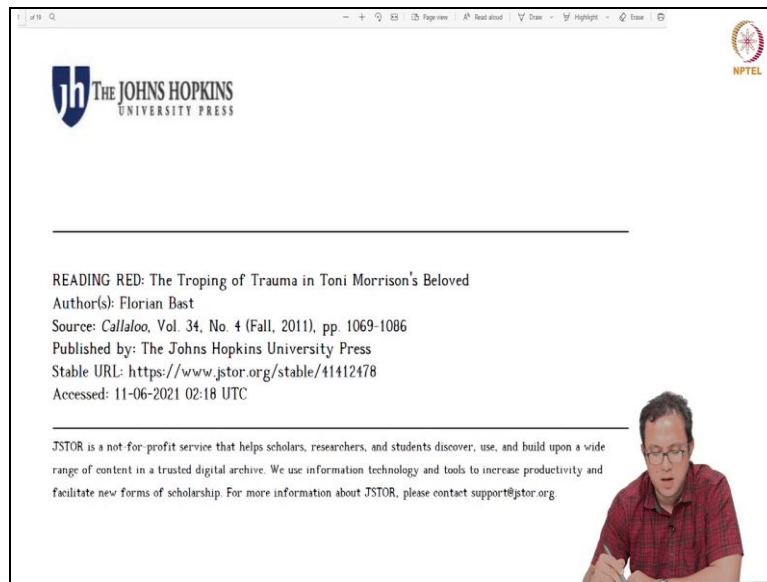


**Trauma and Literature**  
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**Lecture – 55**  
**Toni Morrison's Beloved - Part 1**

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This is an NPTEL course titled “Trauma and Literature”. We will look at the final work of fiction study in this course on Toni Morrison's novel “Beloved”. So, like Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel “Nervous Conditions” we also look at an essay which is a very good coverage from the novel it is very good critical examination of the novel especially from the lenses of Trauma Studies which is what we will look at in great details.

The name of the essay is “Reading Red: The Tropical Trauma in Toni Morrison's Beloved” by Florian Bast was published by in a journal Kelly in fall issue 2011. The publisher John Hopkins University Press talks about the interesting use of colours by Toni Morrison and how the colour red becomes representative of a certain kind of nervous condition a certain kind of traumatic condition.

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A staggering amount of research has been conducted on Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*. More than a decade ago Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu claimed that "a virtual industry of *Beloved* (and, by extension, Morrisonian) scholarship has evolved" (59). While the text's thematic and formal range has elicited an exceptionally heterogeneous body of scholarship, most researchers—within their respective theoretical approaches—have focused or at least touched on the text's portrayal of physical and emotional trauma and the characters' struggles to survive it. Linda Koolish, for example, comments on the continuous "struggle for psychic wholeness" in *Beloved* "which requires access to painful memories" (169). Kristin Boudreau contends that the novel's very opening lines "announc[e] the prominent place of pain in the lives of these ex-slaves" (447). Anne Koenen reads the character Beloved as the return of the repressed, "the ghost of slavery" (117), and Claudine Raynaud specifically analyzes Morrison's approach to memory and likens it to "the work of mourning" (43). Roger Luckhurst, finally, affirms *Beloved*'s status as "a formative text in literary trauma studies" (*The Trauma Question* 90).

An aspect which has been largely overlooked, particularly in this context, is the text's use of color to portray the consequences of slavery. Certainly, some scholars have remarked on the importance of color in *Beloved*. Cheryl Hall, for example, identifies its use as part of a "sophisticated system of repeated motifs [which] is at work in *Beloved*" (93), yet does not elaborate on this particular aspect of the system. Indeed, Morrison herself has claimed that "[t]here is practically no color whatsoever in its pages, and when there is, it is so stark and remarked upon, it is virtually raw" (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 397). However, no attempt at establishing a coherent analysis of the use of even one color has of yet been made. In spite of Morrison's statement to the contrary, even a cursory reading of the novel quickly affirms the amount of energy the text expends in portraying different colors. *Beloved* repeatedly evokes comprehensive palettes of color: the multicolored ribbons, clothes, and



Morrison's "Beloved" is a novel about spectrality about slavery about dehumanization about in a re-memory it has different kinds of memory experiences which play between materiality and spectrology. And in the process it just becomes very complex and dark depiction of a traumatic novel it is one of the classic cases of representations of trauma in fiction it is just gets cited almost everywhere.

