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Adolescence Trauma and Posttraumatic Growth in Sara Barnard's *Beautiful Broken Things* and *Fierce Fragile Hearts*

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Introduction

Trauma, as a concept, has been universally common ever since the onset of humanity. However, its definition has been evolving and changing throughout history. To begin with, the term trauma originated from the Greek language. It was mainly used to refer to a bodily wound (Morrissey 31). The word itself has been incorporated into the English language in 1693. Thus, it was purely related to physical injuries and wounds. Particularly, it meant a physical wound that was caused by an external or outer source (Bond and Craps 2). With the progression of time, the definition of trauma shifted to encompass a more psychological interpretation. Because special attention has been given to the study of mental health in the 21st century, literature has also focused on mental health issues, specifically those related to young adults and teenagers. As a result, Young Adult Literature sheds light on the problems and perils that teenagers are exposed to. This allows teenagers to read about the traumas and challenges of others and learn how to overcome them without being exposed to them in real life. Although a trauma always has a negative impact on an adolescent's personality, if treated correctly, it can result in posttraumatic growth which is basically a positive change that happens to the character of the traumatised person. Hence, this paper aims to study Sara Barnard's novel *Beautiful Broken Things* (2016) which discusses the domestic abuse that the adolescent Suzanne Watts suffers from and the trauma she endures as a result. It will also analyse the posttraumatic growth that happens to her in the sequel *Fierce Fragile Hearts* (2019).

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Defining Trauma

The outbreak of industrial modernity in the late nineteenth century brought about some changes regarding the understanding and definition of trauma. As trauma became associated with the Western modernity, the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution most of the time resulted in physical injuries to the workers and soldiers fighting in major wars. Consequently, both the labour force and soldiers suffered from what was known as shell shock or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as it is known today. The association of trauma with modernity may falsely give the misconception that the notion of trauma was non-existent before modernity. Nevertheless, it has been proven that trauma has always existed, but the term itself was always used differently. The increasing number of injuries and deaths caused by railway accidents brought about a realization of the tolls caused by the development of the railway during the 1840s and 1860s. This resulted in the development of a new type of trauma known as railway spine that resulted in injuries of the spine which is mainly caused by trains. As such, the awareness of the connection between modernity and trauma was brought about.

Moreover, with the passage of time, prominent figures in the field of psychiatry such as Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, and Sigmund Freud have laid the foundation for trauma studies during the twentieth and twenty first centuries (Bond and Craps 19). Despite having different approaches to the study of trauma, they all associated the infliction with trauma to hysteria. This basically means that being hysteric is related to a physical injury that is mostly caused by a hereditary condition. Charcot's studies began by focusing on females which led him to believe that hysteria is a gender-related injury of the mind. After shifting his studies to "the victims of industrial and railway accidents" (Bond and Craps 20), he came to believe that hysteria is related to unconscious thoughts and desires which proves that as an illness, it is not gender-related as previously believed. He concluded his studies on hysteria by asserting that the symptoms of trauma were essentially psychological rather than physiological (Bond and Craps 20). In fact, this discovery by Charcot may be considered the first suggestion ever of traumas being psychological rather than physiological.

In the twenty-first century, the interest in the study of psychological trauma has increased dramatically. As an evolving and ever-changing concept, psychological trauma does not have one static definition. On the contrary, it has various definitions that combined together give a comprehensive overview of the concept itself. For example, the APA Dictionary of Psychology defines trauma as "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a

long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning." Moreover, "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present" (Van der Kolk 32). As such, the definition of trauma goes beyond the mere event or experience that is considered harmful or shattering to the victim. It is rather the effect that this traumatic experience leaves on the mind and body of the victim. Usually, a traumatic event restructures the way a person thinks and challenges his or her major beliefs in life. This happens because the "[t]rauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think" (Van der Kolk 32). Furthermore, trauma is a wound of the soul. Thus, it is considered "an inner injury, a lasting rupture or split within the self due to difficult or hurtful events. By this definition, trauma is primarily what happens within someone as a result of the difficult or hurtful events that befall them; it is not the events themselves" (Maté and Maté 34). As such, trauma is the change that happens to a traumatised person rather than the harmful or distressing event itself. In other words, "[t]rauma is not what happens *to* you but what happens *inside* you" (Maté and Maté 34) as a result of going through a harrowing and disturbing event.

A trauma is often categorised as either interpersonal or non-interpersonal. On the one hand, interpersonal trauma is usually the kind that is caused by other humans such as assault, abuse, rape and wars. This type of trauma includes a perpetrator that traumatises another person be it a child, an adult or even an elder person. Non-interpersonal trauma, on the other hand, is caused by natural disasters and has no human interference such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and tsunamis. Nevertheless, an interpersonal trauma leaves a more negative impact on the victim's psyche more than non-interpersonal trauma. This often happens as "[i]ndividuals whose trauma was 'interpersonal' (caused deliberately by other people) are twice as likely to develop PTSD, relative to those who experience accidental trauma with more complex and severe symptoms" (Bell et al. 3).

