppressed events within consciousness. This type of distressing recollection is referred to as 'pathogenic remembrance,' highlighting the pathological symptoms triggered by the memory (40). Freud, over the course of his career, consistently addressed the idea that trauma leads to dissociation or a division within the psyche (Rajendran et al. 2022: 2). According to Freud, trauma involves an intricate interplay between ego defense mechanisms and psychological impact. His conceptualization emphasized ego conflicts leading to repression of traumatic memories into the unconscious. This manifested in the repetition compulsion, where unconscious material sought expression through somatic phenomena and dreams (Freud 2015: 14). Cathy Caruth and other scholars have developed approaches to studying the relationship between memory, mind, and trauma manifestations. Caruth characterizes trauma as an overwhelming experience with delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearances of hallucinations and intrusions (1996: 11).

She distinguishes between individual and collective trauma. Individual trauma involves a sudden, brutal psychic blow that disrupts defenses and impedes response. Collective trauma gradually erodes communal bonds and support within a community, impairing the prevailing sense of communality (Caruth 1995: 187).

In other words, trauma is a multifaceted phenomenon that transcends individual experiences, enriching the ongoing discourse within the field of psychology. In the context of Caruth's deconstructive criticism, the model she proposes places special emphasis on linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality, and aporia. The unspeakable void emerges as a dominant concept in criticism for envisioning trauma's

role in literature. This classic model found resonance not only within poststructuralism but also attracted critics outside of this framework due to the idea of trauma causing irreversible damage to the psyche. The assumed neurobiological features of trauma, resisting representation and inducing dissociation, were pivotal in arguments emphasizing profound suffering from external sources, whether individual perpetrators or collective social practices. While the model serves to support claims about language's inability to capture the truth of the past, it was swiftly accompanied by alternative models and methodologies that challenged this foundational claim, suggesting that determinate value exists in traumatic experience (Balaev 2014: 1).

6.2. Trauma and Narrative: Flashbacks, Delays, and Repetition

Contemporary fiction depicts the intricate relationship between trauma, memory, and the reconstruction of the self. The conventional view of trauma, associated primarily with extreme circumstances such as war or abuse, has evolved. Trauma now encompasses a broader spectrum, permeating everyday life in the aftermath of communal violence. Witness accounts of genocides testify to the delirium that extends beyond the physical, seeping into the psychological and cultural realms. Cathy Caruth defines trauma in literature as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events” (1995: 57). Trauma, according to Caruth, manifests as an uncontrolled, repetitive appearance, echoing the profound impact of traumatic events.

Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and *Kali Tal's Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. Early scholarship, led by Caruth, shaped literary trauma theory by introducing the notion of trauma as an unrepresentable event. Caruth's psychoanalytic poststructural approach, rooted in Lacanian philosophy, posits trauma as an unsolvable problem of the unconscious, revealing inherent contradictions in experience and language. This perspective emphasizes linguistic indeterminacy, ambiguous referentiality, and aporia, framing trauma as a recurring sense of absence that hinders linguistic expression beyond reference. Caruth's deconstructive criticism underscores the unspeakable void as a central concept in understanding trauma's role in literature. (2014: 1) Caruth presents literature as a mirror that allows readers to engage with traumatic events unconventionally. The challenge lies in acknowledging distressing memories; as psychoanalytic theory suggests trauma stems from an individual's inability to bear the mental aftermath of traumatic events. The interplay between trauma and memory becomes central in understanding the narrative structure employed in trauma literature.

