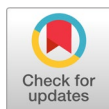


Linguistics and Literature Review (LLR)

Volume 12 Issue 2, Fall 2026

ISSN(P): 2221-6510, ISSN(E): 2409-109X

Homepage: <http://journals.umt.edu.pk/llr/Home.aspx>



- Title:** Reframing Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: A Post-Traumatic Growth Perspective
- Author (s):** Muhammad Afzal Khan Janjua
- Affiliation (s):** Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan
- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.122.01>
- History:** Received: December 25, 2026, Revised: July 28, 2026, Accepted: August 12, 2026, Published: 7 Oct, 2026
- Citation:** Janjua, M. A. K. (2026). Reframing trauma in Toni Morrison's beloved: A post-traumatic growth perspective. *Linguistics and Literature Review*, 12(2), 02-27. <https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.122.01>
- Copyright:** © The Authors
- Licensing:**  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of
Department of English and Literary Studies, School of Liberal Arts,
University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan

Reframing Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: A Post-Traumatic Growth Perspective

Muhammad Afzal Khan Janjua*

Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Abstract

Whether traumatic experience reduces the African American subjectivity to a diminished and passive state or enables it to rejuvenate hope and foster individual growth within the segregated and oppressive sociopolitical milieu of slavery-era America is the central issue that this study investigates in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Drawing upon postulates of Post-traumatic Growth Theory, an interdisciplinary framework that combines literary studies and positive psychology. This study explores how traumatic experiences enable the African American characters in the novel to cultivate a greater appreciation of life, seek positive relationships with others, discover new possibilities, strive for personal growth, and develop a deeper sense of spirituality. By reframing trauma, this study finds that the characters endure trauma and dehumanization, yet their precarious circumstances stimulate them to make independent choices, overcome obstacles, pursue self-actualization, and grow as individuals who aspire to a better future. The significance of this research lies in its capacity to illuminate the therapeutic effects of confronting trauma in general, and to highlight African Americans' struggle, their survival and their individual and collective renewal of hope in particular.

Keywords: African Americans, interdisciplinary, Morrison, post-traumatic growth, trauma

Introduction

Was the racist project of white Americans able to erase the essence of Black identity during the antebellum and postbellum eras? This research paper, while examining Toni Morrison's celebrated novel *Beloved* (2007) via Post-traumatic Growth Theory, posits that the Black characters in the novel, after going through generations of trauma, do not lose the fundamental human dignity and values. It argues that instead of descending into regression, obliteration and oblivion, the Black identity is resuscitated, it survives, and

*Corresponding Author: makjanjua@gcuf.edu.pk

ultimately grows to embrace the future. The novel's non-linear or circular narrative structure, delineating the traumatized and dehumanized conditions of the African Americans in the novel, primarily focuses on the protagonist Sethe who kills her own daughter 'Beloved' in the novel (an act which is symbolically significant and liable to multifarious interpretations). From a broader perspective, Toni Morrison mirrors the trials and tribulations faced by the African American community while portraying resilience and strength of a family saga during the pre- and post-civil rights movement in the United States of America. Almost all the African American characters in the novel go through traumatic experiences one way or the other: trauma is pervasively present in the novel. Drawing upon the tenets of Post-traumatic Growth Theory, which is comparatively a new subject within the 'trauma studies'-this paper contends that characters in the novel do not lose hope in the face of adversity. They yearn for freedom of human will, make independent choices and take solace in strong companionship and human camaraderie in attaining self-actualization and individual growth. Therefore, all these characteristics challenge the Eurocentric, reductionist discursive labeling and stereotyping of Black identity as weak or eternally suppressed subject. The healing capacity of trauma of whatever kind has become the subject of a recent theoretical development-Post-Traumatic Growth Theory- in the psychoanalytical field, makes the case for rehabilitation, healing and the actualization of selves under traumatic duress, rather than highlighting horrendous and debilitating impacts on human psyche. The current study utilizes the theory in illuminating unbounded resilience and growth of Afro-American characters in the novel.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2007), a postmodernist text, continues to inspire legions of scholarship owing to its propensity for endless interpretive possibilities. Primarily contextualized and rooted in demonic racism and the debilitating traumatic aftermath on the African American community, this study invites readers' attention to previously unexplored terrain that is the post-traumatic individual growth and development in the confrontation of trauma. As a matter of fact, trauma has, usually, been taken as a self-effacing experience. However, this research posits an aberration from the conventional trauma-related interpretations of the novel. This research paper goes one step further by positing that trauma, because of precarious conditions that befall certain individuals or communities, may become therapeutic, a source of healing and growth in the novel. This study has found that the traumatic conditions do not necessarily put the affected

subjects in a state of denial, oblivion or outright pessimism where life loses all its meaning and purpose; rather, trauma ignites among the traumatic selves-African Americans-a reinvigoration, self-actualization and the revival of hope. Hope is used as an essential ancillary to the growth perspective of trauma. Snyder defines hope as a “positive motivational state based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency and pathways” (He et al., [2026](#)). The current research premises that traumatic experiences lead to hopefulness instead of despair and pessimism in the context of African Americans’ experience.

Sethe (the protagonist of the novel), Paul D (shattered and rootless), Denver (daughter of Sethe), Stamp Paid among others-all these characters, despite reeling in horrendous slavery and then running away from ‘Sweet Home’, which resembles a ‘death house’, take control of their lives. By the end of the novel, they are able to decide their destiny and start thinking independently, thereby embracing free will and hopefulness. Although they are not detached from the debilitating and horrific past, yet the past does not hinder them from envisioning a better future. It is illuminated that even the worst kind of adversity cannot shatter the core of human values. Human values-love, sympathy, companionship, freedom: all these traits associated with the African -Americans characters not only remain intact but also flourish and get strengthened with the passage of time. This resuscitation of hope, and the desire to embrace the future-despite going through a ghettoized past- are explored in the novel through the framework of Post-traumatic Growth Theory. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the current evaluation of Morrison’s *Beloved* ([2007](#)) stimulates understanding of the traumatizing and suppressive mechanisms of the dominant white supremacists, colonial or oppressive groups while also illuminating the determination, courage and individual growth of African American. This research has focused on the major postulates of Post-traumatic Growth Theory such as appreciation of individuality, finding new possibilities, individual growth, healthy human companionship or camaraderie and solace in spirituality. As an increment to trauma studies, the exploration has found the therapeutic impacts of trauma on the lives of the Afro-American subjects, thereby forming an interdisciplinary and productive relationship between positive psychology and literary studies.

