



UDK: 82-1/-9

Dilnoza DEKHKANOVA,
Senior Teacher of the Department of English Philology
Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Based on the review of SamSIFL, PhD. Associate professor, M.M. Oblokulova

A CHORUS OF PAIN AND HOPE: HOW JAZZ TELLS THE STORY OF CULTURAL TRAUMA

Annotation

This article explores the narrative strategy in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), focusing on its innovative use of literary jazz as a technique to articulate African American cultural memory and identity. Through a detailed analysis of Morrison's narrative style - characterized by polyphony, improvisation, fragmentation, and the call-and-response structure - this study reveals how *Jazz* transforms the African American oral and musical tradition into a powerful literary form.

Key words: Literary jazz, African American literature, polyphony, narrative strategy, improvisation, cultural memory, Toni Morrison.

ХОР БОЛИ И НАДЕЖДЫ: КАК “ДЖАЗ” РАССКАЗЫВАЕТ ИСТОРИЮ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ТРАВМЫ

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается повествовательная стратегия в романе Тони Моррисон *Джаз* (1992), с акцентом на её инновационное использование литературного джаза как приёма для выражения культурной памяти и идентичности афроамериканцев. Посредством детального анализа повествовательного стиля Моррисон - характеризующегося полифонией, импровизацией, фрагментацией и структурой «вызова и ответа» - исследование показывает, как *Джаз* превращает афроамериканскую устную и музыкальную традицию в мощную литературную форму.

Ключевые слова: Литературный джаз, афроамериканская литература, полифония, повествовательная стратегия, импровизация, культурная память, Тони Моррисон.

OG'RIQ VA UMID XORI: “JAZZ” ORQALI MADANIY TRAVMA HIKOYASI

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola Toni Morrisonning *Jazz* (1992) romanidagi hikoya qilish strategiyasini o'rganadi. Asarda Morrisonning «adabiy jazz»ni - afroamerikaliklar madaniy xotirasi va identitetini ifodalash vositasi sifatida innovatsion tarzda qo'llashi tahlil qilinadi. Morrisonning uslubiy yondashuvi - polifoniya, improvizatsiya, fragmentatsiya va «savol-javob» (call-and-response) strukturasiga asoslangan tahlil orqali, maqolada Jazz qanday qilib afroamerikaliklar og'zaki va musiqiy an'analarini kuchli adabiy shaklga aylantirishi ochib beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Adabiy jazz, afroamerikaliklar adabiyoti, polifoniya, hikoya qilish strategiyasi, improvizatsiya, madaniy xotira, Toni Morrison.

Introduction. Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) occupies a unique place in the landscape of American literature, standing as both a profound exploration of African American history and a formal experiment that challenges traditional narrative structures. Morrison's engagement with jazz as a metaphor and a narrative strategy reflects her broader project of rewriting the cultural and historical narratives of Black America. Scholars such as Gates (1988), Neal (1968), and Morrison herself (1994) have long noted the significance of African American vernacular traditions in shaping literary forms that resist hegemonic paradigms. In *Jazz*, Morrison extends this tradition by embedding the aesthetics and ethos of jazz music into the very structure of her novel, creating what scholars have termed a “literary jazz” [1, 2].

The research explores the unique narrative style in *Jazz*, focusing on how Toni Morrison uses jazz-inspired techniques - like improvisation, polyphony, call-and-response, and fragmentation - to weave a story that both reflects and responds to African American cultural memory and trauma. By shaping *Jazz* as a vivid expression of the African American experience, this study highlights how Morrison's storytelling goes beyond just being an artistic innovation - it's also a powerful way to express cultural identity and resistance. Also looks at how Morrison challenges traditional Eurocentric

literary norms, offering instead a narrative approach that embraces complexity, fluidity, and defiance.

Literature Review and Methodology. This research employs a qualitative literary analysis approach, combining close textual reading of Morrison's *Jazz* with insights from African American literary theory, musicology, and narrative studies. The study draws upon key theoretical frameworks, including Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) concept of polyphony and dialogism, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s (1988) theory of Signifyin(g), Houston A. Baker Jr.'s (1984) ideas on blues and jazz in literature, and Toni Morrison's (1994) own essays on narrative form and Black cultural expression.

Primary sources include Morrison's novel *Jazz* and her critical writings, particularly *Unspeakable Things Unspoken* (1994). Secondary sources encompass scholarly works on jazz as a cultural and musical form [1, 2], African American literary criticism [3, 4], and critical studies of Morrison's work [5, 6]. The analytical process involved identifying specific narrative techniques in *Jazz*, mapping them onto jazz aesthetics, and interpreting their significance within the cultural and historical context of African American life in early 20th-century Harlem.