Traumatized individuals often struggle with a dual self, torn between a desire to deny and speak up about traumatic incidents simultaneously. Trauma literature becomes a crucial vehicle for giving voice to victims, unveiling the physical and mental harm inflicted by violent historical events. Through its narrative power, trauma literature bridges the gap between personal experience and collective understanding. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth

1996: 4). Also, Trauma is a complicated concept. It has at its heart an occurrence that took place in reality. (Haghshenas and Anushiravani 2022: 906) Trauma theory can seem to imply that everyone is a victim, that all history is trauma and that we share a pathological 'wound culture'. (Whitehead 2004:14), which emphasizes applying trauma theory universally to various historical and cultural settings. LaCapra emphasizes the importance of staying aware of the difference between structural and historical trauma to prevent their rapid conflation, "tends to take place so rapidly that it escapes notice and seems natural or necessary" (2004:48). LaCapra's distinction between structural and historical trauma points to the nuanced nature of traumatic experiences. The caution against conflation highlights the need for careful consideration of specific contexts and factors contributing to trauma, preventing oversimplification or misinterpretation.

The fragmented narrative form disrupts tradition, providing space for fragmented memories and emotions. This intersection of fragmentation and trauma creates a narrative mirroring the shattered internal landscape of trauma survivors (Ganteau 2014:200). Trauma's resistance to chronology is evident in fragmented flashbacks and disjointed recollections. Herman characterizes trauma's "central dialectic" as knowledge so partial it verges on denial, revealing itself incompletely and obscuringly (1997:1). Trauma narrative strategies like flashbacks, delays, repetition, and representation capture traumatic experiences' disorienting nature and enduring impact. These intricately woven strategies offer an immersive experience, allowing readers to empathize with the complex emotional landscape of survivors. Caruth states:

Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of unpleasurable conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way. (Caruth 1996: 59)

This insight underscores trauma's unique and overwhelming nature, challenging notions of how the mind copes. The exploration of trauma, fragmentation, and narrative in literature provides profound understanding of human experience. The interplay between trauma and narrative, illuminated by Caruth, reveals literature's power in grappling with trauma's aftermath. Fragmented trauma narratives uniquely convey the unspeakable, contributing to collective understanding of trauma's impact. Caruth presents literature as a mirror to engage with trauma unconventionally. Trauma often renders memories too distressing to acknowledge as truth. She contends literature is an investigation of truth through dialogue, like psychoanalysis (Caruth 1996: 60). Such experiences show the struggle to reconcile conscious understanding with traumatic memories. Psychoanalytic theory posits trauma stems from inability to bear aftermath. Victims undergo psychological reactions before trauma recedes. Reflecting this, trauma literature's narrative structure reflects experiencing, recalling, and

recovering. Irreconcilable traumatic memory causes fragmentation into a dual self, complicating articulation. Thus, techniques like flashbacks and repetition capture trauma's disorienting and lasting impact. Caruth presented "trauma theory, emphasizing the challenges of representing traumatic events within narratives due to three key impediments: representation, delayed action, and repetition" (qtd. in Pourgharib and Esmaili 2023-2024: 156). Literary criticism shows how these narratives convey the impossible attempt to avoid unpleasant memories and the transformative power of literature in dealing with trauma's aftermath. Fragmented stories provide a unique platform for addressing the unspeakable, deepening our understanding of trauma's effects on individuals and society.

7. Discussion

7.1. Toni Morrison and *Home*

Toni Morrison consistently addresses the impact of historical and personal traumas on African American communities in her novels. In works like *Home*, Morrison vividly portrays the enduring trauma of war, race, indicate historical horrors and the lasting impact on individuals and communities. Morrison's unique narrative style, marked by rich language and nonlinear storytelling, reflects the fragmented nature of traumatic memories. "The trauma narrative in *Home* takes various forms. As a veteran of the Korean War, Frank displays many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)." (Visser 2016: 151) Her use of language adds depth to the emotional impact of trauma. Toni Morrison's exploration of trauma extends beyond depiction, offering a nuanced understanding of its intricate manifestations and the potential for healing and resilience. Her contributions to the literary discourse on trauma remain significant, portraying the lasting effects on individuals and communities.

