Scripta Humanika:
Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan
Vol. 2, No. 2 November 2026, Hal 43-51
ISSN: 3110-892X (Print) ISSN: 3110-8911 (Electronic)
Open Access: https://scriptaintelektual.com/scripta-humanika/index

Trauma, Silence, and Voice: Intergenerational Healing in walker's The Color Purple and Morrison's Beloved

Karim Dembélé[1]
[1] Yambo Ouologuem University, Mali
Email: rymkademe2015@gmail.com[1]

Article Info :
Received:
18-09-2026
Revised:
18-10-2026
Accepted:
01-11-2026

Abstract

Black American women's literature constitutes one of the most theoretically rich engagements with historical trauma in the Western literary tradition. However, critical scholarship rarely compares how texts within this canon diverge in terms of aesthetic representation and resolution of historical violence. The main purpose of this study is to present a comparative analysis of Alice Walker's (1982) The Color Purple and Toni Morrison's (1987) Beloved to crystallize their two distinct models of intergenerational fracture and restoration. It uses three fundamental theoretical frameworks, notably Judith Herman's (1992) stage-model of trauma recovery, then Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) somatic theory of embodied trauma and healing, and the Black feminist historical criticism of Hortense Spillers (1987). This study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in close reading informed by comparative literary analysis. It is articulated around four core axes: language and silence, maternal rupture, spiritual transcendence, and community witness. The findings demonstrate that Walker (1982) uses an epistolary model that processes healing as a linear progression leading to literacy, self-articulation, and individual autonomy. Conversely, Morrison (1987) employs a non-linear, polyphonic, and spectral narrative method that lays bare the limits of individual linguistic recovery, positioning transatlantic trauma as embodied requiring collective, communal reintegration.

Keywords: *Black feminist criticism, intergenerational trauma, healing, women's literature.*

©2026 Authors.. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License.
(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

Black American women writers produced literature in the latter half of the twentieth century that represents one of the most sustained with historical trauma in the Western literary tradition. This literature emerged from the specific experience of racial oppression, sexual violence, systemic silencing. As bearing witness to this suffering, this body of work sets out to theorize it, examining the mechanisms by which trauma is transmitted across generations and the conditions enabling healing. Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* and Morrison's (1987) *Beloved* emerge as the most significant contributions among this rich and diverse literary tradition. These two novels have permanently and consistently shaped both literary and cultural conversations about Black women's interiority, agency, and survival. Putting these two works in dialog is not a simple exercise in comparative literature. It requires careful and deep analysis and interpretation of two distinct visions of what trauma does to a woman, and what actions a woman must take to survive it. The issues raised by Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) are not only literarily relevant but also politically and ethically pressing at this historical moment when conversations about intergenerational trauma, racial oppression, and restorative justice have acquired renewed urgency.

There is a substantial body of scholarship dedicated to each novel separately, but comparative studies addressing Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) as involved in a genuine theoretical conversation about trauma remain significantly limited. The existing literature tends to situate *The Color Purple* (1982) within the frameworks of epistolary feminist tradition and womanist theology, following the work of bell hooks (1989) illuminating Celie's gradual reclamation of voice. Doumbia & Dembélé (2026) maintain that Walker's work permanently depicts healing as the construction of protective space.

The scholarship around Morrison (1987) is articulated around psychoanalytic and postcolonial frameworks, fundamentally linked to the work of Hortense Spillers (1987), who analyzes the ungendering of Black women's bodies under slavery in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*. This work provides a critical historical grounding for Beloved. Herman's (1992) *Trauma and recovery* and Caruth's (1996) *Unclaimed Experience* have applied trauma theory as a distinct discipline to Morrison's (1987) novel in particular. While the above laid the groundwork for Black feminist trauma studies, more recent comparative scholarship - notably the works of Keita (2018b), Boulding (2020), and Armstrong (2022) - has questioned contrasts between narrative resolution and historical fragmentation. However, the research revealed that scholarship that uses trauma theory as a comparative lens - placing both novels in conversations and asking where they converge and diverge – remains underexploited. This gap is vast enough to merit our full critical engagement.