Literature Review

The twentieth century has been characterized, in the words of Shoshana

Felman, as “a century of trauma and [at the same time] a century of trauma theory” (as cited in Yang, [2023](#), p.1). Trauma, as a psychological phenomenon, came under rigorous investigation during and after the two World Wars. The use of phrases like ‘shellshock’ and ‘combat fatigue’ emerged as significant discursive tools for exposing the catastrophic effects of war on people’s psyches. Thus, there emerged critical debates in trauma-related scholarships about how trauma affects lives. Trauma, as a concept, connotes a physical wound or injury to the body owing to “physical, chemical, and biological factors” a meaning that later “extends to the psychological field, bearing the meaning that psychological damage is caused by external stimuli” (Lu & Zhang, [2023](#)). Sigmund Freud, a dominant voice in psychoanalytical Theory, has taken the concept in such a way that the traumatic experience is the “one which, in a very short space of time, is able to increase the strength of a given stimulus so enormously that its assimilation, or rather its elaboration, can no longer be effected by normal means” (Freud, [2020](#)). Conventional ‘Trauma Theory’, as mentioned earlier, gained currency in the backdrop of World Wars in the Western context also focused on Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-a condition that afflicted the debilitated and war-strained soldiers. This field of scholarship, subsequently, also inspired and permeated women’s liberation movements, and paved the way to orchestrating anti-child abuse campaigns in the United States (Lu & Zhang, [2023](#)). As a matter of fact and consequence, many artists also joined the trend by embedding their narratives with characters immersed in traumatic situations in order to explore the inner turmoil wrought by trauma. Thereafter, trauma, as a theoretical paradigm and as a post-catastrophic psychological condition, made noticeable inroads into literary scholarship, and the current study builds on this foundation while extending it further.

Though Freud’s psychoanalytic theorisations in the wake of the World Wars are widely discussed, it was primarily Cathy Caruth who systematically explored the phenomenon of trauma in literary aesthetics in the late twentieth century. Caruth opines that “the response to trauma is often uncontrolled and delayed, occurring in repetitive ways in the victim’s mind, such as flashbacks, and other recurring phenomena” (Lu & Zhang, [2023](#)). Caruth’s seminal contribution to trauma studies lies in her argument that trauma is fundamentally an experience of belatedness-that is, the traumatic event is not fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence but returns insistently and unexpectedly, disrupting the survivor’s sense of time,

self, and narrative coherence (Caruth, [1995](#)). For Caruth, this temporal dislocation is not merely a psychological symptom but a defining characteristic of trauma itself, one that poses a profound challenge to conventional modes of representation and storytelling. Crucially, she contends that literature, by virtue of its capacity to give form to the unrepresentable, becomes a privileged site for bearing witness to traumatic experience and transmitting it across generations. It is precisely this insight that makes Morrison's *Beloved* ([2007](#)) with its non-linear narrative, fragmented voices, and the ghost of Beloved as an embodiment of unresolved traumatic memory—a compelling literary instantiation of Caruth's theoretical framework. While the present study departs from Caruth's emphasis on the paralyzing and unresolvable nature of trauma by foregrounding instead its growth-oriented dimensions through PTG Theory, her foundational theorizations remain indispensable for understanding the traumatic landscape within which Morrison's characters operate and ultimately transcend traumatic stress. The significance of the portrayal of trauma in literary aesthetics lies in "its ability to faithfully represent the indescribable traumatic experiences of victims" (Yang, [2023](#)). However, Post-traumatic Growth theory is a recent occurrence which has been employed, most often, in the rehabilitation of traumatized patients. For instance, Xiong et al. ([2026](#)) have applied Post-traumatic Growth theory on cancer patients, concluding that family caregivers' interventions "tailored to specific stages", skills training, early education and supportive policies—all of these coping mechanisms help foster post-traumatic growth among cancer survivors. However, its application in the literary field is relatively rare, a gap the author of this article has tried to fill to understand the nature of traumatic experiences in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* ([2007](#)) to provide, hitherto unexplored, perspective to understanding the traumatic experiences of African American characters in the novel. This article argues that the traumatic experiences of the African Americans and other marginalized communities in the novel help them make independent choices, harness maturity, strive for individual growth and validate the efficacy of human relationships in overcoming trials and tribulations including racial segregation and racial victimhood.

Likewise, the intersection of psychology and literature is a perennial phenomenon that has been pervasively studied. Such interplay is utilized to comprehend the emotional and behavioral undercurrents of characters inhabiting the fictional world. Neelam Tandon has explored the close

affinity between psychology and literature with a focus on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2007) arguing that trauma and oppression affect characters' lives in multiple ways. Employing classical trauma theory and psychoanalysis, Tandon, while exploring the impacts of slavery on characters' lives especially on the character of Sethe, finds out that there are "lasting impacts of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities" (Tandon, 2019). Furthermore, she concurs that trauma continues to impact the African American community even after the abolition of slavery and racism in American context. Similarly, Mayank (2023) adds to the conventional understanding of trauma by arguing that the characters in the novel grapple with recurring trauma, and examines how their lives have been affected and their "identities fractured" while dealing with historical trauma meted out to the Afro-American community who has been experience in racial discrimination and oppression for centuries (Mayank, 2023, p. 141). Furthermore, she has found that the traumatic experiences also bring in healing, but that process is incomplete, signifying the "lingering effects of trauma" on the African American community (Mayank, 2023, p. 146). Mayank concludes that both characters and community carry "the burden of historical trauma" stressing upon the fact that "both personal and shared traumatic experiences shape the self" (Mayank, 2023, p. 146). In the above discussion, Mayank has primarily explored the aftermaths and how trauma cripple African American characters psychologically, ignoring the positive and growth perspective.

Linking the segregation of African American community with the oppression of the Black women, Mushonga et al. (2021) employ feminist perspective by arguing that the Black female subject refuses to surrender in the face of traumatic and oppressive experiences; rather, Black women demonstrate strong resilience, individual growth and self-actualization. Their explorations of the Black female subjectivity as an embodiment of personal growth and social and communal significance helps in understanding the tribulations of female characters such as Sethe, Denver and Babby Suggs in the novel. However, they rely on a feminist perspective. The current study goes beyond merely feminist resilience to the collective renewal and growth of African American subjectivities' confrontation with trauma. Elaborating on the different manifestations of trauma in the novel under study, Liting Wang, while exploring the traumatic experience faced by the black children in the novel, concludes that Morrison's "early works mainly focused on alleviating the trauma experienced by Black children by

‘accusing’ the cruel acts of white people and ‘witnessing’ the traumatic history of black people” (Wang, [2022](#), p. 228). Wang, too, explores the plight of children and the aftermaths of trauma on child psychology, whereas, the current study argues for the growth of Denver—a child—towards maturity and self-actualization.

