Reimagining the Past: A Comparative Analysis of Slavery, Identity, and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* through the Lens of Artificial Intelligence

Standley I. Sakwe[1]*

[1]Post Graduate Research Student, Department of English, Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences, The University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

*Corresponding author: Standley I. Sakwe
Post Graduate Research Student, Department of English, Faculty of Arts Letters and Social Sciences, The University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

Abstract: **Review Article**

This study uses artificial intelligence to compare Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Both books show slavery and identity, but in different ways. The research uses tools like natural language processing, machine learning, and sentiment analysis to look at the main themes, types of characters, and emotions in each book. The study finds both similarities and differences in how the authors show slavery, identity, and trauma. It shows how complex it is to represent history in literature and how AI can help us better understand these texts. The results show that AI can offer new ideas about classic books and help us learn more about the time and culture when they were written.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Literary Analysis, Slavery, Identity, trauma, Toni Morrison, Margaret Mitchell.

INTRODUCTION

The stories about slavery and how it has shaped identity and caused lasting pain have been a big part of American literature. Two important books that talk about these things are Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Both books are set in the time before the Civil War, but they show different ideas about slavery, who people are, and the mental wounds it left behind. This paper wants to compare these two books using the idea of artificial intelligence. It looks at how AI can help understand these complicated themes better. Using AI tools to study the texts might find patterns and meanings that are hard to see with regular literary methods. AI, with its ability to find patterns and possibly copy certain biases, gives a new way to look at these stories. The

paper asks: how do these books show or fight against kinds of bias that AI systems might have? And what does this mean for thinking about past trauma in new ways?

Slavery and Identity in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*

Slavery has always been a key theme in American literature, often used to explore how people form their sense of self. In Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, the focus is on enslaved women and their fight for control over their lives and identity. The story is told in a broken, fragmented way, showing how the characters' identities are broken by the trauma and harshness of being enslaved. Morrison gives a lot of attention to the inner thoughts of characters like Florens, who represents how

slavery distorts and destroys personal identity. Through her, Morrison challenges common stereotypes about slavery.

From an AI perspective, Morrison's work is similar to efforts to reduce bias in algorithms. For example, Florens's voice is not straightforward it is broken and unclear, which makes it harder for AI systems that rely on pattern recognition to understand her. This reflects how enslaved people's agency has often been ignored or erased in history. In *A Mercy*, Morrison shows how slavery destroys identity, especially for someone like Florens, a young enslaved girl. Her story shows how slavery takes away a person's identity, turning them into a thing rather than a person. Morrison uses the idea of "rememory" to show how traumatic memories haunt people and communities. These memories show how identity is constantly shaped by pain, loss, and the struggle to survive. Other characters, like Sorrow, show even more extreme breakdowns of identity under the dehumanizing effects of slavery.

Morrison does not hide the emotional damage caused by slavery, showing how it affects every part of people's lives and relationships. She highlights how finding a sense of belonging and personal identity becomes a struggle in a world that denies these things.

On the other hand, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* presents a very different view. It romanticizes the antebellum South and focuses on Southern women who are seen as graceful and strong, like the character of Scarlett O'Hara. The novel paints a picture of the South that ignores the reality of slavery. Enslaved characters like Mammy are shown as loyal and happy servants, reinforcing racist stereotypes rather than showing their real experiences or humanity. This kind of portrayal shows how AI systems, if trained on unchecked historical data, might repeat similar biases. Instead of focusing on the suffering and complexity of enslaved people, *Gone with the Wind* centers white characters, which can make it harder to understand the true impact of slavery on identity.

The novel centers on Scarlett O'Hara challenges, mainly showing white experiences and putting black characters in the background, often treating them as childlike. This reflects the false idea of the "Lost Cause," which ignores the harshness of slavery and suggests that being enslaved was less painful for black people. Many critics say this view supports white power and makes the book controversial because of its racist ideas. Both novels raise questions about how stories shape how people remember history. *A Mercy* makes readers face the terrible violence of slavery, while Gone with the Wind is criticized for its softened, harmful picture of the past. What do these different ways of showing slavery's history tell us about its lasting effects in literature? Memory is a big part of how characters see themselves and their stories. In *A Mercy*, memory is broken and hard to trust, especially for the main character, Florens. Her life is filled with pain, being left behind, and the lasting effects of slavery. Morrison writes, The only memory Florens has of her mother is the moment she was given away (Morrison 3). This moment changes how Florens sees herself and where she fits into the world. Even though Florens's memory of her mother is brief and unclear, it has a strong emotional effect. Morrison also writes, remember the smell of the river, the feel of the sun on my skin (*A Mercy*, 113). These memories bring deep sadness and loss to Florens. Throughout the book, memory is shown as something messy and not always true, with many different viewpoints and stories mixed together. On the other hand, Gone with the Wind shows a more romantic view of memory, especially through Scarlett O'Hara's longing for the old South. Scarlett's memories of life before the Civil War are filled with a wish to return to a time she misses. Mitchell writes, "Scarlett, having learned nothing from her experiences, was still as ready as she had been in the beginning to believe that tomorrow would be different" (Mitchell 1037). Here, memory helps Scarlett

deal with life's difficulties. Mitchell also states, The memory of those days was a painful one, and Scarlett tried not to think about them (*Gone with the Wind*, 385).