While existing scholarship often examines *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Beloved* (1987) separately, this study resorts to comparative analysis to scrutinize both their convergences and divergences across individual, spiritual, and communal aspects of healing. Rather than positioning these texts as essentially binary, the study is structured around four fundamental axes: language and silence, maternal rupture, spiritual transcendence, and community witness to show how their different narrative strategies offer complementary insights into Black feminist trauma theory.

This study has four specific objectives: First, it explores how Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) represent the relationship between trauma, silence, and language, emphasizing how their main characters negotiate the recovery of voice and agency. Second, it examines how both novels trace maternal rupture and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Third, it explores the role of spiritual transcendence and sacred traditions in reshaping the traumatized self. Fourth, it examines the role of community witness and collective memory in long-term restoration.

This study mobilizes three interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks. Herman's (1992) *Trauma and recovery* develops a three-stage model of trauma recovery providing a structuring scaffold. Van der Kolk's (2014) somatic theory of embodied trauma and healing exemplifies Morrison's (1987) insistence on the body as a privileged site of horrible suffering. Spillers (1987) and Hartman (1997) foreground the historical and political grounding in which they situate both novels within the longer and terrible history of slavery's assault on Black women's subjectivity and testimony.

RESEARCH METHODS

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative and comparative approach grounded in close reading. Textual evidence is carefully extracted from both corpora serving as primary sources supplemented by sustained dialog with theoretical sources named above, with close attention to moments where the novels' formal choices-narrative voice, structure, temporality enact rather than simply describe their respective theories of trauma. Close reading was operationalized through thematic coding across four comparative axes: language and silence, maternal rupture, spiritual transcendence, and community witness.

Theoretical frameworks; Judith Herman's recovery stages, Bessel van der Kolk's somatic theory, and Hortense Spillers' Black feminist critique are used as interpretive lenses rather than diagnosis tools. This ensures that the characters are not reduced to clinical case studies. Applying Western trauma psychology to creative works has some limitations because clinical models are subordinated to historical context, literary form, and African American aesthetic traditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section is organized around four logical axes: Trauma, Silence, and the Recovery of Voice; Maternal Rupture and Intergenerational Trauma; Spirituality, Supernatural, and Collective Healing. The first section analyzes how the protagonists' recovery of voice and agency is

shaped by language and embodied trauma. The second examines contrasting representations of maternal loss, rupture, and intergenerational trauma. The third compares Walker's integrative spirituality with Morrison's supernatural architecture. The fourth section makes a parallel between the two distinct roles of individual intimacy and communal accountability in post-traumatic healing.

Trauma, Silence, and The Recovery of Voice

Trauma has a voice or not? This deceptively simple distinction lies at the heart of Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* and Morrison's (1987) *Beloved*, two novels that powerfully explore Black Women's suffering in American literary history. Both Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) address the same historical wound: what happens to a woman's subjectivity when her body is affected by violence and when she is forced to silence by those with power over her? The answers to these questions diverge not only stylistically but also theoretically. Walker (1982) argues that the act of writing is the primary mechanism by which a traumatized self can heal. Morrison (1987), for her part, warns that certain traumas cannot be borne by language, arguing that they settle into the body, into action, into haunting. Bringing these two novels in parallel does not only reveal two stories about Black women's suffering, but also two competing theories of survival, two theories of coping with trauma.

This tension is fundamentally related to a broader understanding of how trauma operates on human psyche. Herman's (1992) *Trauma and Recovery* exposes the core experience of psychological trauma. Herman (1992) argues that recovery requires the subject's capacity to speak – his ability to name what happened and situate it in narrative. Her model crystallizes Walker's (1982) novel remarkably: Celie's entire arc applies to Herman's (1992) logic: moving from established silence toward voice and, through voice, toward agency. However, Morrison's (1987) novel breaks this logic. As van der Kolk's (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score* demonstrates, trauma does not always lend itself to narrative processing – it frequently settles the body as sensation, image, and physical response, exceeding language literally.