Whenever there is a reference to or a conference in trauma fiction Morrison's "Beloved" becomes almost like a something like a poster for that kind of scholarship now. The reason why chosen this essay is chosen by Florian Bast is because it really corresponds very well and it is quite compatible to the kind of work that we are trying to achieve in this course is looking at the medium of fiction as a very unique focal point through which trauma can be represented trauma can be calibrated trauma can be in a remembered and characterized.

So, staggering and modern research has been conducted by Toni Morrison's 1987 novel "Beloved". More than a decade ago Elizabeth and Billy claimed that a virtual industry of "Beloved" amber extension on Morrison onion industry scholarship has evolved.

While the Texas thematic and formal range has elicited an exceptionally heterogeneous body of scholarship most researchers within their respective theoretical approaches have focused or at least touched on the Texas portrayal of physical and emotional trauma and the characters struggles to survive it. So, as mentioned in Trauma Studies, "Beloved"

becomes a very well-read text, a very heavily anthologized text very heavily critiqued texts and critique positively of course the level of academic scholarship.

Linda Coolish for example comments on the continuous struggle for psychic wholeness and beloved which requires access to painful memories and this is a very important bit in the novel where the characters appear fragmented the characters appear isolated and eliminated. So, the struggle to achieve wholeness to reconnect to a holistic understanding of reality holistic form of embodiment is something which one finds in "Beloved" over and over again.

Christian Bodhi contends that the novel's very opening lines announce the prominent place of pain in the lives of these ex-slaves. It is a very historical novel as well it talks about the American slavery and how the identity politics around that the brutal human history of slavery imprisonment torture abuse how identities were produced suppressed repressed and got regenerated to different forms different figures spectral material all kinds of figures.

There is quite literally the cost of slavery, slavery has a spectral condition. The spectrogenic quality of slavery the ontological quality of slavery and that's something which we see Anna Conan reads the character beloved as a return of the repressed the ghost of slavery. There is a very strong classic Freudian reading the return of the repressed the recursive quality of trauma.

The classic Freudian model of trauma has a repetitive condition has a repeating condition which is there and very much and beloved and Claudin Reynard specifically analyzes Morrison's approach to memory and likens it to a worker moaning Roger Lucas finally affirms billable status as a formative text in literary trauma studies. These are all very big names. Later, we find the reference to category and whitehead and interestingly we were looking at categories unclaimed experience and Whiter's Trauma fiction in the latter part and in the final bit of this goes.

After this reading of Toni Morrison's novel, we will look at Kuru and Whitehead. It is interesting how this essay on Morrison's novel refers to that kind of scholarship and Trauma Studies and that is the reason why this essay is chosen in the first place. It

connects the work of fiction and reading of the work of fiction to some of the more philosophical works done on trauma.

We can see in the very opening paragraph of this essay there is a list of scholarship a rich range of research which talks about this particular novel and how this becomes a novel about spectrality about moaning about the history of slavery about the identities which are born out of this repressed condition and how it also becomes a classic frightening condition of the return of the repressed how the the reputation of trauma becomes part of the plot progression in the novel.

This is where it comes this essay comes in has a unique reading how the colour red becomes an interesting marker for trauma a very interesting signifier of the traumatized identity in a certain sense. An aspect which has largely been overlooked particularly in this context is the Texas use of colour to portray the consequences of slavery certainly some scholars have remarked on the importance of the colour.

Cheryl Hall for example identifies its use as part of a sophisticated system of repeated motifs which is at work and “Beloved” here does not elaborate on this particular aspect of the system indeed. Morrison herself has claimed that there is practically no colour whatsoever in his pages and when there is it is. So, stark and remarked upon it is virtually wrong however no attempt at establishing a coherent analysis of the use of even one column has of yet been made.

This is the literature gap this particular essay is trying to address and it is a very good example of how to write an essay as well those of you willing to publish on Trauma Studies and “Trauma and Literature”. This can be a very good template for all of us in terms of how we first talk about a scholarship done on a particular domain whether it is a as a literature text whether it is a film a piece of cinema painting whatever the case may be.

One first talk about a scholarship available on that domain on that field and then you talk about the absence of a certain kind of scholarship where the gap is what has not been done what has not been explored. And that is where one’s work can come in as a very

interesting intervention a very original offering in terms of how it can intervene into Trauma Studies.