The study also examines Morrison's own reflections on her writing process, paying particular attention to her characterization of *Jazz* as a “jazz gesture” [6]. By situating

these analyses within broader discourses on cultural hybridity and narrative theory, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Morrison's narrative strategy. The analysis of Toni Morrison's *Jazz* demonstrates that narrative polyphony is not merely a stylistic device but a profound structural strategy that Morrison uses to embody the complexity of African-American cultural trauma. The polyphonic design - characterized by multiple, often contradictory, narrative voices; temporal fragmentation; and the interweaving of personal and collective histories - enables Morrison to challenge dominant historiographies and represent the lingering effects of trauma within African-American memory.

One of the most significant findings is the role of the narrator as an unreliable, fragmented, and emotionally invested presence. The narrator in *Jazz* is not an omniscient or detached observer but a self-conscious voice that fluctuates between knowing and not knowing, between involvement and distance. As Morrison writes, "*I'm crazy about this City*" [6], the narrator admits their partiality, affection, and limitations. This narrative self-awareness aligns with Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, where the author's voice is but one among many, and no single perspective dominates the narrative field [7]. The narrator's hesitations - "*I thought I knew them, but I didn't*" [6] - mirror the gaps and uncertainties inherent in traumatic memory. Caruth emphasizes that trauma is not fully accessible in the moment of its occurrence; it resurfaces later, often in fragmented, non-linear ways. Morrison's narrative structure, with its temporal shifts and recursive loops, embodies this belatedness of trauma.

The novel's multiple character perspectives - Joe's haunted recollections, Violet's yearning and rage, Dorcas's youthful defiance, Alice's moral rigidity - create a tapestry of voices that refuse a single authoritative account. For instance, Joe's confession that he "*loved Dorcas too much*" [6] contrasts with Violet's perspective, which oscillates between jealousy and a strange sense of kinship with Dorcas. These conflicting viewpoints, left unresolved, reinforce the notion that trauma is not a singular event with a singular meaning but a site of ongoing struggle and negotiation. As LaCapra suggests, traumatic histories often resist closure and demand continual reinterpretation [8].

Another key finding is the function of temporality in *Jazz*. The novel's non-linear structure - jumping between the 1920s Harlem present, characters' Southern pasts, and fragmented memories - reflects what LaCapra terms the "*acting-out*" of trauma, where past and present collapse into each other [8]. The repeated revisiting of Dorcas's death, Violet's attack at the funeral, and Joe's feelings of abandonment by his mother mirror the cyclical, unresolved nature of traumatic memory. This temporal fragmentation echoes Paul Gilroy's notion of the "*Black Atlantic*" as a space of diasporic identity forged through rupture, displacement, and recombination [9].

Results. The motif of jazz music itself, as both content and form, is integral to Morrison's narrative strategy. Jazz music, with its improvisational structure, syncopation, and layering of individual instruments into a collective sound, serves as a metaphor for both the fractured experience of trauma and the creative potential of cultural expression. As Griffin argues, Morrison's use of "jazz aesthetics" allows her to write the experience of migration, loss, and reinvention in a form that mirrors the improvisational spirit of Black cultural survival [10]. The novel's repetitions, variations on themes (such as the repeated images of birds, the City, and wounds), and the soloing of different character voices resemble a jazz composition where dissonance and harmony coexist. This aesthetic choice aligns with Butler's theory of performativity, where identity and memory are not fixed but are constituted

through repeated acts. Morrison's narrative performs trauma, enacting its fragmentation, recursiveness, and elusiveness, rather than simply describing it [11].

Morrison's *Jazz* resists the traditional Western narrative arc that moves toward resolution, catharsis, or moral closure. Instead, the novel ends with an ambiguous, lyrical reflection: "*Don't ever think I fell for you, or fell over you. I didn't fall in love, I rose in it*" [6]. This refusal of closure challenges the reader to engage with trauma as an ongoing process rather than a problem to be solved. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and the "*Third Space*" is also relevant here, as Morrison's narrative creates a liminal space where competing histories, identities, and memories coexist without synthesis.

Discussions. The novel's engagement with the sociohistorical context of the Great Migration, racial violence, and systemic inequality reinforces the political stakes of narrative form. Morrison situates her characters within a continuum of historical trauma - Joe's abandonment as a child by his mother, Violet's memories of rural poverty, and Dorcas's struggle for autonomy as a young Black woman - all echo the broader collective trauma of African-American history.