Morrison's (1987) logic is close to van der Kolk's (2014) understanding rather than Herman's: Sethe's trauma cannot be spoken out; it moves through flesh, through scar, through violent action. Spillers' (1987) theory is essential here, in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, she posits that one of the mechanisms of slavery's violence is to strip Black women of the right to name their own experience. Celie and Sethe both inherit this historical silencing, but Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) process them from very different angles.

This dynamic of silencing is established by Walker from the very first lines of the novel. After having raped Celie, her stepfather threatens her into silence, warning her never to speak of this assault to any soul. Walker writes: "you better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill you mammy" (p. 1).

Her stepfather does not merely require silence but enforces it as an act of protection, not only for the mother, but also for the family, and the perpetrator. Celie has no other choice but to obey and this is where the undermining of her spirit starts. She engages in an epistolary conversation with God. Telling her experience to God is telling it to herself. Walker (1982) perfectly describes Celie's psychological toll in these words: "I am fourteen years old. I-aa I have always been a good girl" (p. 4).

In this sentence, Celie's stuttering and hesitation by saying "I-aa'' before finding the rest of the sentence signals a psychological gesture. She cannot finish the sentence because she does not know yet what she is. The fracture within her reflects her fractured identity. However, Walker (1982) demonstrates that the act of writing over years will restore this fracture. As the novel unfolds, Celie writes with full confidence, declaring: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook… But I'm here" (p. 240). These words demonstrate that the epistolary correspondence has achieved what Herman (1992) describes as restoring narrative, and that very narrative has restored selfhood.

Morrison (1987) develops an almost opposite architecture. Where Celie speaks out her trauma and is healed by it, Sethe learns about her own trauma from others. Therefore, her trauma remains unspeakable from within. It is Amy Denver and not Sethe herself, who talks about the "Chokecherry tree" – the scar left by schoolteacher's whipping. Morrison (1987) writes: "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk — it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches" (p. 81). Sethe cannot see her own back. So, she receives her trauma through the eyes and words of another woman. This is how van der Kolk (2014) puts it plainly: the body interiorizes what the mind cannot access, and language about it must come from outside, if ever it should come.

Maternal Rupture and the Persistence of Intergenerational Trauma

The maternal bond plays a crucial role in African American literature as it serves as the primary site for exploring trauma triggered by systemic oppression and the possibilities of recovering. Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) consider the loss of a daughter as the fundamental rupture of the narrative. However, the two authors have a divergent treatment of this wound. For Walker (1982), the lost daughter represents eventual restoration; for Morrison (1987), she represents haunting and historical reckoning. The parallel between the two authors lies in the fact that Walker (1982) believes in the reparative power of time and reunion while Morrison (1987) insists that some violation of the maternal body leaves indelible scars.

In *The Color Purple* (1982), Celie's loss is deeply associated with patriarchal oppression. Her children are snatched from her, making her believe that they are dead – this lie has been carefully devised to strip her of her agency. However, the children are kept alive through Nettie's letters before they physically reappear. Walker depicts Olivia, as Celie's beacon of hope, as illustrated by this passage:

> *"I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children" (p. 222).*

This passage underscores Walker's (1982) vision that the trauma of the past is a prelude to communal abundance. The daughter Celie lost and finally gets reunited with bridges the gap between the American South and Africa.