“Beloved” repeatedly evokes comprehensive plates of colour it is multicoloured ribbons clothes and flowers that Sethi buys during the last weeks in which beloved is in the house the quilt with the two orange patches as well as a quilt of merry colours in which Paul De finds Seth in the novel's last scene and in many colours many different colors that baby sucks ponders in the last years before are dead can serve as examples.

Now what is essay is trying to do quite clearly is how to sort of situate certain forms of psychological condition certain forms of mental conditions certain forms of embodiment condition corresponding to certain colours. So, colours over here become symbols to certain kinds of experiences or certain orders of experientiality shall we say and that kind of a chromatic order we have different forms of embodiment different forms of traumatic embodiment.

Trauma and colour begin to become equated and that is a very original reading. Among this elaborate use of colours it is the colour red which is employed most conspicuously and it is this colour which is intricately connected to the novel's portrayal of trauma. It is a novel about trauma about traumatic reputation about the traumatic body the traumatic mind the traumatic subject.

But the colour red becomes most compatible to this chromatophilic condition this traumatized condition rather it appears in some of the central tropes of the novel such as Baldi red herd stamp paints red ribbon and beloved pink tombstone. Additionally the novel contains a multitude of bloody images due to frequent scenes of bodily harm. So, there is this very corporeal quality about trauma it is about bodily abuse it is about the violence done to the body to the blackboard in particular.

So, that corporeal quality of trauma the corporate quality of damage and violence also gets manifested in the colour red. It is a very bloody novel in a very literal sense. There is a red heart there is a red ribbon there is a pink tombstone and there are some images of bodily damage bodily abuse which also are depicted with the colour red symbolically speaking.

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serves as an amplifier: within Western culture, red is most commonly associated with danger, blood, fire, or romantic love, and thus it always marks some notion of intensity. However, in Morrison's novel its use is more specific. Red is more than just a universal amplifier. Even given the highly diverse connotations associated with its respective occurrences, red is traceable to a single source: the evils of slavery.<sup>4</sup> More precisely, the text negotiates issues of trauma using the color red. This study's central argument is that red is a complex and potent trope in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: it constitutes a text in and of itself, as it is through the characters' interaction with the color that the novel narrates their processing of trauma.

Trauma Theory and *Beloved*

Cathy Caruth, in her seminal study *Unclaimed Experience*, has defined trauma as an event which is not experienced but simply registered, as it overwhelms the person to whom it happens (4).<sup>7</sup> Among the typical reactions to this phenomenon is a repetition compulsion, an urge to continually return to the traumatic event, which is not freely accessible to memory, paradoxically aimed at achieving a level of preparedness in facing it in repetition (termed "belatedness"). The traumatic event, while not "available to consciousness," is bound to "impos[e] itself again" in changed forms on the consciousness of the victim (4). One, if not the only, way to heal a trauma is giving testimony, which "requires a highly collaborative relationship between speaker and listener" (Whitehead 7). Anne Whitehead claims that "[t]he impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its



Generally, red serves as an amplifier within western culture red is almost commonly most commonly associated with danger blood fire a romantic love. This is always marks some notion of intensity however in Morrison's novel its use is more specific red is more than just a universal amplifier even given the highly diverse connotations associated with this respective occurrences red is traceable to a single source that is the evils of slavery.

More precisely the text negotiates issues of trauma using the colour red this study's central argument is that red is a complex important troll and Toni Morrison's "Beloved", it constitutes a text in and of itself and it is through the characters interaction with the colour that a novel narrates their processing of trauma now this is a very wonderful framework.

This is trying to do at a very symbolic level is look at the way in which the processing of trauma takes place through the colour red how red becomes an amplifier trauma. How red becomes a marker of trauma how it becomes a certain fire trauma and also a symbol of trauma in a certain sense. There are different kinds of connotations and denotations which are depicted by the colour red evils of slavery being a classic case in point.

In a way red becomes a symbol of interactivity red becomes a symbol of spectrality red becomes a symbol of violence red becomes a symbol of loss red becomes a symbol of imprisonment. All these different markers of trauma are negotiated with the colour red. The colour red becomes the way in which the processing or trauma takes place in a novel

and it is exactly the processing that this particular is trying to calibrate it is trying to engage with at a level of scholarship.

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The slide features a title "Trauma Theory and Beloved" at the top center. Below the title is a block of text discussing Cathy Caruth's work on trauma and its application to Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved". The text is dense and academic. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and a red shirt, who appears to be the speaker for this segment. The NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner of the slide frame.