Validating Cathy Caruth’s notion of trauma as manifested through flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and fragmented recollection, Bakhyaseema ([2023](#)) has examined the novel *Beloved* by highlighting the obliterating nature of traumatic experiences that not only reflect the unresolved memories of the past but also help to contribute to the fragmentation of identity formation. Thus, Bakhyaseema has tried to explore the intersection of non-linear and fragmentary nature of the narrative structure of the novel with the chaotic and fragmented selves of the Black people that inhabit the novel vis-a-vis exposing the unimaginable and inhumane atrocities meted out to Black people in white dominated external environment, and it also helps in modifying the nature of memory, history, individual and collective identity (Bakhyaseema, [2023](#)). This critical reading of the novel has linked the circular structure of the novel with the fragmented and truncated identities, but it lacks exploration of the healing and growth of African American characters dealing with confronting trauma.

Helena Austine connects the experiences of slavery with the therapeutic narratives in which both perspectives unearth the complexities of traumatic experiences. However, Austine’s argument does not include the procedure involved in trauma’s therapeutic benefits. She contends that the personal narrative regarding slavery reflects the working of authority and power contribute to the development of psychological trauma through means of objectification and dehumanization. She contends that “the objectification of human beings...was part and parcel of slavery’s horrors: an aggregate of traumas that eroded the enslaved subject’s sense of self” (Austine, [2007](#), p. 12). However, this argument also falls short of the effect of trauma on individual characters in terms of growth, renewal of hope, and spiritual awakening.

Commenting on the nature of trauma in the novel, Janeen Selfridge goes so far as to argue that the character of Beloved, the reincarnation of the slaughtered daughter, is the physical embodiment of the fractured and fragmented identities of Sethe and Denver. The protagonist of the novel, Sethe, after experiencing oppressive and brutal enslavement that ‘took her

milk away', loses the value of being human and which distorts her perception of love, resulting in an attempt to murder all her children as to get away with the kind of slavery she has been facing. Furthermore, it is argued that Denver, the daughter, is also traumatized by her troubled childhood. It validates the cyclical nature of violence, resulting from generational enslavement. Both Sethe and Denver lose their essence and humanity, metamorphosing into hysterical, shattered, dissociated and distrustful individuals. Their turbulent and chaotic existence finds redemption through Beloved who makes them realize the value of human freedom. (Selfridge, [2018](#)) Therefore, Selfridge's understanding of psychological trauma and its physical manifestation in the form of Beloved's reincarnation are explored through the lens of Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other related anxiety disorders which lack a broader and upside understanding of trauma. This research further examines the transitional impacts of trauma on characters in the novel *Beloved*. Similarly, Yang ([2023](#)) has also utilized the traditional trauma theory to comparatively understand "the agonizing internal battles of trauma-afflicted mothers" (Yang, [2023](#), p. 1) in Morrison's *Beloved* and Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*. He highlights the debilitating and harrowing conditions experienced by mothers in marginalized communities in general and by African Americans in particular that are "rooted in war, racial discrimination and systemic prejudice" (p.2). Yang improvises further by opining that the Black character's distressed and fragmented selves, gain agency through "fragmented narrations across time, space and characters" (p. 2). In conclusion, Yang argues, 'enslaved narratives' "present the fragmented inner world of the traumatized individuals, reflecting their shattered psyche and conflicting dual personalities" (p.7). As the above discussion demonstrates, although the critics have added valuable critical discussion of the novel the novel, the current study offers a fresh and unexplored perspective.

Interpreting the novel further, Gibson ([2025](#)) discusses the spiritual and religious symbols in the novel *Beloved*, arguing that the character of Beloved in the novel is both an embodiment of Christian morality and traditional African American cosmological patterns. He argues that that the intermingling of both religious and cultural ethos in the novel invokes spiritual awakening that complements the theorization of post-traumatic growth. It signifies the pervasive inevitability of spirituality among Black people as an expression of personal strength and resilience in the face of

enduring oppression. Their focus rests only upon spiritual and religious perspective, whereas Post-traumatic Growth Theory covers multiple dimensions of changes. In the same vein, Chin et al. (2023), combining racially triggered trauma and post-traumatic growth, contend that post-traumatic growth helps in shredding externally imposed narratives in search for identity. They are of the view that narration is one of the potent ways of reinvigorating cognitive abilities that ultimately promote growth, survival, and healing. They connect growth with narration and narrative structure rather than examining the tenets of Post-traumatic Growth theory in the novel, an approach adopted by present study

The previous trauma related studies have dealt with the novel highlighting the negative effects of the trauma in the lives of characters. However, there is a scarcity of scholarship on the growth-oriented dimensions of trauma- a gap this article addresses. It establishes the fact that the centuries of oppression and repression in the form of animal cruelty and subhuman treatment inflicted upon African Americans, have not marred the nobility and maturity of Black individuals. The current study revisits trauma in *Beloved* (2007) by implying that traumatic experiences help the African American characters develop into mature, independent and noble individuals. In addition, this exploration also challenges Eurocentric and reductionist approaches towards the Black subjects. To understand the positive impact of trauma, a very recent concept within positive psychology in the form of Post-traumatic Growth Theory is concurrently utilized, that makes this research incremental and significant. The major propositions of this theory are discussed in the succeeding section of the article.

Theoretical Framework

This section discuss the major tenets of Post-traumatic Growth Theory and its genealogy are discussed in detail. To begin with, the positive impact of suffering on human beings is a subject that almost all major religions, moral and intellectual philosophies have addressed Nietzsche was among the first philosophers to discuss suffering and trauma their impact on individuals during the 19th century (Woodward & Joseph, 2003). Nietzsche, who himself experienced severe mental breakdowns, went on to theorize the nature of suffering based on his own experiences. He highlighted the transformative power of suffering and resilience because they are the “ultimate emancipator of spirit”, and the sufferer feels “as though born again and has a new skin”, with a “finer taste for joyfulness” (Taylor, 2015).