Home by Toni Morrison revolves around the siblings Frank and Cee Money, who grew up in the small town of Lotus, Georgia, facing a troubled childhood. Frank, a Korean War veteran struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, receives an anonymous note urging him to rescue his sister Cee in Atlanta. Cee, after a failed marriage and troubling experiences with a doctor, is in dire straits. As Frank embarks on a journey to save Cee, the narrative explores their traumatic past, including abusive family dynamics, racial issues, and the impact of war. Frank's protective instincts for Cee are explored, revealing a complex relationship. Cee's experiences in Atlanta, especially with Dr. Beauregard Scott, unfold as a tale of exploitation and medical malpractice. Upon rescuing Cee, Frank returns to Lotus, seeking healing for his sister. The women in Lotus, led by Miss Ethel Fordham, provide Cee with physical and spiritual recovery. The siblings confront their painful truths, leading to a deeper bond. Frank's admission of a dark wartime incident contributes to his own healing. The novel addresses themes of trauma, identity, and the quest for redemption. The siblings undertake a symbolic act of justice by giving a proper burial to a

man who died in an illicit fight club. *Home* explores the transformative journey of the characters as they reconcile with their past and seek a sense of belonging and healing.

7.2. Symptom of Trauma

Toni Morrison's *Home* depicts the profound impact of traumatic memories, particularly those rooted in childhood abuse, while also interweaving the broader historical context of slavery, racist persecution, and lynching. As Visser mentions, the novel follows the harrowing journey of Frank Money, a Korean War veteran, as he endeavors to save his sister amid the relentless grip of severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Visser 2014: 6). Frank's trauma manifests itself through a myriad of symptoms, the most prominent being intrusive memories, dissociative episodes, hypervigilance, and uncontrollable rage. As Caruth explains, trauma survivors often involuntarily re-experience aspects of the initial traumatic event in ruptures of normal consciousness (Caruth 1996: 5). Frank epitomizes this struggle, as horrific visions from the warfront rupture into his daily life. One core trait of Frank's PTSD is intrusive recall, where his mind spontaneously activates traumatic memories without conscious control. Frank's friend Lily notes how "whenever a smattering of color returned, he was pleased to know he wasn't going color-blind and the horrible pictures might fade" (Morrison 2012: 24). The "horrible pictures" refer to graphic flashbacks that abruptly hijack Frank's cognition. Intrusive recall also surfaces via nightmares, when Frank remembers "Never get[ting] enough sleep [...] Waking up to pistols pointing at your head" (105). Sleep disruption frequently accompanies PTSD since trauma-related nightmares are recurrent and difficult to consciously suppress (Crocq and Crocq 2000: 5).

Hence, Frank's PTSD infiltrates both waking life and sleep. In addition to unpleasant recall, Frank exhibits dissociative episodes where he mentally detaches from reality. After "a few shots to steady himself" Frank loses "sanity" as "[b]ack was the free-floating rage, the self-loathing disguised as somebody else's fault" (Morrison 15). The consuming anger signifies Frank dissociating from his immediate surroundings as past traumas possess his psyche. Additionally, Frank admits, "I must have been acting up [...] I truly could not remember" (15). His patchy memory indicates dissociative amnesia, an inability to recall events when excessively stressed (Frewen et al. 2017: 97). Hence PTSD fractures Frank's conscious awareness at times. Hypervigilance is another classic PTSD sign present in Frank, exemplified via his hair-trigger aggression. When two white men insult an African American couple at a diner, Frank explodes: "In one move Money was up...He grabbed the edge of the table, overturned it" (Morrison 29). Frank instinctually launches into violence though the couple posed no physical threat. His hypersensitivity towards perceived danger and explosively defensive response demonstrate extreme hypervigilance channeled into rage (Chemtob et al. 1994: 543). Finally, Frank exhibits PTSD's emotional numbing symptom when he self-isolates and abandons formerly pleasurable activities. He

concedes, “For a year he had wandered about the country [...] Walking mostly [...] seeking nothing and finding it” (Morrison 105). Frank’s excessive walking epitomizes emotional numbness since he abandons meaningful relationships and goals (Frewen et al.). Through Frank Money’s battle with disturbing recall, dissociation, hypervigilance and emotional numbing, Morrison provides a wrenching portrait of post-traumatic stress disorder’s formidable psychological grip. Frank’s trauma symptoms pervade all facets of life, preventing peace. Yet over the course of Frank’s journey to save his sister, glimmers of recovery take hold, proving PTSD’s paralysis conquerable through communal support.