We will talk about some of the critical frameworks in Trauma Studies and it will bring in a category it will bring in and Whitehead and these are two figures as mentioned that we will look at as well in the concluding part of this course we are beginning to wind up.

We will see interestingly how this essay while talking about the colour red while talking about the processing of trauma and Toni Morrison's "Beloved" alludes to exactly those works that we will wind up with trauma theory and "Beloved". So, just a little bit of space and time and with engaging with trauma theory some of the big names in the field Cathy Caruth one of the biggest names.

Cathy Caruth in her seminal study *Unclaimed Experience* has defined trauma as an event which is not experienced but simply registered as it overwhelms the person to whom it happens. The very ontology of trauma and we remember "The Ontology Of The Accident" by Captain Malibu again a very critical theory reading on trauma. Now Caruth too has a similar kind of a philosophical framework of course she is writing before Malibu and she defines trauma as not an event which is experienced.

But simply registered because we cannot experience trauma fully and that is the whole ontology of the accident the whole ontology of the trauma moment that it is impossible to experience it fully because experiencing and understanding go hand in hand. So,

trauma is something which is always left understood to a certain extent we just register it sometimes passively perhaps.

Among the typical reactions to this phenomenon is a reputation compulsion an urge to continually return to the traumatic event which is all freely accessible to memory paradoxically aimed at achieving a level of preparedness and facing it in reputation termed belatedness. So, these are the technical terms belatedness reputation etc and it is almost like a compulsive condition the urge to keep revisiting the traumatic moment.

And we find this it is happening throughout the different works of fiction that we have read already. So, when we just finished slaughterhouse five we find that in the beginning of the novel when Kurt Vonnegut is trying to write the novel about the Dresden bombing he is trying to revisit that movement he is trying to repeat that entire moment of trauma.

However that reputation is always a belated reputation it never can capture the full moment of trauma the full experience of trauma and that is why he keeps saying remember that this is a failed attempt this is an example of failed representation. So, the constant compulsion to repeat and return the traumatic event and which is not accessible anymore and that is why the memory becomes unreliable.

That is why the remembrance becomes unreliable and that is why the idea of belatedness comes into being it is only a belated understanding you can only understand it much later it is incomplete and is related in a certain sense. So, the traumatic event while not available to consciousness is bound to impose itself again in changed forms on the consciousness of the victim.

So, there is that slippery quality about the traumatic reputation it just becomes a change form. So, it may or may not be the original traumatic movement it may or may not correspond to the actual traumatic movement rather what it what it does is that it keeps reconfiguring the traumatic movement and it is always a degree of a departure a degree of belatedness a degree of distance from the traumatic moment there is a change form of consciousness which trauma generates with trauma and acts one if not the only way to heal a trauma is giving testimony which requires a highly collaborative relationship between speaker and listener.



This is where whitehead comes in and interestingly we will look at whitehead's works more closely and in a concluding bit as mentioned the politics of testimony the ontology of testimony is it is quite complex because it requires a level of empathy it requires a level of a collaborative relationship between the speaker and the listener.

So, and that is the way in which trauma can be healed the ability to confess the ability to talk about trauma the ability to give it a narrative design a storytelling shape and it must be accepted it must be absorbed by someone it must be a collaboration between the speaker and the listener. So, that is a trauma the testimony of trauma is that the morning that coping process that that healing process the curative process can only take place through collaboration.

Anne whitehead claims that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking as forms and symptoms. So, the operative word over here is mimicking. So, there is a mimetic quality about representation there is a mimetic quality about traumatic reputation and again if you go back to the text which we just finished which is a good one against "Slaughterhouse-Five" there is always an attempt to mine the original even they are always intended to have a magmatic representation a reputation of what had happened many years ago.

There is a quality there is an awareness that it is impossible to mime it completely attempt and offer a shallow mimicry of it an incomplete and insufficient mimicry of it and the insufficiency is exactly what makes it a failed attempt. There is that quality of mimicry about trauma and the number of scholars have argued.

And his insistence on circling back to traumatic events as well as in this literalization of the haunting past through occurs constitutes a particularly complex example of exactly this mimicry now it is interesting how all these different concepts are brought together there is a course in "Beloved" the figure of Beloved respect the spectral reputation the return of the repressed the figure of the course which does not quite go away it just keeps coming back.