However, the field of positive psychology has made the ‘therapeutic’ impact of suffering a proper subject of clinical investigation of late. Post-traumatic Growth Theory is a relatively recent development in the field of positive psychology that invokes hope and healing in stressful and agonizing circumstances. It is based on the premise that stressful situations can encourage growth and positivity, rather than pushing individuals towards regression and inwardness. This growth is not only renewal; it is, as Linley and Joseph opine, “more than simply resilience” and it refers to going beyond previous levels of functioning” (Joseph & Linley, [2008](#)). Woodward and Joseph have discussed the positive impacts of traumatic experiences, arguing that trauma ignites growth. They categorize such growth in three dimensions: first, people, who have experienced trauma develop a greater understanding of the value of human relationships; secondly, the trauma survivors start thinking positively about themselves that enhances acceptance of their previously shattered identities; thirdly, they begin to view take their lives holistically and positively, leading to what both the scholars call ‘positive changes in life philosophy’. (Woodward & Joseph, [2003](#)) Post-traumatic Growth Theory aims to highlight the life-giving impacts of traumatic experiences rather than pushing sufferers into a state of oblivion.

Post-traumatic Growth theory is primarily attributed to Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun. However, Tedeschi ([2023](#)) extended the traditional scholarship in trauma studies, arguing that Post-traumatic Growth Theory could also be utilized to address suffering and adversity. He has identified major postulates of PTG- efficacy of human relationships, finding new possibilities in life, enhanced appreciation of life, personal growth and spirituality. All these tenet provide theoretical frame to evaluate Morrison’s *Beloved* ([2007](#)).

These two psychologists presented their postulations, known as ‘Post-traumatic Growth theory’ in the 1990s. The theory addresses the positive outcomes of trauma experienced in the context of adversity and extremely violent living conditions. This theory refers to “positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi et al., [2018](#), p. 3). These theorists found that “changes analogous to PTG can happen in people who have not been exposed to [trauma]. However, PTG results from processes initiated by a significant challenge to a person’s assumptive world-a challenge to

their core beliefs” (Tedeschi et al., [2018](#), p. 6).

Congruent with these theoretical propositions, Tedeschi asserts that “people develop new understandings of themselves, the world they live in, how to relate to other people, the kind of future they might have and a better understanding of how to live life” (Collier, [2016](#)). Post-Traumatic Growth Theory provides a profound understanding of trauma survivors and traumatic situations. Collier (2016), commenting on the efficacy of this theory while speaking at an event organized by the American Psychological Association, discussed the vital contribution of Kanako Taku, an associate professor of psychology at Oakland University. He highlighted that Taku utilized PTG following the devastating 1995 Kobe earthquake in Japan. Collier quotes Taku as saying that “resilience is the personal attribute or ability to recover”. PTG, on the other hand, helps individuals find a sense of personal growth. It's a process that "takes a lot of time, energy, and struggle"(Collier, [2016](#)). Calhoun and Tedeschi summarized the concept of ‘growth’, rather than ‘benefit’, arising from traumatic experiences and difficult conditions into five characteristics: “seeing new possibilities, changed relationships, the paradoxical view of being both stronger yet more vulnerable, a greater appreciation for life, and changes in the individual's spiritual and existential domains” (Calhoun & Tedeschi, [2004](#), p. 95). Discussing their findings, Calhoun and Tedeschi inform that:

The confrontation in life, perhaps including one's mortality can lead them to become actively engaged with issues related to a variety of questions that for many individuals have central and highly important significance-existential issues about purpose and meaning and self-assessment. The aftermath of trauma can also produce a constellation of intrusive cognitive processes that can include, but are not restricted to, elements directly related to the crisis. (Calhoun & Tedeschi, [2004](#), p. 97)

As an extension of Post-traumatic Growth theory, Tedeschi and Calhoun developed another perspective in the form of Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which, according to them, measures five outcomes of trauma, such as “appreciation of life, relationship with others, new possibilities in life, personal growth and spiritual change” (Collier, [2016](#)).

Bray’s psycho-spiritual model ([2010](#), [2013](#)) within the paradigm of

Post-traumatic Growth Theory is useful for understanding the resuscitation of hope among the Black individuals in race-conscious American society, both historically and in contemporary times. The spiritual reawakening after suffering is something that Bray adds to the discourse on positive psychology. Unlike traditional assumptions that trauma disrupts the mental equilibrium, Bray is of the view that trauma does not lead to the shattering of core assumptions or to rumination; rather, it results in spiritual emergence (Khursheed & Shahnawaz, [2020](#)). Bray postulates that the conception of trauma and its related suffering is understood differently across societies. Unlike the Western coping model which focuses on a rationalistic understanding of trauma through the supreme rational stratagem inherently found in human beings and is logocentric and anthropocentric in nature-Bray's model speaks to spirituality and the power of spiritual awakening which, even after suffering experiencing innumerable forms suffering, remains intact, complete, serene and alive. It is not the self-deterministic technique that controls or copes with trauma; rather, it is the connection with the Supreme Being is believed to free individuals from worldly suffering. The spiritual awakening is equated with the increased awareness that results in "psycho-spiritual growth" (Khursheed & Shahnawaz, [2020](#)).

Similarly, Goodman's ([2004](#)) examination of the impacts of trauma on Sudanese tribe known as the Dinka, who, like Black sufferers in the United States of America, experienced ethnic cleansing, barbaric form of torture, and death by starvation and other manifestations of violence. He went on to conclude that, as reported by Khursheed and Shahnawaz ([2020](#)), the "participants expressed feelings of fellowship, hopefulness, and benevolence rather than resentment and victimization, six to twelve months after arriving in the USA" (Khursheed & Shahnawaz, [2020](#)). Furthermore, it was their unwavering belief in the supreme authority of God Almighty which did not let their bodies and souls surrender to trials and tribulations of all kinds. It was not only their resilience but also their strength of character that enabled them to stand tall against all abominable odds. Likewise, Janoff-Bulman also argues that trauma has limited impact on human beings because of universal core values such as self-worth, self-control, luck, predictability of events and benevolence (Khursheed & Shahnawaz, [2020](#)) these core values, which serves as the guiding principles of human life, bring meaning and hope to human existence. In conclusion, the Post-traumatic Growth theory provides an expansive framework for understanding the traumatic experiences during the height of racial

discrimination, dehumanization and subhuman treatment of enslaved African American in the before and after Civil War in United States of America during that period