Conversely, Sethe defies traditional restoration through a rupture. Beloved returns as ghost, then as physical presence to haunt and consume Sethe entirely. Morrison (1987) portrays this return with unsettling precision in these lines:

> *The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became... Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it (p. 236).*

These lines depict Beloved, not as a symbol of hope but a "rememory" made flesh, in other words, a manifestation of a past keeps on haunting and eating Sethe up. The climax of *The Color Purple* (1982) is a scene of profound emotional balance. The return of Olivia, Adam, and Nettie serves to repair the initial rupture for Celie. Walker (1982) vividly portrays this reunion where the sisters express their joy with words full of emotions:

> *By now my heart is in my mouth and I can't move... Then us both start to moan and cry. Us totter toward one nother like us use to do when us was babies. Then us feel so weak when us touch, us knock each other down. But what us care? Us sit and lay there on the porch inside each other's arms (p. 293).*

In this poignant reunion, the physical collapse onto the porch demonstrates a strong emotional surge, dissolving years of trauma into pure and unfiltered affection. This scene shows how deep bonds can restore lost and innocent intimacy.

Morrison (1987) does not offer such a happy denouement. Beloved's presence demands a literal and figurative reckoning that nearly kills Sethe. The daughter seems to be the personification of the "Sixty Million and more" ungrieved dead of the Middle Passage returning in a single body. Morrison (1987) writes:

> *The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became... She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur (p. 236).*

Finally, the neighborhood gathers its strength to expel Beloved, who cannot be healed through love and language, showing that while historical wounds leave enduring scars, healing is enabled through Denver's social emergence, Paul D's return, and the community's intervention.

Some scholars have discussed the divergence between these two approaches, examining how Black motherhood is mediated through history. Barbara Christian (1985) demonstrates that Walker pleads for a strategy of healing the ancestral line, where the return of the children marks a decisive triumph over the fragmentation of the Black family. Mae Henderson (1991), for her part, maintains that Morrison's (1987) work foregrounds "maternal as a site of resistance," suggesting that the act of infanticide and the haunting that follows signals the impossible choices imposed on enslaved women.

Similarly, Hortense Spillers (1987) posits that in the context of the "Middle Passage," the maternal is often legally not considered, making Morrison's (1987) "permanent rupture" a more historically grounded, albeit devastating, representation of the African American experience. Finally, Davis (1998) suggests that Walker's (1982) narratives tendency toward emotional closure contrasts sharply with Morrison's representation of gothic conventions, through which the weight of historical trauma returns as a permanently overwhelming presence in the lives of her characters. Ultimately, Walker (1982) allows Celie to regain her autonomy, suggesting that the "daughter you make" is likely to be the one you lost. Morrison (1987) warns that the daughter you lose is gone forever.

Spirituality, Haunting, and the Possibilities of Collective Healing

Healing from trauma in African American literature requires characters to change the way they view the supernatural. *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Beloved* (1987) represent an active force that either repairs or distorts the self. Where Celie finds a "God" to talk to, Sethe comes to grips with a "Ghost" that haunts and destroys her. The divergence between the two works signals a profound disagreement on the nature of healing: is the divine a companion that helps heal trauma, or is the supernatural the embodiment historical weight that must be forcibly conjured up?

For Celie, to heal one must change the way one thinks about God and religion. She has been conditioned to view God as a remote white patriarch. She finds liberation through Shug Avery's determination and freewill. This new God of Celie is found not in the church but in the purple of the field. Walker (1982) describes this spiritual awakening as an act of liberation and freeing the self. As Shug explains to Celie: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (p. 203).

This consciousness helps Celie break the yoke of victimhood, becoming a free and joyful soul. The supernatural in *The Color Purple* (1982) is friendly and expansive; it helps liberate the self. Celie stops seeking help from the external world by internalizing this divinity, which helps her become her own authority. Walker (1982) vividly renders this self-affirmation through a long, lyrical, reflection writing:

> *Everything want to be loved. Us sing and dance, make faces and give flower bouquets, trying to be loved. You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk? Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing. (p. 204).*

As the novel draws to its end, Celie's spirituality successfully survives her past and present, enabling her to emerge as a whole and liberated being who "paints" her world with the colors she likes.

