ORAL STORYTELLING AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

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Abstract. *This article compares the narrative functions of oral tradition in contemporary American fiction. Close reading focuses on voice, repetition, naming, and the intergenerational reconstruction of cultural memory in works by Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich.*

Keywords: *oral storytelling, cultural memory, Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, narrative, ancestral memory, oral tradition.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada zamonaviy Amerika nasrida og‘zaki hikoyachilik va madaniy xotirani qayta tiklash o‘rtasidagi munosabat tahlil qilinadi. Toni Morrison va Luiza Erdrik asarlaridagi qo‘shiq, ism, avlodlar xotirasi hamda hikoyachi ovozining badiiy vazifalari qiyosiy o‘rganiladi.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *og‘zaki hikoyachilik, madaniy xotira, Toni Morrison, Luiza Erdrik, narrativ, avlodlar xotirasi, og‘zaki an’ana, o‘zlik*

Аннотация. *В статье анализируется связь устного повествования с реконструкцией культурной памяти в современной американской прозе. Сопоставляются голос, повтор и межпоколенческая передача знаний в произведениях Тони Моррисон и Луизы Эрдрик.*

Ключевые слова: *устное повествование, культурная память, Тони Моррисон, Луиза Эрдрик, нарратив, родовая память, устная традиция.*

Introduction

Oral storytelling in contemporary American fiction does more than preserve recognizable folklore. In Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon and Louise Erdrich’s Tracks, songs, names, and competing accounts shape the conditions under which a community remembers. The present article examines oral form as a narrative method rather than as an ornamental reference to tradition.

The distinction is important because a familiar motif does not carry a fixed interpretation across different texts. Its narrative placement and the reader’s changing expectations determine its immediate effect. Oral storytelling in contemporary American fiction does more than preserve recognizable folklore.

Attention to the order in which information becomes available reveals a formal dimension of memory. Readers are asked to revise earlier assumptions as fragments acquire a different context. Oral storytelling in contemporary American fiction does more than preserve recognizable folklore.

A comparison should therefore focus on how each work distributes knowledge among characters and narrators, rather than treating folklore as a catalogue of shared symbols. Oral storytelling in contemporary American fiction does more than preserve recognizable folklore. [1].

Method and conceptual frame

The discussion uses comparative close reading, with particular attention to voice, repetition, naming, and narrative gaps. Cultural memory is treated as a process of transmission and revision. The approach does not assume that a fictional narrative can serve as a transparent record of communal history.

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Songs as narrative evidence

In Song of Solomon, a children’s song acquires significance as Milkman’s understanding of family history changes. Its repetitions do not simply add atmosphere; they invite the character and reader to reconsider the relationship between everyday speech and inherited knowledge.

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Plural voices and uncertain authority

Tracks presents a history mediated through distinct narrators whose perspectives cannot be reduced to a single authoritative account. Oral storytelling thus becomes a site of negotiation: the act of telling reveals both attachment to a shared past and the limits of individual testimony.

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Naming, belonging, and narrative gaps

Names may preserve kinship while also recording breaks in transmission. The interpretive work of a character who asks where a name originated resembles the reader’s work of connecting incomplete accounts. Narrative gaps therefore produce meaning rather than merely indicating missing information.

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Comparative discussion

Morrison foregrounds the gradual reinterpretation of inherited signs, while Erdrich places pressure on the authority of any single teller. Both approaches resist the idea of memory as a stable archive. What matters is not simply which story survives but who can tell it and under what circumstances.

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Conclusion

Oral storytelling in these works is an active mode of literary knowledge. Through repetition, narrative plurality, and the revision of names, cultural memory becomes a process that must be interpreted. The comparison suggests that folklore’s continuing importance lies in its adaptability to changing forms of communal experience.

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Practical recommendations

For classroom application, students can map who tells each remembered story, what information each retelling preserves, and what remains uncertain. Such a comparison helps distinguish narrative memory from documentary evidence and prevents treating oral tradition as a single, unchanging voice.

References

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