Methodology

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary in approach relying on the textual analysis of the novel with a focus on the major characters-Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, Paul D and Stamp Paid. It seeks to bridge the gap between literary criticism and positive psychology. Traditionally, psychoanalytical theories are employed to understand the nature of trauma in the novel, but this research has gone one step further by invoking the postulates of Post-Traumatic Growth theory. The congruence of these two paradigms as theoretical lenses has contributed to the multifarious interpretations of the novel. Drawing upon the postulates of Post-traumatic Growth Theory-namely, appreciation of life, finding new possibilities, individual growth, health human companionship or camaraderie and solace through spirituality-the study highlights the redemptive power of traumatic experiences. The current study has primarily utilized theorizations proposed by Calhoun and Tedeschi (2004), and later developed by Tedeschi (2023). The character study is central to the rigorous textual analysis owing to their centrality to the narrative structure, trauma and racism. The textual analysis traces individuals' transformation, survival, resilience and growth in the light of major tenets discussed above. The analysis section interprets the important character dialogue, settings, symbols and descriptions in the novel followed by rigorous interpretation and discussion. For clarity, it should also be noted that although the narrative structure of the novel is circular and non-linear, yet the textual analysis is carried out systematically in accordance with theoretical framework and in organized form. The research, being qualitative in nature, has not used any table, figures, charts or any other quantitative or statistical data, because the study is essentially interpretive and evaluative.

In addition to the textual analysis of the novel *Beloved*, this study also takes insights from other disciplines and scholarships ranging from trauma related studies, positive psychology, spirituality, African American studies, intersectionality, critical race theory, critical theory feminism, critical discourse analysis and literary criticism. The interdisciplinary approach has crystalized and chiseled the argument, contending that traumatic experience also induces growth and self-actualization viz-a-viz the fictional narration

of Toni Morrison. This study uses a lowercase ‘t’ instead of an uppercase ‘T’ while mentioning Post-traumatic instead of ‘Post-Traumatic’ for the sake of clarity. As a delimitation of the study, the novel is discussed within the American context of slavery and Reconstruction, the historical period portrayed in the novel. The treatment and status of African Americans in contemporary American society have changed considerably, a subject that could be explored in future research.

Analysis and Discussions

Post-traumatic Growth in Morrison’s *Beloved*

This section presents a rigorous analysis of the African American characters in the novel, with reference to the major postulations of Post-traumatic Growth Theory. The application of this theory seeks to explain the major characters’ increased valuing of their lived experiences, belief in strong and healthy relationships, and their search for new possibilities in personal and spiritual growth.

Against the trauma-silhouetted backdrop of Morrison’s *Beloved* (2007), hope is rejuvenated through the character of Denver, the youngest daughter of the protagonist, Sethe. Denver’s appreciation of life, along with her desire and determination not only to face the ordeal but also to confront it courageously, mirrors her personal growth and maturity as an individual. She grows up under unimaginably terrible circumstance, into which she was exposed from her mother’s painful pregnancy to the “raggediest looking trash” (Morrison, 2007, p. 38), culminating in witnessing the most inhuman act of savagery-the infanticide of her sister-committed by her own mother. Becoming a mature person after enduring such circumstances from birth to adulthood is nothing less than a miracle-an attribute her mother repeatedly ascribes to her. While still in the womb, she was miraculously saved during Sethe’s precarious flight from Sweet Home. She was also miraculously saved during her birth in a canoe. Existing scholarship primarily focuses on the character of Sethe who receives primary attention because of her heroic struggle, her embodiment of sacrifice, suffering, and the cruel reminder of dehumanizing slavery reflected in her actions. By contrast, far less attention is given to the heroics of Denver. Denver’s struggle to stand tall against these circumstances is more compelling and, in many ways, sacrosanct. Sethe barely remembers her own childhood and upbringing, except for a few sparse memories of the brief days she spent with her

mother. Denver, her daughter, on the other hand, is someone whose childhood from the birth is like an open secret to her. Her ability to confront and ultimately overcome these bedeviling circumstances is even more laudable, that speaks volumes about her growth and maturity. It is a widely accepted psychological phenomenon that childhood scars are difficult to erase in later life, but Denver's case takes a different turn—a phenomenon consistent with Post-traumatic Growth theory. Denver's audacity of hope and individual strength can be seen in the fact that she neither runs away from, nor is she terrified by, the 'spiteful,' 'venom-filled', 'lackluster', and barren house 124 Bluestone Road house. Rather, Shetakes pleasure in the enchanted and haunted space, as reflected in the omniscient narrator's comment:

None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but knowing the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it sacred them; Grandma Baby knew, but it saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of Ghost Company. Even Sethe didn't love it. She just took it for granted—like a sudden change in the weather. (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 45)

The resuscitation of hope finds its most desirable expression in Denver, who, from a home-bound girl, comes to take control of her life by the end of the novel, when she feels compelled to go outside and explore the world—partly out of personal desire and partly out of responsibility to her home and family. Morrison narrates that “Denver knew it was on her”. She is the one who “would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two of them behind and go ask somebody for help” (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 286).

Unlike many individuals who face trauma it does not seem to shatter Denver, as often occurs in traumatic situations. Most often, individuals thrown to the mercy of suffering and tribulation lose their sanctity and human values; however, in Denver's case, she emerges as a value-laden, responsible, mature, and strong human being. Morphing from a person who “wept, sighed, trembled, and fell into fit” (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 35) into an autonomous and determined individual is a testament to Denver's unfazed and uncanny strength of character. Denver is the kind of girl who “lived all her life in a house peopled by the living activity of the dead” (p.35) It is Denver who “decided to do the necessary” (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 296), a resolve that compels Stamp Paid to say “Aw no. Hey. Lay off Denver, Paul

D. That's my heart. I'm proud of that girl" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 313). Denver chooses to remain indomitable, resilient and strong. She is the one who takes control of her life: a life marred by trauma from inception to her tryst with responsibility and maturity. She has been facing the void of oblivion and loneliness throughout her eighteen years of life. She has been living in a house not only haunted inside and out but also cast out and condemned by the community. No one in the vicinity of once 'loud and noisy' and later 'spiteful' and 'venom-filled' house dared to enter it. She was also deprived of fatherly protection and care. Her yearning for fatherly love and care is reflected in her questions to Paul D about her father, since her mother appears reluctant to revisit her own painful memories.