Unlike Walker (1982), Morrison's (1987) supernatural is rather "cold, monstrous, and hungry" presence. Beloved is not a friendly deity, she is trauma made flesh. Whereas Walker's (1982) God helps the individual get empowered, Morrison's (1987) ghost terrorizes the household. Sethe is relentlessly hounded by Beloved giving her no peace; she finds herself trapped in a parasitic cycle of guilt and consumption. Beloved is the "rememory" that cannot be ignored or expelled. Morrison (1987) defines it as something that outlives even death, a picture that exists in the world. As Beloved intensifies her haunting, Sethe is obliged to surrender, she retreats into a consuming present tense: "there is no world outside my door. I only need to know one thing. How bad is the scar?" (p. 174). This self-dissolving into the very trauma entrapping her does not favor healing.

Where Celie's God is a partner, Beloved is an immense void who comes to claim what was lost. The climax in Morrison's (1987) work involves violent communal exorcism. The entire community of women must gather to conjure up the evil spirit that Sethe cannot defeat alone. Morrison's

(1987) view of the supernatural is associated with ruptures as exemplified in her description of the haunting's end:

> *It was not a story to pass on. So they forgot her. Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep. Occasionally, however, the rustle of a skirt hushes when they wake, and the knuckles brushing a cheek in sleep seem to belong to the sleeper. Sometimes the photograph of a close friend or relative looked at too long shifts, and something more familiar than the dear face itself moves there (p. 266).*

For Morrison (1987), healing does not come from the integration of the ghost, but from its departure. The community deliberately chooses to forget this ghost because the weight of such a presence is too heavy for one person to bear.

Scholars have analyzed the differences in these two theories of healing focusing on the intersection of faith and history. The distinction between Walker's (1982) integrative spirituality and Morrison's (1987) distorted supernatural has been scrutinized through the lens of womanist theology. Townes (2006) argues that Black women's spirituality is always shaped by history of systemic racial violence, while Cannon (1988) demonstrates that moral and spiritual survival under oppressive structures takes the form of resisting conventional religious categories. Ultimately, Walker (1982) advocates an integrative spirituality that heals the self, while Morrison (1987) advocates a destabilizing supernatural that can only be survived by expelling it. One offers a theology of presence; the other, a theology of necessary absence.

The novel does not reduce Beloved to a mere evil spirit, nor does it declare trauma irreparable in Morrison's framework; rather, it demonstrates the complex, dialectical boundary between historical symbolism and psychological healing. Beloved represents the collective weight of transatlantic slavery a manifestation of "rememory" that transcends individual speech. Her exorcism by the women of Cincinnati is a clear signal that some historical wounds cannot be neatly erased. Instead, Paul D's return to take care of Sethe, and the community's collective intervention underscore that while historical trauma fractures the self permanently, partial healing and re-entry into the community remain possible to some extent.

Individual and Collective Witnessing in Trauma Recovery

Moving from erasure to existence in African American literature requires a witness – someone to testify the reality of one's pain and the legitimacy of one's humanity. The act of "witnessing" in *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Beloved* (1987), triggers the protagonists' resurrection. However, both authors offer divergent paths towards restoration. For Walker (1982), witnessing is synonymous with a private, imagined dialog that eventually develops into a life-saving intimacy between individuals. For Morrison (1987), witnessing is a difficult task that requires a fractured community to reunite.

In *The Color Purple* (1982), Celie begins her journey being relegated at the margin of the community, thus being invisible. She is robbed of her voice by her stepfather and her dignity by Albert. Only one possibility remains to her; turning to the only witness that will never fail her: God. Her numerous letters are not mere epistolary communication; they are a well-elaborated strategy for self-preservation. She writes "Dear God" to create a self-space where her life is recorded and where she can find someone to talk to in this painful isolation. This imagined witnessing takes forms through Shug Avery, who sees Celie back into being through a radical and plain reclamation of her own self.