And that reputation of the ghostly figure the reputation the spectral figure or the spectrality the reputation of spectrality the recursivity of spectrality is exactly what makes the mimicry happen over here. There is a mimicry quality of our trauma. So, it just keeps repeating over and over again and memory becomes the only mode of representation that beloved is.

So, trying to foreground here; so, while whitehead has located this feature primarily in Villarva's repeated description of key episodes, Naomi Morgenstern for instance has argued that in a status as a self-conscious new slave narrative beloved represents as well as enacts this process of testimony. There is a quality testimony because will have it also generates the listener to a certain extent.

The reader becomes the listener it was an extent. So, it just becomes a test monitor trauma testimony a traumatic experience and the case being the case in point being that of slavery Lucas in the trauma question has even extended this argument to the novel's treatment of his readers and killing Morrison's famous statement that she aims to create inner readers a compelling confusion similar to the characters Lockheed argues convincingly that Beloved's disruption of the narrative timeline.

And it is withholding of important information actually subjects its readers to feelings of nighttime list or belatedness. So, this is a German word a naturally kit or belatedness and thus to a symptom of traumatic experience. Lucas's idea of belatedness is interesting because it what it is telling us is as readers only get a belated understanding of what really happened.

And there is that cognitive confusion that Morrison's trying to generate that is part of the narrative design per se. Now interestingly what that does is it allows a certain level of empathy between the reader and the characters because even the characters inside the novel they are confused cognitively and there is a sense of belated understanding of what may have happened.

The real traumatic encounter the real traumatic movement can only be processed in a very belated way and that belatedness is also a a departure disruption from the original even now that sense of confusion that sense of cognitive experiential confusion is spilled

over into the reader as well. And as readers too we only get an incomplete and related understanding of what really took place and this is a technical term that Roger Lockhart has used in the sense of belatedness.

And to understand trauma one can only do it to a mimicry which is belated in quality it is a supposed talk understanding it is never really an immediate understanding you can only be negotiated and engaged with at a post top level. One can look back at it in a related way there is always a sense of temporality a sense of time having passed.

So, in a similar argument regarding the inclusion of the reader in the traumatic experience Vincent O'cafe has stated that in certain segments of the novel traumatic memories of Satan Paul D and Denver are fragmentary circular and revisionary bits that readers struggle to piece together the ambiguity compels readers to cross perceptual boundaries and attempt to re-inhabit the character's psychological processes.

As opposed to the registering passively their thoughts and memories as finished products now the last bit is the most interesting bit and note the lack of finishedness or the unfinished quality the novel is something which is very interesting and that's very deliberately done. So, there is an unfinished understanding there is an incomplete understanding and that the rejection the finished product of understanding that rejection the resistance towards this finishedness is exactly part of the traumatic representation.

So, in other words what do cliff is saying over here is part of the narrative design of Toni Morrison but if one is writing a book of fiction about trauma especially if it is historical trauma intergenerational inequality like slavery there should always be a sense of open-handedness. So, in a certain sense when you look back at it there is a sense of belatedness you only understand it later.

So, the immediate understanding is unavailable to us. So, there is a spectral related quality of understanding and then again even that understanding too is unfinished in quality. So, that unfinished quality of understanding is something which is part of the cognitive confusion that trauma has and. So, in a certain sense this becomes very authentic representation a very legitimate representation of the traumatic mind especially in fiction.

So, the narrative confusion the different orders and directive that Morrison is playing and entangling together which is frustrating the reader which is confusing the radar, so, that cognitive confusion becomes very much part of the authorial strategy to which trauma can be relatedly engaged with as well as incompletely understood. So, this unfinished quality and related quality and the repetition quality of trauma is all woven together in this novel.

Which is also a very profound historical novel about the intergenerational quality of slavery torture abuse at a very corporeal category the body is abused the black body is abused there is violence directed at the black body but at the same time there is also a system of epistemic abuse. So, identity abuses how the identity is denied how the agencies deny it.

So, in that sense it becomes a complex condition which is corporeal as well as effective and experiential in quality or psychological and quality. So, let us stop at this point today but I think these are the conceptual categories that this essay is trying to foreground and how Morrison's novel becomes a wonderful experiment in fiction in which all these different categories and trauma fiction and trauma theory are brought together very compellingly.

We have a depiction of slavery depression of spectrality depiction of recursivity as very complex conditions as well as political conditions cognitive conditions.