Furthermore, she assumes the role of a moral crusader because she is the one who objects to Paul D's intrusion into their house and his newfound camaraderie with her mother. The development of affinity between an ever painful and grief-stricken mother and another slave named Paul D, disturbs her. For Denver, Paul D is not only an anomaly in the troubling enchantment associated with the infanticide of her 'already crawling' sister but also an intrusion into the mother-daughter relationship. Both the daughter and mother have witnessed the most abominable act committed by the latter and both have been living through this grief. Therefore, she objects to the arrival of Paul D at the outset. However, she does not remain rigid. Rigidity is antithetical to flexibility and growth as a person. Rigidity discourages change and adaptability to the varying circumstances whereas flexibility of character embraces metamorphosis and adaptability: it is one of the hallmarks of being a civilized and mature person. After observing the changes in her and her mother's life during the carnival tour, Denver begins to tolerate Paul D. No longer a difficult child who used to speak in a harsh manner while speaking to strangers, she turns into a convivial human being who respects and values Paul D's sagacity and lightheartedness. Her spirit gets nourished and the omnipresent narrator of the novel takes the opportunity to equate this revived spirit of human relationships by commenting that "and on the way home (from the carnival tour), although leading them now, the shadows of three people still held hands" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 59) -the supreme virtues of humanity. It also establishes the fact that trauma of whatever kind, even Sethe's magnanimous sufferings in particular and the African American people in general cannot sanitize the nobility of the Black self. The revival of human relationships could be emblematic of the Black self that continues to revive, thrive and remains an

integral part of the land that Henry Kissinger called 'the melting-pot'. The Indomitable spirit of the Black self cannot be conquered by any means.

Reawakening of spirituality is another facet of the psychological growth of the characters mirrored through the character of Baby Suggs, who, in Santos's words, "provides stabilization, harmony, communal bonding, and individual empowerment" (Santos, [2018](#)). Baby Suggs, who had witnessed many forms of oppression and enslavement in her lifetime, embraces spiritual awakening after her son Halle bought her freedom from 'Sweet Home'. After settling in Cincinnati, Ohio, she becomes the pivot of communal bonding and camaraderie owing to her 'un-anointed' and 'un-churched' ways of preaching that challenge the anthropocentric and logocentric vision of the dominant Western discourse. It is mentioned in the text of *Beloved* ([2007](#)) that it is the heart that remains intact in Baby Suggs's existence, which she then offers to spread love among the Black community. Baby Suggs, who has been a victim of slavery that has "busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue but her heart which, she put to work at once" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 102). It is the supreme grace that could save the oppressed from the turpitude of the circumstances, as she says in the seemingly spiritual space, Clearing, that "here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs, and dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 103), breaking the traditional ritualistic Christian preaching in which soul is given primacy over the body, on the one hand, and inculcating a stable psychic world vision among her followers, on the other. The Clearing becomes the refuge of the runaways, hungry, strangers, and all those people who need help. It is the place where "everything depends on knowing how much" and also a place where "good is knowing when to stop" (p. 102). Ritualistic deeds practiced at the Clearing and the feast episode further enhance the community bonding and revive the spirit of living the natural and free life as opposed to the bonded life the Black community had been subjected to in an apartheid and race-oriented American space in Morrison's *Beloved* during the pre-and post-Civil War in the United States. The Black community, which is a kind of "trespassers among the human race" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 148) could also behave like the noblest among humankind. Despite enduring generations of psychological trauma, the Black community remains relevant and thriving.

Searching for new possibilities has been at the center of the narrative as well. It starts in Kentucky's Sweet Home where all the slaves ponder over

strategies to run away from racial segregation and from the schoolteacher's demonic oversight. They don't remain stagnant like the crestfallen individuals; rather, they struggle to find escape from the current damnation. They do not accept their predetermined fate. They don't slavishly accept the terrible conditions in which they live. Halle is the son of Baby Suggs who buys freedom for her mother. Baby Suggs does not remember her children in a complete sense, but she does remember Halle because he is the one who bought his mother freedom. Secondly, Halle decides to marry Sethe at a time and in a space where wedding as a ritual for the Black community was irrelevant and prohibited. Although, their marriage was a simple kind of ritual but the decision of Halle and Sethe to get married was an anomaly in the status quo of the Black community. Sethe along with other slaves such as Sixo, Paul A, Paul D and Paul F make different plans to escape from the living hell that the Sweet Home has turned into under the auspices of the schoolteacher. These slaves fail in their attempts, but they never abandon the urge to gain freedom. Sixo is burnt alive, but this does not dampen the energized spirit of others.

Sethe, pregnant with her fourth child, decides to leave Sweet Home at the cost of her life as well as the life of her unborn child: she faces the severest form of pain, hunger pangs and most importantly fear of being caught and brought back. Despite giving birth to a baby, named Denver after Amy Denver who saved her life while giving birth to the baby, in a canoe, she does not lose hope and, although miraculously strides, to House 124 where her kids and mother-in-law had already reached. Her tale is an embodiment of struggle for finding new possibilities in life, a feat that makes her an autonomous and mature character who is traumatized yet decisively autonomous and independent. Her act of killing her daughter is maligned in legal terms-an infanticide but her intentions push the readers to look at her character from a different perspective. The infanticide is horrific, but Sethe thinks that slave life in which the four 'horsemen' would have brought her children into was even more horrible. Sethe's offense is undeniably against the spirit of humanity but her intentions to kill her 'dearly beloved' daughter reflect her purpose to save Denver from the clutches of damnable slavery. Sethe recalled that she "stopped him...took and put my[her] babies where they'd be safe" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 193).

The character of Paul D also reflects the desire to find new possibilities in the novel *Beloved* (1987). He is not portrayed as static, tied to one place

or moment. He is able to run away from the Sweet Home. He then finds the house where Sethe and his old crush-lives, and he is able to exorcize the demonic spirit. He gradually shifts Denver's perspective, who considers him an unwanted intervention in mother-daughter love.

Even the life of Stamp Paid is an embodiment of finding new possibilities. Instead of avenging the abusers of his wife, he starts ferrying people across the river. He becomes the source of communication for the Black community, thereby earning the right to walk into the black dwellers' houses without taking permission. He is the one who saves Denver at a time when Sethe pounces upon her children to kill them in fear of their enslavement at the hands of the cruel schoolteacher. He is the one who feels guilty after showing the piece of paper containing Sethe's episode to Paul D. He strives to find Paul to let him know the real cause of Sethe's infanticide. Paul D comes back to Sethe with the intention of starting life anew by the end of the story, as seen in *Beloved*.