While Frank’s trauma symptoms create profound personal suffering, the roots of his PTSD originate from the collective racial trauma burdening African Americans. As Sam Durrant elucidates, racial trauma transpierces personal identity and collapses the individual into a shared legend of oppression (Durrant 80). Frank’s plight must be understood against the backdrop of anti-Black violence permeating America. The Korean War only intensifies racial trauma already brewing within Frank. Prior to Korea, he endured a perilous childhood punctuated by the threat of white brutality. Frank’s grandmother warns him, “You think you a man [...] You can’t kick nobody’s ass and yours can get kicked from Alaska to Mexico” (Morrison 99). Her admonition underscores the conditional masculinity of Black men—emasculatation or annihilation always looms as reprisal for asserting agency. Korea then compounds pre-existing racial trauma when Frank witnesses the senseless deaths of his friends Stuff and Leroy. Frank divulges, “First Stuff shot dead while changing socks, then Leroy examining a farmhouse for food” (Morrison 105). Their deaths underscore war’s arbitrary brutality, how no valor or vigilance spares Black soldiers expendability. Through Stuff and Leroy’s murders, America’s dehumanizing racial contract stalks Frank overseas (Mills 1999: 3-31). Racial trauma thus compounds war trauma for Frank. Not only does he confront PTSD daily, but behind the disorder looms the longer trajectory of anti-Black violence festering in him from childhood.

His psychic wounds originate from the enduring dehumanization of African Americans. Morrison suggests personal healing hinges upon communal healing of racial trauma. At novel’s end, Frank begins renouncing isolation and narcissistic anger through reconciling with loved ones. After rescuing his sister Cee from a racist eugenicist doctor, Frank returns home in search of human connection, not wandering. He opts out of self-exile from family and society necessary to nurture himself and racial kin towards affirming Black humanity. The private restoration parallels potential public advancement if sufficient bonds strengthen Frank Money’s profound personal and cultural traumas leave deep imprints no solitary victory can erase. Yet glints of recoil against trauma’s legacy emerge as Frank recognizes healing’s fundamentally collective nature. If he withstands remembering wounds engraved by racial violence, social alliances may seed communal repair beyond individual reprieve. Not ceasing to repress cultural trauma, Frank clears space for its airing as preface to possible

conciliation.

7.3. Narrative and Trauma in *Home*

7.3.1. Fragmentation and Flashback

Literature uses fragmentation and flashback technique to convey the complexity of trauma and its lasting impact on individuals. Trauma disrupts daily life and evokes feelings of helplessness, leading to unresolved troubles. Over time, trauma transforms from the present to the past, and understanding this progression is crucial. Diverse signs of trauma include emotional distress, hallucinations, and mood disturbances. The mentally traumatized internal world is chaotic and disordered. Traditional narrative structures have limitations when portraying trauma, so authors often employ fragmentation to represent traumatic experiences and psychological mechanisms of depression and recovery. Pourgharib et al. note that “Caruth’s triple aporia of representation, repetition, and belatedness refer to the distress and disorder of the narrative” (22), emphasizing the challenges and disruptions inherent in narrating trauma. By breaking away from linear storytelling, writers create multi-layered, fragmented works that mirror the chaos of trauma, offering a deeper exploration of traumatic psychology. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub articulated that “The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place, and time “(Felman and Laub 1992: 69). Authors often turn to fragmentation as a literary device to represent not only the fragmentation of traumatic experiences but also the intricate psychological mechanisms involved in the cycles of depression and recovery. Breaking away from linear storytelling, these writers craft multi-layered, fragmented works that mirror the internal chaos of trauma. Through this narrative approach, literature offers a profound exploration of traumatic psychology, exploring the ongoing challenges faced by those who have experienced profound and unsettling events.