In this context, memory acts as a bittersweet reminder of what has been lost, and Scarlett's longing for the Old South often conflicts with the difficult circumstances of her current life. Memory is a key element in forming the characters' identities in both novels, as Florens's recollections help define who she is, while Scarlett's memories shape how she sees herself in the world. Ultimately, the idea of 'rememory' in these novels highlights how powerful memory is in shaping our reality. By looking at how memory is created, broken, and used, we can better understand the connection between history, identity, and storytelling.

TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN TONI MORRISON'S *A MERCY* AND MARGARET MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND*

Trauma is a major theme in both novels. In Morrison's work, the characters face the lasting psychological effects of slavery, illustrating that trauma can span generations and impact not just individuals but entire communities. Morrison uses fragmented storytelling to show how trauma disrupts a person's sense of identity and memory. This is clearly seen in the sections of the novel focusing on Florens, who experiences extreme violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Trauma is not just a single event but a continuous state that affects a person's life. Florens's experiences of abandonment, sexual assault, and search for belonging create deep, unresolved grief. The novel's fragmented structure mirrors the way trauma disrupts a person's ability to tell a coherent story or remember clearly. Characters like Florens and Rebekka carry trauma without explicitly stating it; their actions, such as Florens's intense love and Rebekka's emotional numbness, show unprocessed pain. The trauma of enslaved characters often stems from the dehumanizing conditions of slavery. Florens's struggle to find self-worth without validation is an example of this. In her letters to the blacksmith, she writes, "I am become wilderness again if I am not careful. I will be lost forever in this longing for you" (*A Mercy*, 113). Her fragmented writing

reflects the disconnection and chaos trauma causes. Without stable relationships, her identity breaks down, and she feels abandoned by her mother and rejected by the blacksmith.

The metaphor of "wilderness" shows her isolation and regression—trauma makes her want connection but also causes her to lose herself. The sexual assault by the schoolteacher's nephew is described in a vague way, which shows how trauma is often unspeakable. Her later actions, such as her violent rejection of the child she might be carrying, show trauma expressed through physical rupture. Florens's obsession with the blacksmith reflects how trauma distorts self-worth, as she seeks validation to overcome the dehumanization of slavery. Rebekka also embodies trauma and dislocation in the novel, as seen in the line, "the cold was inside her, in her bones" (*A Mercy* 54). Her emotional numbness reflects the trauma of being displaced from her home, her marriage, and multiple losses. Unlike Florens, who reacts emotionally, Rebekka's trauma shows as emotional withdrawal, a way to cope. Intergenerational trauma is also present, demonstrated by Sorrow's infanticide: "She threw the infant into the river and screamed" (*A Mercy*, 119). Sorrow's act is more than madness—it is a form of resistance and resignation to a system that denies her the right to mother. The abrupt nature of the act shows how trauma can erupt suddenly without coherent narrative. Sorrow's fate as an enslaved woman, separated from her family, and driven to kill illustrates how slavery embeds trauma in both bodies and lineage. Morrison critiques systems that erase individuality and shows trauma as a breakdown in relationships. From the perspective of trauma theory, *A Mercy* aligns with Cathy Caruth's idea of "unclaimed experience," where trauma is something that cannot be fully represented, justifying the novel's fragmented form.

In contrast, Mitchell's portrayal of trauma is less deep, often focusing on the loss of the Southern way of life rather than the lived realities of enslaved people. This difference highlights the narratives that dominate American history and the voices that are left out. The brutality of slavery is frequently absent or simplified. Enslaved characters like Mammy and Pork are portrayed with stereotypical traits of loyal servants, which minimizes their personal trauma. For example, the novel says, "Mammy, she loves dat chile [Scarlett]

like she own young'un" (*Gone with the Wind*, 48). Mammy's love is depicted as automatic devotion, ignoring her autonomy, emotions, or history of suffering. Her life is centered around white children, reinforcing the idea of the maternal slave without inner life. When she scolds Scarlett or handles a crisis, it is seen as funny "sass" or loyalty, not as a sign of agency or trauma response. Trauma is also present in characters like Prissy, but it is often used for comedic or plot purposes. For example, the novel says, "Prissy let out a high, wailing shriek and fled" (*Gone with the Wind*, 412). Her panic is treated as a spectacle, not a genuine expression of fear. This contrasts with Florens's silence, where her trauma is not shown as a spectacle but as something deeply personal. The idea of white centrality is key in the novel, as seen in Scarlett's description of her fear: "As long as she lived she would never forget the horror of those days of starvation" (*Gone with the Wind*, 385). Scarlett's horror dominates the narrative, while the suffering of enslaved characters is in the background. This reflects the novel's focus on white Southern trauma, which overshadows the reality of enslaved people's experiences. The novel frames the Civil War and Reconstruction as white Southern suffering, ignoring the systemic violence against Black people. The plantation myth, which portrays benevolent masters and happy slaves, also supports this false narrative, presenting slavery not as traumatic but as a necessary institution that reinforces racist beliefs. The novel reflects historical erasure, favoring dominant narratives—a point criticized by scholars like bell hooks for reinforcing white supremacy.