Denver also shows the working of finding new possibilities. She no longer remains meek and mild or house-bound; she goes out to talk to the community for food and help; she also starts a job to support her family; she also lets Ella and Mr Edward Bodwin, the abolitionist, know about the deteriorating conditions of her mother in the presence of her sister *Beloved*. It is her action that primarily, brings thirty women together, and the spirit of *Beloved* is exorcized and banished from House 124. Denver's attempt to find solutions to the dislocated and traumatised life at House 124 makes her a mature, responsible and grown-up character in the novel.

Stamp Paid's life, along with Denver's, truly reflects characteristic sagacity and personal growth. Morrison makes her narrator say that "underneath his legal vegetables were the contraband humans that he ferried across the river" (p. 200). Denver was alive, partially, owing to Stamp Paid, who was there at the time of her birth. Seeing her alive after four weeks "pleased him so much he gathered all he could carry of the best blackberries in the country" (Morrison, p. 200). He was also there at the time, which he calls the 'Misery', when Sethe tried to kill her children. Morrison narrates that "had he not been there chopping firewood, Sethe would have spread her baby's brains on the planking" (Morrison, 2007, p. 201). Personal growth is also wrought with personal dilemmas. Stamp Paid, who shows the maturity of the character, is also caught up in his dilemmas. He tries to make Paul D aware of the happenings at the house 124, but at the same time,

he also feels guilty because his revelation might have brought unhappiness to the posterity of Baby Suggs, whom he considers his benefactor and spiritual leader. Owing to his services, he was free to visit any house, but after a particular episode of showing the newspaper piece to Paul, his unwillingness to enter the house became like “spirit willing; flesh weak” (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 203).

Respect for human relationships is an insignia of personal growth. In Morrison’s *Beloved*, the power of human relationships is expressively presented. Against the individualist growth of capitalistic and white Eurocentric discourse, the Black self believes and survives not in isolation but in union and in relationship with others. In the Sweet Home run by Mr. Garner and then by the cruel school teacher, there can be seen an example of the value of human relationships. All the working slaves on the plantation share their pains, griefs, and even their happiness and excitement. It is their unified self that grants them courage to leave the slave-bondage at the hands of the school teacher. Even their relationship with the natural world is sacrosanct. The tree at the Sweet Home, where all the fellow slaves sit and discuss things, is called the ‘Brother’ that symbolizes their shared heritage, identity, and Afro-American life pattern and ethos. Sixo’s story of the thirty-mile women becomes the source of amusement for all. Human relationships based on love promote courage to resist injustice and provide resilience in hardships, as was seen from the daughter-mother relationship at a time when Denver, Beloved, and Sethe are reunited in the *Beloved*, is shown through the following excerpt:

Holding hands, bracing each other, they swirled over the ice. Beloved wore the pair; Denver wore one, step-gliding over the treacherous ice...each seemed to be helping the other two stay upright, yet every tumble doubled their delight. The live oak and souging pine on the banks enclosed them and absorbed their laughter while they fought gravity for each other’s hands. (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 205)

Disparate selves turn into a sublimating unity in the final chapters of *Beloved*. The bond between Denver, Sethe and Beloved is brief, but it carries significance. It is the moment which brings joy and happiness to the hitherto anguished selves of Sethe and her daughter. The symphony of human relationships can be gauged from the fact that Morrison unites three selves together, where each claims the other’s love and unity without

reservation. Three different souls are merged into a single unified consciousness. This relationship acts as a wall against the encroachment of trauma in the novel.

The spirit of community and human camaraderie play a vital role in the narrative. Baby Suggs caters to the well-being of the community. It is the community which did not warn Sethe of the arrival of the four horsemen, but it is also the community that banishes the reproachful spirit of the *Beloved*. Ella's efforts, Edward Bodwin's courtesy and the role of society in dealing with traumatic experiences are laudable. The "thirty women [that] made up that company and walked slowly, slowly toward 124" helped exorcise the house of the ghost of a dead child in the form of *Belo*, who, the community thought, had come back to avenge her killing at the hands of her mother, Sethe.

Though the past is pervasively embedded in the narrative in the form of memory and re-memory but the researcher argues that Toni Morrison is conscious and aware of the future as well. The past is not the haunting ground for the characters, but it provides a backdrop to stride into the future, brimming with hope. The past is not something that we can leave behind, but it is not so demonic that it hinders us from venturing into an exciting future. Sethe's past is horrible, but she recovers from it, albeit with the help of other characters. Paul D wholeheartedly accepts her. Paul D recalls Sixo's memorable words that "she is a friend of my mind. She gathers me, man. The pieces I am, she gathers them and gives them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you've got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 321). Paul D leaves behind 'the baggy monster' of the past, and embraces the future. He himself went through traumatic experiences and felt the impact of Sethe's acts too, but he decides to accept Sethe with all her quirks and complexities. The possibility of grabbing the future is reflected in Ella's following perspective:

Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy...the future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life-every day was a test and a trial. (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 302)

The above lines speak volumes about the importance of tomorrow. In the novel, almost all the Black characters have suffered, been traumatized, and become paranoid, but they haven't lost the sanctity of their selves. The past turns out to be not a burden but a power, and acts as an unredeemed force to live tomorrow in a better possible way. Trauma does not evaporate the self; rather, it helps growth and maturity in the way Paul D declares at the end that: "Sethe, me and you, we got yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison, [2007](#), p. 322).

Conclusion

Traumatic experience in the novel, *Beloved* (1987), is not entirely debilitating for the African American community. This research has found, after an exhaustive study of the characters in relation to their circumstances, trauma not only cultivates resilience or forms a shield to survive in the precariously segregated and racially oppressive sphere, but it also promotes characters' growth, maturity, individual autonomy, and it resuscitates hope and determination in the face of adversity and adverse circumstances. This research paper has found that the characters go through transformation and change by seeking new possibilities, creating positive relationships with fellow human beings, indulging in enhanced appreciation of living, and invoking spiritual awakening. This research claims to be significant because it helps to understand the different perspectives of trauma. In the traditional approaches, trauma is always presented as nightmarish and obliterating; that it robs one of human dignity, rationality, and mental balance, creating a paranoiac self. Going against the grain of such postulations, this paper has utilized a fresh perspective of the trauma theory—Post-traumatic Growth Theory. Moreover, it also invites a variant understanding of the struggles and triumphs of the African American community from an unexplored angle. Like Baby Suggs's only unrobbed treasure –her heart-, this interpretation goes beyond the stereotypical understanding of the novel based on race or intersectionality: this interpretation makes a case for inclusivity, dialogism, and acceptance of diversity. Toni Morrison, a staunch believer in love, envisions love as the binding force of human relationships and a tool to overcome traumatic conditions. To put it simply, usually trauma dismembers the very existence of an individual, but this study, challenging the prevailing scholarship as well as adding to interdisciplinary interpretations, has concluded that a traumatic situation leads African Americans to individual growth, independence, optimism and