In Toni Morrison’s novel *Home*, flashback is used as a narrative technique to depict the complexities of the characters’ pasts and their impact on their present lives. Home as a historical trauma narrative, deals with the fragmented identities and collective hauntings of African Americans, which have to do with slavery and its legacy, but also with the Korean War” (Ramirez 2017: 127). Flashback serves several purposes, including providing context, revealing important information, creating suspense, and developing character depth. The disruption of the linear flow of the narrative indicates different time periods to reflect the fragmented memory, the characters’ experiences, the characters’ identities. Frank Money is haunted by his experiences as a soldier during the Korean War, which the reader can witness the horrors the endured and the emotional toll it has taken on him. These flashbacks and memories not only provide context for Frank’s actions and behaviors in the present, but they also highlight the lasting effects of trauma. In this case, Morrison writes:

He declined, but asked for more coffee. He had spent ‘ a sleepless night, churning and entangled in thoughts relentless and troubling. How he had covered his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies. Day and night he had held on to that suffering because it let him off the hook, kept the Korean child hidden. (135).

In Toni Morrison’s *Home*, the protagonist Frank Money grapples with haunting memories of his traumatic experiences in the Korean War. The vivid depiction of a sleepless night conveys his emotional turmoil and guilt over killing a Korean girl. His “big-time mourning” for fallen comrades suggests a coping mechanism to conceal deeper distress. The mention of a “Korean child hidden” reveals a concealed memory that haunts him. (Ramírez 128) The metaphorical “hook” embedded in his chest powerfully conveys the inescapable nature of his pain and guilt, emphasizing trauma’s profound impact on the psyche. Toni Morrison heightens the sense of trauma’s disruption of conventional memory through Frank Money’s interactions with literal ghosts from his past. As Caruth explains, “The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (17). Frank is haunted by visions of his dead war comrades, “the hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to, or laugh with” (Morrison 99). The persistence of these ghosts represents the way trauma reverberates through memory, reasserting itself through the very act of attempted forgetting. By dramatizing this traumatic repetition through the figures of ghosts, Morrison challenges straightforward narrative progression, instead showing how ghosts from the past haunt the present with their disruptive returns. Accordingly, Morrison’s attenuated, subjective use of flashback mirrors the effects of trauma in shattering unitary historical perspective.

Moreover, Morrison uses flashback to challenge linear narratives of history that can distort or erase marginalized experiences. As literary critic Whitehead argues, “Morrison is definitely taking seriously the need to consider all those traces of individual and collective traumatic memories to see how the resulting grieving processes may be resolved” (69). By presenting the past through characters’ fragmented recollections, Morrison questions the limitations of dominant historical narratives that have traditionally privileged certain voices while silencing others. For example, the protagonist Frank Money suffers from intrusive memories and visions that underscore the fallibility of memory. Frank repeatedly sees his dead war comrades: “Abrupt, unregulated memories put a watery shine in his eyes. For months, only alcohol dispersed his best friends, the hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to, or laugh with” (Morrison 99). According to Derrida, such ghosts represent “certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us” (xix). The persistence of these ghosts and Frank’s distorted memories challenges conventional linear narratives that might otherwise erase such traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, Morrison’s varied perspectives and subjective retellings of the past in-

vite scrutiny of commonly accepted histories by presenting multiple perspectives and versions of events, Morrison challenges the notion of a singular and objective truth, highlighting the ways in which memory is shaped by personal experiences, cultural narratives, and the passage of time (Ibarra 2014: 113). This kaleidoscopic approach suggests the limitations of any definitive historical account, emphasizing instead the multiplicity and malleability of memory. Thus, through her fragmented and multifaceted use of flashback, Morrison resists dominant historical narratives that have traditionally excluded or misrepresented marginalized voices. As Whitehead contends, “Morrison is definitely taking seriously the need to consider all those traces of individual and collective traumatic memories” (69) in order to develop new narratives that incorporate a wider range of perspectives and experiences. Flashback enables Morrison to recreate the past as dynamic, subjective, and open to reinterpretation.