A Mercy presents trauma as something unavoidable and fragmented, challenging readers to face the horrors of slavery. In contrast, *Gone with the Wind* uses trauma, when it appears, as a background for white narratives, showing literary complicity in racial oppression. This contrast shows how storytelling choices either reveal or hide the trauma of marginalized people.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LITERARY ANALYSIS

The introduction of artificial intelligence has created new opportunities for studying literature, enabling researchers to explore texts in fresh and innovative ways. AI tools are capable of examining language patterns, themes, and the development of characters, offering insights that complement traditional literary methods. This study uses AI to analyze *A Mercy* and *Gone with the Wind*, aiming to uncover deeper themes and relationships that can lead to a more detailed understanding of slavery, identity, and trauma. The study conducts a comparative analysis of *A Mercy* and *Gone with the Wind* using AI tools to extract and examine textual data. The focus is on major themes related to slavery, identity, and trauma, with special attention given to how characters develop and how the stories are structured. AI algorithms are used to detect repeated symbols, language trends, and emotional undertones within the texts. These findings are then interpreted in light of existing literary research, offering a thorough understanding of the themes explored in both works.

The AI analysis identified several key themes that appear in both *A Mercy* and *Gone with the Wind.* In *A Mercy*, the sense of fragmented identity is clear, as seen in how the characters struggle to define themselves. The overall tone of the book is very serious, emphasizing the heavy impact of trauma. On the other hand, *Gone with the Wind* uses a more romanticized style, with a focus on nostalgia and loss. The emotional tone of this novel is often uplifting, even though the characters face deep personal suffering. These findings show how the two novels present slavery and identity in different ways. The comparison of *A Mercy* and *Gone with the Wind* through the use of AI highlights important aspects of slavery, identity, and trauma. Morrison's novel underscores how trauma shapes the way people define themselves, while Mitchell's work tends to overlook the deeper consequences of slavery. The use of AI has helped to create a more detailed understanding of these themes, emphasizing the value of varied storytelling in shaping shared historical memory. This study also brings up questions about the role of technology in studying literature and the potential for AI to uncover hidden meanings in texts.

In summary, the comparison of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* using artificial intelligence provides important insights into the themes of slavery, identity, and trauma. Although both novels deal with these themes, they approach them from very different angles, showing the complexity of American history. The use of AI in literary study improves our understanding of these texts, revealing patterns and connections that contribute

to a fuller picture of the stories surrounding slavery. Future research could look into how AI and literary studies intersect, opening up new possibilities for understanding the past.

WORKS CITED

- Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936.
- Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- Morrison, Toni. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: South End Press, 1981.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. *Social Identity Theory and the Organization*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/258189?refreqid=search-gateway. 1989.
- Baker, Houston. A. *The Black American Literature Forum: A Critical Review of the Literature*. Georgia: The University of Georgia Press. 1996.
- Barbara, Krauthamer. *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- Barker, Deborah. *Reconstructing Violence: The Southern Rape Complex in Film and Literature*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2015.
- Blight, David W. "The Quarrel Over Black Freedom and the Meaning of the Civil War." *Race and Reunion*: *The Civil War in American Memory*, New York: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Boudreau, Kristin. Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Contemporary Literature,* vol. 36, no. 3, 1995, p. 447-465.
- Brave, Heart, Maria Yellow Horse. "The Historical Trauma Response among Natives and its Relationship with Substance Abuse." Journal of Indigenous Issues, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, P. 7-22.
- Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William Brown, a Fugitive Slave*. Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, Boston, 1847.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. New York: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Gates, H. Louis. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. London: Oxford University Press. 1988.
- Harris, T. *Slavery and the Making of America*. Oxford University Press. 2011.
- Hooks, bell. *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Koolish, Lynda. "To Be Loved and Cry Shame: A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved." *Melus: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2001, P. 169-195.
- Lorenz, Erik. "Slavery, Motherhood, and Recurring Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." Journal of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research, vol. 13, article 4, 2021.
- LU, Xingyu. *An Analysis of the Construction of Female Identity in A Mercy Under the Perspective of Homi Bhabha's Post-Colonial Theory*. Atlantis Press, 2021.
- Mackethan, Lucinda H. *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.
- MANDIBLE, Myra, editor. American Shame: Stigma and the Body Politics. Indiana University Press, 2016.
- Marc, C. Conner**. *The Aesthetic of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Rody, Caroline. Toni Morrison's Beloved: History, 'Rememory', and a Clamor for a Kiss." American Literary History, vol. 7, no. 1, 1995, p. 92-119.
- Root, Maria P. P. "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality." *Personality and Psychopathology*, edited by L. Brown and M. Ballou, Guilford Press, 1992, P. 229-265.
- Smith, J. *The Trauma of Slavery: A Comparative Study of African American Literature*. Routledge, 2019.
- Van, der Kolk, Bessel. The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. Viking, 2014.