self-sustainability in the world of Morrison's *Beloved*. Moreover, the study implies that art possesses an inherent power for individual and social transformation. This positions Toni Morrison as a chronicler of Black survival, resilience, and growth. This paper offers a fresh perspective to scholarship on Toni Morrison, her art, vision, and legacy. This study can also contribute meaningfully to the growing scholarship on the presentation of trauma in African American fictions by situating trauma within the specific historical period the novel *Beloved* portrays. It leaves open, however, a viable avenue for future inquiry. The viewpoint of this study could be utilized to explore the status and lived experiences of the African American community in Afro-American literature in contemporary American society. In this respect, the present research could offer a foundational framework upon which subsequent scholarship may build.

Author Contribution

Muhammad Afzal Khan Janjua: sole author

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

No funding has been received for this research.

Generative AI Disclosure Statement

The author did not use any type of generative artificial intelligence software for this research

References

- Austine, H. (2007). *The persistence of memory: Slavery and trauma in Toni Morrison's Beloved* [Master's thesis, Florida International University]. FIU Digital Commons. <https://doi.org/10.25148/etd.FI14032372>
- Bakhyaseema, K. P. (2023). An ordeal of suffering in Toni Morison's *Beloved*. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 4(1), 1314–1316. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1.2023.3421>
- Bray, P. (2010). A broader framework for exploring the influence of spiritual experience in the wake of stressful life events: Examining connections between posttraumatic growth and psycho-spiritual

- transformation. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 13(3), 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670903367199>.
- Bray, P. (2013). Bereavement and transformation: A psycho-spiritual and post-traumatic growth perspective. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 52(3), 890–903. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9539-8>.
- Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (2004). Authors' response: The foundations of posttraumatic growth: New considerations. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 93–102. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_03
- Caruth, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chin, D., Smith-Clapham, A. M., & Wyatt, G. E. (2023). Race-based trauma and post-traumatic growth through identity transformation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article e1031602. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1031602>
- Collier, L. (2016, November). Growth after trauma. *Monitor on Psychology*, 47(10), 48. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/11/growth-trauma>
- Freud, S. (2020). *A general introduction to psychoanalysis* (G. S. Hall, Trans.). Outlook Verlag. (Original work published 1920).
- Gibson, C. L. (2025). The duality of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Postmodern religious symbols that highlight the inherited legacy of the American South. *Religions*, 16(2), Article e171. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020171>
- Goodman, J. H. (2004). Coping with trauma and hardship among unaccompanied refugee youths from Sudan. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(9), 1177–1196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304265923>
- He, L., Liu, J., Sun, R., Tan, Y., Qiu, L., & Chen, S. (2026). The effect of Snyder's hope theory-based psychological intervention on post-traumatic growth in Chinese women experiencing perinatal loss: A randomised controlled trial. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 47(1), Article 2650195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0167482X.2026.2650195>

- Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2008). Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress: An integrative psychosocial framework. In S. Joseph & P. A. Linley (Eds.), *Trauma, recovery, and growth: Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress* (pp. 1–20). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118269718.ch1>
- Khursheed, M., & Shahnawaz, M. G. (2020). Trauma and post-traumatic growth: Spirituality and self-compassion as mediators among parents who lost their young children in a protracted conflict. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(5), 2623–2637. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-00980-2>
- Lu, Y., & Zhang, Z. (2023). On Sethe's trauma and recovery in *Beloved* from the perspective of trauma theory. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 194–200. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.81.23>
- Mayank, K. A. (2023). Echoes of historical trauma: An analysis of *Beloved* and *The God of Small Things*. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 8(5), 141–147. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.85.24>
- Morrison, T. (2007). *Beloved*. Vintage Books. (Original work published 1987)
- Mushonga, D. R., Rasheem, S., & Anderson, D. (2021). And still I rise: Resilience factors contributing to posttraumatic growth in African American women. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 47(2–3), 151–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798420979805>
- Santos, J. de P. (2018). The representation of rituals in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Community, resistance, empowerment. *Scripta Uniandrade*, 16(2), 314–329. <https://doi.org/10.5935/1679-5520.20180039>.
- Selfridge, J. (2018). *Beloved*: The physical embodiment of psychological trauma. *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 9, 68–83. <https://research.monm.edu/mjur/mjur-2018-issue/>
- Tandon, N. (2019). Toni Morrison's *Beloved*—demonstration of mother daughter relationship. *International Journal of Research in English*, 1(1), 30–33. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2019.v1.i1a.81>.
- Taylor, S. (2015, December 7). *How to suffer successfully: Post-traumatic*

growth and Nietzschean resilience. Wake Up World. <https://wake-up-world.com/2015/12/07/how-to-suffer-successfully-post-traumatic-growth-and-nietzschean-resilience/>

Tedeschi, R. G. (2023). The post-traumatic growth approach to psychological trauma. *World Psychiatry*, 22(2), 328–329. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21093>

Tedeschi, R. G., Shakespeare-Finch, J., Taku, K., & Calhoun, L. G. (2018). *Posttraumatic growth: Theory, research, and applications*. Routledge.

Wang, L. (2022, December 17–18). *A study of trauma metaphor in Morrison's novels* [Paper presentation]. Proceedings of 8th International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication, Moscow, Russia.

Woodward, C., & Joseph, S. (2003). Positive change processes and post-traumatic growth in people who have experienced childhood abuse: Understanding vehicles of change. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 76(3), 267–283. <https://doi.org/10.1348/147608303322362497>

Xiong, H., Chen, L., Gu, Q., Tian, X., Zhou, L., Huang, Y., & Xiao, W. (2026). Post-traumatic growth among young and middle-aged family caregivers of patients with advanced cancer in China: A theory-guided thematic analysis using the ABC-X model. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing*, 81, Article e103174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejon.2026.103174>

Yang, Y. (2023). The trauma and fragmentation narrative in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10, Article e553. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02046-6>