Morrison's *Jazz* embodies trauma through its formal innovations: the multiplicity of perspectives, the fracturing of time, the improvisational and performative voice of the narrator, and the evocation of jazz music as a model for both individual and collective expression. These elements coalesce into a narrative that does not offer closure or healing in a conventional sense but instead insists on the necessity of remembering, revisiting, and re-narrating trauma. As Morrison herself affirms, "Memory is the deliberate act of remembering, a form of willed creation" [6]. In *Jazz*, this act of remembering is shared among characters, narrator, and reader alike, implicating all in the ongoing process of witnessing and reimagining the past.

Morrison constructs *Jazz* as a multi-voiced narrative, where characters such as Joe, Violet, Dorcas, and even the city of Harlem itself contribute distinct perspectives. This polyphony mirrors the improvisational ensemble of a jazz band, where no single instrument dominates, but rather, voices intertwine to create a layered and textured composition. The narrator - an enigmatic, often unreliable voice - shifts in tone and perspective, sometimes offering omniscient commentary, other times becoming entangled in the characters' emotions. This narrative layering disrupts the traditional linear plot, creating a syncopated rhythm that echoes the unpredictability of jazz performance [7].

Improvisation in *Jazz* manifests in the fluid, often abrupt shifts in narrative time and space. Morrison's prose is marked by nonlinear temporality, where past, present, and future coexist in a kaleidoscopic pattern, much like the spontaneous riffs in a jazz piece. The fragmentation of narrative strands - such as Joe's affair with Dorcas, Violet's breakdown, and the collective memory of the Harlem community - reflects the improvisational nature of jazz, where structure emerges through performance rather than premeditated design [5].

Morrison incorporates the African American oral tradition of call-and-response into the fabric of *Jazz*. This is evident in the narrator's direct engagement with the reader - posing questions, offering commentary, and responding to the characters' actions. For example, the recurring question "*Where is she?*" and the reply "There she is" exemplifies this dynamic [6]. The novel thus becomes an interactive space, where meaning is co-constructed through dialogue between voices, mirroring the participatory ethos of jazz performance [3].

Morrison's narrative strategy also functions as a repository of cultural memory. By weaving in historical allusions - the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and the legacy of slavery - *Jazz* situates individual stories within the broader tapestry of African American experience. The improvisational form becomes a means of reclaiming silenced histories, allowing characters to re-narrate their lives outside the constraints of Eurocentric literary norms [6].

Morrison's *Jazz* exemplifies how literary form can serve as an act of cultural resistance. By appropriating the aesthetics of jazz music, Morrison challenges the monological structures of Western literature and asserts a Black expressive mode rooted in oral tradition, musicality, and communal memory. As Gates argues, the act of Signifyin(g) - repurposing dominant cultural forms for subversive ends - is central to African American literature. The significance of Morrison's narrative strategy extends beyond formal innovation. It addresses fundamental questions about language, representation, and cultural survival. Morrison's concept of the "unspeakable" - the trauma of slavery, the violence of racial oppression, and the erasure of Black

voices—finds articulation in the nonlinear, improvisational language of jazz [6].

Jazz invites readers into an active interpretive role, challenging them to navigate the gaps, silences, and contradictions within the text. This participatory reading mirrors the communal listening experience of jazz, where meaning emerges through engagement rather than passive consumption. By dissolving narrative hierarchies and embracing multiplicity, Morrison's work becomes an inclusive, democratic space that resists the exclusionary tendencies of dominant literary traditions.

Conclusion. Morrison's narrative strategy in *Jazz* is not merely an aesthetic choice but a political and cultural intervention. It redefines the possibilities of the novel form, foregrounds African American cultural expression, and challenges the literary canon to accommodate voices and experiences long marginalized. Morrison's *Jazz* thus stands as a testament to the transformative power of narrative - a power rooted in the improvisational, polyphonic, and liberatory spirit of jazz itself.

LITERATURE

1. Zaitsev A. V. *Afrikano-Amerikanskaya Muzyka i Problemy Afrikanio-Amerikanskoy Identichnosti*. Moscow: Institute of Africa, Russian Academy of Sciences. 2004
2. Berben L. *Jazz as Narrative Strategy in African American Literature*. Routledge. 2005
3. Gates H. L. Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press. 1988
4. Neal L. The Black Arts Movement. *Drama Review*, 12(4), 1968. P. 29–39.
5. O'meally R. G. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. Columbia University Press. 1998
6. Morrison T. *Jazz*. New York: Plume (Penguin Books USA). 1992
7. Bakhtin M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. 1984
8. LaCapra D. *Writing history, writing trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 2001
9. Gilroy P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Harvard University Press. 1993
10. Griffin, F. J. *Who set you flowin'?: The African-American migration narrative*. Oxford University Press. 1996
11. Butler J. *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. Routledge. 1997