7.4. Belatedness

In *Home*, Toni Morrison employs belatedness and delay as powerful narrative techniques to convey the fragmentation and disruptive impacts of trauma. A key example is in the delayed revelations about the protagonist Frank Money’s traumatic experiences in the Korean War. Throughout much of the novel, the details of Frank’s wartime trauma are withheld, creating mystery and suspense. This allows Morrison to gradually reveal the troubling events, mirroring how trauma disrupts memory and the perception of time. (Whitt 2023: 196) For instance, when Frank has flashbacks to the war, Morrison depicts his fractured recollection through nonlinear storytelling, reflecting the belatedness of trauma. She writes, “Nothing featureless gets remembered that way. Only violence. Real or imagined. Private or public. Body or soul violation...” (Morrison 84). The use of delay and circulatory time patterns heighten the distressing impacts of Frank’s traumatic memories. Morrison also utilizes delay and belatedness in depicting the trauma following Cee’s mysterious hospitalization and near-death experience. Though the causes remain ambiguous for much of the novel, the non-linear storytelling creates space for deeper rumination on Cee’s precarious psychological state in the aftermath:

Then I saw the bamboo part, low to the ground. A dog, maybe No. It was a child’s hand sticking out and patting the ground. I remember smiling. Reminded me of Cee and me trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson’s tree, sneaking, crawling, being as quiet as we could so she wouldn’t see us and grab a belt. (Morrison 94)

When the troubling details are at last revealed towards the climax, the long-awaited catharsis reflects the distressing ways trauma can resurface over time. As Frank helps nurture Cee back to health, their journey of reconciliation highlights the possibility of healing even in the wake of belated suffering. Therefore, by fracturing the narrative timeline and relying on strategic delays in revelation, Morrison mimics the persistence and discontinuity of trauma throughout *Home*. The impacts reverberate throughout the characters’ lives, continually rupturing the present long after the initial

wounds were inflicted. This lends an emotional weight and complexity to the narrative, inviting consideration of private pain and collective memory in the shadow of large-scale historical violence and injustice.

In Toni Morrison's novel *Home*, the character Frank Money displays symptoms of belated trauma after returning from fighting in the Korean War. Frank suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt, unable to integrate his traumatic memories. Morrison explores the concept of belatedness—the paradox wherein a survivor cannot initially comprehend their experiences but reencounters them later in involuntary memories. As trauma theorist Cathy Caruth explains, “the direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an inability to know it,” only to return in disruptive flashbacks once the survivor has more distance (1996: 92). Morrison depicts this belated understanding in Frank's involuntary reliving of scenes from Korea. Though vivid, the visions surface unbidden, in “nanosecond[s] of embarrassment” where Frank suddenly confronts what his mind previously blocked out (Morrison 100). Belatedness structures his post-traumatic state.

Morrison conveys Frank's splintered subjectivity as he swings between numbness and extreme emotion. At first Frank feels aloof and dissociated, drinking “alone” with “no need to revisit” Korea's horrors consciously (Morrison 14-15). Yet unintegrated memories haunt his unconscious and break through against Frank's will via triggers later. Caruth theorizes traumatic recall as the “wrenching departure from self-understanding,” too much to integrate logically when it happens (153). Over time, piecemeal confrontation enables comprehension. Frank's initial numb homecoming followed by vivid intrusions models “the incomprehensibility of one's near death” eventually coming into focus as narrative aids processing (Caruth 1996: 62).