Shug helps Celie realize her worth by handing her a mirror and instructing her to look at her body. A body that has been violated, used, and rendered invisible by years of domestic violence. This gesture is revolutionary. Celie does as Shug suggests. What happens next is rendered by Shug's verdict: "It a lot prettier than you thought, ain't it?" (p. 80). For the first time in the entire novel, Celie's body does not appear to be a site of violence but rather a site of quiet revelation – seen, named, and reclaimed. Walker (1982) makes this plain by demonstrating that the self cannot be rebuilt by words alone; it necessitates a witness who sees what others refuse to acknowledge.

In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison offers a more grueling view of witnessing. Sethe's trauma is witnessed by the community of Cincinnati. Following the infanticide perpetrated by Sethe at 124 Bluestone Road, the community withdraws itself, leaving Sethe in profound silence and haunting. Morrison (1987) clearly demonstrates that an imagined witness cannot heal the "thick" trauma of

slavery. Healing begins for Sethe with the arrival of Paul D, who offers a literal and physical witnessing – his body becomes an instrument of acknowledgement. Morrison (1987) portrays this moment with clinical precision:

> *"Behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hands. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches" (p. 22).*

This passage makes clear how Paul D hears Sethe's trauma, how he reads it through touch, how he presses his "cheek on her back" to capture her lived experience. However, Morrison (1987) immediately disrupts this tenderness: Sethe "could not feel" his mouth in her back because "her back skin had been dead for years." Paul D's intimate act of witnessing meets a body that trauma has already rendered numb. Therefore, Morrison (1987) insists that physical presence is necessary, but not sufficient.

The true healing of Sethe requires the participation of the entire community that decides to return after abandoning her for twenty years. Denver makes the hard decision to break the barrier between them and the community by crossing the threshold into the outside world. This decisive step initiates the healing process. Morrison (1987) depicts this dramatic episode in these words: "They stopped praying and took a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (p. 245). Morrison (1987) demonstrates that collective witnessing transcends spoken words; it is stronger than language and relies on historical memory that no single individual can carry alone. Returning to the community is not guaranteed because it requires the community to choose to face the unbearable trauma, thus offering salvation to the individual from collapsing.

Critics have explored the distinction between these two models of witnessing. McDowell (1987) shows that literary tradition values the internal lives and relational bonds of its female protagonists, suggesting that recovery in Walker's (1982) work is localized intimate, and deeply seated in the transformative power of female solidarity. Mitchell (2002) points out that in Morrison's fiction, "liberatory violence" and its consequences can only be addressed through communal action, suggesting that Morrison's realistic portrayal of trauma proves that recovery takes a whole community – one single person cannot bear that grief. This reading is further supported by Fatoumata Keita (2018a), who plainly demonstrates in her analysis of Morrison's (1987) *Paradise* that abusive masculinity systematically endangers women's communal spaces, and that strong collective healing only becomes possible when such masculinity is utterly replaced by redemptive forms of male presence. This dynamic can be observed in the community of women who collectively expelled Beloved from 124 Bluestone Road. Ultimately, for Walker (1982), those who love us help us in the recovery process. For Morrison, true recovery requires recognition from those who formerly rejected us. While Walker (1982) grounds restoration in personal intimacy, Morrison advocates a broader and political model of communal accountability.

CONCLUSION

This main purpose of this study was to tackle this question: Do Walker (1982) and Morrison (1987) propose the same healing strategy for intergenerational trauma, or do their novels offer competing intellectual frameworks? The fact that *The Color Purple* (1982) and *Beloved* (1987) share a common concern with Black women's suffering from racial and gendered violence, motivated this study. Most interestingly, both works diverge in the ways they encode what trauma does to language, maternal bonds, spirituality, and community, claiming that these different views should be read not as complementary but as productively distinct.