When everyday stimuli like a friend's laugh or profile unleash unbidden memories for Frank, abruptly “[his] best friends...[are] hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to, or laugh with” (Morrison 100). In dreamlike flashes, Frank loses his grip on the fact they have died. The imagery precedes meaning, emphasizing belatedness. Literary critic Laurie Vickroy analyzes how Frank's “emotionally charged images” are the psyche's attempt at “incorporat[ing] the excluded material” central to PTSD through unconscious confrontation (166). The visions offer gradual access on the psyche's terms. Morrison stresses their involuntary quality, occurring despite Frank's willed suppression and signaling trauma's delayed eruption.

Ultimately, Frank requires distance and support to make sense of his traumatic past. Morrison stresses that he remembers “only later” and “belatedly,” unable to immediately comprehend the loss (Visser 156). Caruth would add that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness,” surfacing over time far from violence's heat (7). Until Frank can confront and work through his buried pain, it continually resurges. His initially numb homecoming, followed by intrusive memories, models how trauma's “near death” defies comprehension at first (Caruth 62). Processing necessitates retelling one's narrative to integrate the fragments. Morrison

captures this in depicting Frank's gradual awakening, structured by belatedness.

Through the character of Frank Money, Morrison demonstrates how trauma can cause memories to be buried only to resurface years later. After returning from the Korean War, Frank is haunted by the memory of a young Korean girl he failed to save, yet he does not fully confront this memory until much later in life. As the narrator explains, "Indeed it is only later, or belatedly, and aided by the therapeutic process of narrating his story, that Frank remembers the truth of the girl's death" (Morrison 135). At first, Frank hides from his guilt by mourning his dead army buddies. Morrison notes, "He had spent 'a sleepless night, churning and entangled in thoughts relentless and troubling. How he had covered his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies'" (135). However, Frank cannot escape this traumatic memory forever, as "the hook was deep inside his chest and nothing would dislodge it" (135). The language of the "hook" symbolizes how Frank's guilt over not saving the young girl continues to painfully resurface throughout his life. This memory demonstrates Morrison's use of belatedness to explore how repressed memories of trauma can emerge later on despite initial attempts to suppress them. Through Frank's character arc, Morrison emphasizes the lingering impacts of personal trauma and memory.

7.5 . Repetition

Repetition is the act of repeating words, phrases, or motifs within a narrative. It serves as a literary tool that can enhance the overall impact of a story by emphasizing certain themes, ideas, or emotions. Through repetition, authors can create a sense of rhythm, reinforce key concepts, and establish a deeper connection with the reader. As articulated in trauma theory: "The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain un - available to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight— thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing" (Caruth 92).

In Toni Morrison's *Home*, crucial themes and emotions are underscored and repeated to indicate trauma. One such recurrent element is the haunting trauma of war, specifically manifesting in Frank's harrowing experiences as a soldier during the Korean War. Afflicted by PTSD, Frank grapples with the relentless resurgence of traumatic memories, a challenge that, as noted by literary critic Laura Whitehead, resists conventional narrative structures and linear temporalities (2004: 5). The novel artistically portrays Frank's PTSD through the repetition of flashbacks and nightmares, providing glimpses into the visceral impact of war on his psyche. As Frank reflects on a particular memory, he confesses, "Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill" (Morrison 96). This recurring memory becomes an indelible part of Frank's consciousness, contributing significantly to his psychological trauma.

Another notable instance of repetition in the narrative is the triggering of

Frank's PTSD episodes by encounters with young girls. James Phelan expresses this repetition, suggesting that Frank's unreliability stems from faulty memory and subconscious guilt rather than intentional deceit (51). Instances where Frank confronts images of young girls evoke painful flashbacks, emphasizing the enduring emotional scars he carries. In one poignant scene, as Frank ponders the unthinkable acts committed against a young girl, his emotional turmoil is vividly depicted:

“Who would do that to a young girl? And a doctor? What the hell for?
His eyes burned and he blinked rapidly to forestall what could have become the crying he had not done since he was a toddler” (Morrison 132).

Through the deliberate repetition of these memories and triggers, Morrison intricately weaves together the themes of trauma and Frank's evolving character. The consistent reemergence of these visceral visions from the past contributes to a nuanced portrayal of a man deeply scarred by the traumas of war. Morrison's adept use of repetition serves to magnify these thematic elements, ensuring a resonant and impactful narrative for the reader.

7.6. Healing of Trauma

Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back and adapt in the face of adversity to heal. It is a quality that allows individuals to maintain their mental and emotional well-being despite experiencing traumatic events. In *Home*, Frank demonstrates remarkable resilience in their efforts to confront and overcome the traumas they have endured. Toni Morrison depicts trauma and its healing as a complex, nonlinear process in *Home*. The main character Frank Money experiences severe trauma from his military service in the Korean War that leaves him feeling shattered and without purpose: “He'd had lots of sad memories, but no ghosts or nightmares for two days, and he was desperate for black coffee in the mornings, not the wake-up jolt whiskey once gave him” (Morrison 106). Frank begins his healing journey when he learns his sister Cee is in danger, sparking a sense of purpose and connection to his “authentic self” that drives him to her aid: “Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself—a strong good me” (Morrison 104). Revisiting and reenacting trauma is shown to contribute to healing. As Frank returns to his hometown, narrative and memory allow him to process his painful past: “Had he been alert instead of daydreaming, he would have recognized that reefer and gasoline smell, the rapid sneaker tread as well as the gang breath — the odor of scared children depending on group bravery. Not military but playground. At the mouth of an alley” (Morrison 106). According to Parker the novel suggests that willfully confronting trauma facilitates recovery: “Cure comes through the reproduction of the primal scene of trauma” (qtd. in Ramírez 135).

Ultimately Morrison conveys trauma healing as an empowering, agentic process. Though incredibly difficult, Frank's choice to aid Cee and reconnect with repressed aspects of himself sets him on the path toward integrating his fragmented identity and recovering from war's ravages. When Frank hears that his cherished

sister Cee is in danger, he finally gains the motivation he needs to push past his painful war memories and nightmares: “Frank Money joined the army to escape his too-small world, he left behind his cherished and fragile little sister, Cee. After the war, his shattered life has no purpose until he hears that Cee is in danger” (Morrison 163). Cee’s illness becomes the impetus for Frank to confront his trauma, as saving his sister requires moving beyond his own suffering. In this way, the novel manifests that trauma healing requires a sense of empowerment and purpose to propel the protagonist into revisiting sites of pain. Here Frank gains the necessary motivation to escape from the nightmares of war that have plagued him. His sister’s plight gives him the drive to push past those memories and attempt to rescue her from her bed of illness.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory in the context of Toni Morrison’s *Home* has provided a comprehensive understanding of the intricate layers of trauma portrayed in the novel. Through an exploration of traumatic events, their profound impact on characters, symbolism, historical and contemporary trauma, and narrative strategies, the analysis has revealed the multifaceted nature of trauma within the narrative. The traumatic events depicted in *Home*, ranging from the Korean War experiences of Frank Money to the racial violence and medical experiments faced by the characters, serve as powerful catalysts for personal and collective traumas. The study underscores the lasting impact of these events on the characters’ lives, emphasizing how trauma disrupts personal and social connections, leading to isolation and alienation. Morrison’s narrative strategies, including fragmentation, disruption, unreliable narration, and non-linear storytelling, effectively mirror the characters’ experiences of trauma, creating a visceral understanding for the reader. Despite the pervasive presence of trauma, the novel offers glimpses of healing and resilience. In sum, this study contributes to the broader discourse on trauma by bridging Cathy Caruth’s theoretical framework with Toni Morrison’s literary exploration. It emphasizes the intricate interplay between personal and historical traumas, the disruption of identity, and the possibilities for healing and resilience. Through this interdisciplinary opinion, the study enriches the comprehension of trauma’s complexities and Morrison’s adept portrayal of its profound impact on individuals and communities in *Home*.

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