This analysis was guided by four thematic sections that gave this premise all its consistency. Walker (1982) shows through Celie's letters that writing can help her grow and reach empowerment – that the traumatized subject can be recovered through sustained acts of writing. Morrison (1987) advances counterarguments, arguing that some traumas are too severe for words, demonstrating through Sethe's experience that extreme pain lives in the body and actions, not in the language. As for the maternal rupture, healing is possible for Walker (1982), Celie is reunited with her lost children, broken bond is restored through time and geography. Morrison (1987) does not offer such comforting

outcomes; she puts forward confrontation: the dead daughter takes the form of a ghost to reclaim reckoning, and what the community ultimately decides is not healing, but survival forgetting. As for the supernatural, Walker (1982) presents spirituality as being inclusive and expansive, putting Celie in direct contact with an immanent God, while Morrison's (1987) ghost is terrifying and destabilizing, a form of trauma that can no longer be contained. Finally, concerning the community, Walker (1982) argues that witnessing can be created through the act of writing, while Morrison suggests that it must be physically reconstructed through communal action whether it arrives late and at a heavy price.

Rather than offering opposing models, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) reveal distinct degrees, forms, and limits of healing across their different aesthetic architectures. Exploring Herman, van der Kolk, and Spillers demonstrates a dialectical conversation on post-traumatic healing: while Walker advocates individual agency and epistolary restoration, Morrison highlights the embodied, high-cost demands of collective memory. However, a central limitation of this study is the application of modern Western clinical trauma frameworks to literary works rooted in African American historical and oral traditions. The risk is to pathologize creative representations.

This study naturally offers avenues for further research. It would be interesting to examine how these competing models of trauma and healing are processed in the works of subsequent Black women writers like Edwidge Dandicat, Tayari Jones, or Jesmyn Ward to assess whether Walker's (1982) or Morrison's (1987) philosophical vision has turned out to be more influential for next generation literary voices.

REFERENCES

Armstrong, L. (2022). Somatic memory and Black feminist aesthetics: Re-reading historical trauma in twentieth-century African American fiction. Routledge.

Boulding, J. (2020). Beyond linear recovery: Dialectics of voice, silence, and memory in African American women's literature. Journal of Modern Literature, 43(3), 88–106.

Cannon, K. G. (1988). Black womanist ethics. Scholars Press.

Caruth, C. (1996). Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Christian, B. (1985). Black feminist criticism: Perspectives on Black women writers. Pergamon Press.

Davis, K. C. (1998). "Postmodern blackness": Toni Morrison's Beloved and the end of history. Twentieth Century Literature, 44(2), 242–260. https://doi.org/10.2307/441873

Doumbia, S., & Dembélé, K. (2026). Witnessing trauma and learning survival: Ruth's post-maternal psychology in The third life of Grange Copeland by Alice Walker. Quest Journals: Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, 14(2), 105–110.

Hartman, S. V. (1997). Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America. Oxford University Press.

Henderson, M. G. (1991). Toni Morrison's Beloved: Remembering the body as historical text. In I. H. (Ed.), Comparative American identities: Race, sex, and nationality in the modern text (pp. 62–86). Routledge.

Herman, J. L. (1992). Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—From domestic abuse to political terror. Basic Books.

hooks, b. (1989). Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black. South End Press.

Keita, F. (2018a). Women's safe spaces and the codes of masculinity in Toni Morrison's Paradise. Safara: Revue Internationale de Langues, Littératures et Cultures, 17, 35–56.

Keita, F. (2018b). Writing postcolonial violence and gendered spaces in African American and Francophone African fiction. L'Harmattan.

McDowell, D. E. (1987). "The changing same": Generational connections and Black women novelists. New Literary History, 18(2), 281–302. https://doi.org/10.2307/468730

Mitchell, A. (2002). The freedom to remember: Narrative, slavery, and gender in contemporary Black women's fiction. Rutgers University Press.

Morrison, T. (1987). Beloved. Alfred A. Knopf.

Spillers, H. J. (1987). Mama's baby, Papa's maybe: An American grammar book. Diacritics, 17(2), 64–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747

Townes, E. M. (2006). Womanist ethics and the cultural production of evil. Palgrave Macmillan.

van der Kolk, B. (2014). The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma. Viking.

Walker, A. (1982). The color purple. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.