In addition, there are various kinds of trauma such as acute, complex, chronic and developmental trauma. Firstly, an acute trauma "is characterized by a short-lived sympathetic response to a real or perceived threat that typically results in a "fight or flight" response" (Feriante and Sharma 2). To elaborate, an acute trauma takes place when a person goes through a distressful event that activates the fight or flight response in his or her body. Nevertheless, the failure to resolve this type of trauma and eliminate its causes usually leads to the

development of a chronic trauma, which is a more complicated type of trauma and is more difficult to overcome. Secondly, a complex trauma is "a type of trauma that occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period of time and within specific relationships and contexts" (Courtois 412). This includes disastrous, pernicious and entangled excruciating events that cause traumas, especially during either childhood and/or adulthood such as conflict, combat and wars (Courtois 412). Thirdly, a chronic trauma usually results from long-term, recurrent harmful incidents (Paper Dolls Research Group 4). The most common cause of a chronic trauma is abuse whether it is experienced firsthand or merely being witnessed. In order for abuse to cause a chronic trauma, it must encompass specific conditions. For example, the abuse should be caused by someone who is supposedly close to the victim such as a parent or a caregiver. Although this figure is supposed to protect and care for the child, he or she becomes the perpetrator or abuser. Also, the abuse must follow a repetitive pattern and must take place over a long period of time that could extend to years. This abuse can be experienced in different forms such as emotional, psychological, physical, sexual or even financial. Most importantly, this type of abuse should take place in a relationship that is based on dominance, in which one person has total control over the life of the other. Furthermore, subjection to chronic trauma, specifically if it begins in an early young age often leads to more severe and widespread symptoms. In other words, "[e]arly and chronic trauma exposure can disrupt the formation of secure attachment and negatively influence the developing brain, leading to a personality characterized by chronic hyperarousal, cognitive disorganization, poor affect tolerance, emotional volatility, and impulsivity. Such individuals are also more likely to have severely problematic relationships, to somaticize, and to develop dissociative disorders and personality disorders" (Greenwald 75). Consequently, these symptoms are categorized as developmental trauma disorder and complex PTSD. To further elaborate, a developmental trauma hinders the normal development of a child's social, emotional and cognitive skills. This may sometimes result in a reduced sense of self-worth, difficulty forming relationships with others and struggling to express one's emotions. For the purpose of this study, the words child, teenager, adolescent and young adult will all be used interchangeably. In light of the above-mentioned theoretical framework, the following sections will focus on investigating the trauma and posttraumatic growth of Suzanne, the main character in the selected novels.

The Traumatised Adolescent in *Beautiful Broken Things*

Narrated by Caddy, a sixteen-year-old girl who lives in Brighton, the novel *Beautiful Broken Things* tells the story of Suzanne, who recently joins the school of Rosie, Caddy's best

friend. As opposed to Caddy's peaceful and tranquil life, Suzanne's life is distressing and draining as she is being constantly beaten by her stepfather. Consequently, she leaves the city and goes to live with her aunt, Sarah, in Brighton. Because of the domestic violence that Suzanne suffers from for a prolonged period of her life, she becomes chronically traumatised. As a result, her character is negatively affected, and she tries to commit suicide more than once.

As mentioned earlier, interpersonal trauma is the kind of trauma that is not caused by outer forces such as natural disasters, wars or even loss of loved ones. It is rather the type of trauma that is inflicted by other people, mostly close ones that can be either parents or caregivers. Unfortunately, the affliction that occurs by a trusted person who should supposedly be the source of security and safety in a child's life is the most emotionally painful experience that a child could go through. Actually, it causes the most damage to a child's psyche and self-confidence. As a matter of fact, Suzanne becomes chronically traumatised because she is exposed to different types of domestic abuse by both her parents such as emotional, psychological and physical abuse. Child maltreatment, which is the broader term for child abuse, consists of "the perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence and neglect of infants, children and adolescents aged 0-17 years by parents, caregivers and other authority figures, most often in the home but also in settings such as schools and orphanages" (World Health Organization 2). To elaborate, any inappropriate treatment that a child is exposed to by a guardian is considered maltreatment or abuse. The role of a parent or a caregiver is very important in a child's development because "[c]hildren use their parents as anchors or reference points to understand the meaning of traumatic events, understand cause and effect, experience safety and support, obtain comfort, and receive guidance in effective coping" (Cloitre et al. 9). As a result, maltreatment is considered a fundamental betrayal of the child's belief and trust that the parent should care, guide and provide the child with safety, security and protection. Thereby, a parent who maltreats his/ her child unknowingly impedes the natural growth and character development of his/her child. This maltreatment also hinders the child's ability to assimilate and become involved in different events and life incidents that would otherwise help them in understanding the complexities of life.

In addition, being abused always has detrimental effects on the teenager's personality and spirit. For instance, an abused adolescent usually becomes passive and becomes demotivated to take any actions in life. This happens as a result of stripping the teenager of his or her agency because the abuse has taken place against his or her desire and wish. One of the most common negative effects of abuse is losing trust in others. An abused child finds it

impossible to trust others as he/she had already lost trust in the parent or guardian who was supposed to protect him/her and provide guidance through the challenges of life. Another negative impact of abuse is social isolation and withdrawal from society. By losing trust in others and becoming socially withdrawn, an abused child will most probably feel unworthy. This will result in a reduced perception of oneself and a diminished self-confidence. Moreover, other repercussions may be "(1) loss of healthy attachment and healthy sense of self, (2) loss of effective guidance in the development of emotional and social competencies, and (3) loss of support and connection to the larger social community" (Cloitre et al. 8). In fact, being maltreated particularly by a parent breaks the attachment between the child and the parent. Although this relationship is the first attachment in a child's life, the emotional safety that results from this relationship is often disrupted. Consequently, a teenager or a child becomes psychologically traumatised. As a matter of fact, Suzanne suffers from all types of maltreatment by her parents such as physical, emotional and psychological abuse. Hence, she becomes chronically traumatised. It is important to discuss the types of abuse that Suzanne is exposed to and to analyse the negative impacts they have on her personality.

Suzanne's Trauma Revealed

Caddy narrates that she believes that Suzanne hides a secret related to her family from her friends. By time, Caddy discovers that Suzanne has been maltreated, physically and emotionally abused by her parents. Therefore, Suzanne becomes traumatised. As she is ashamed of the history of abuse with her parents, Suzanne never really opens up or tells her friends about her trauma. She only tells Caddy about the abuse because Caddy herself has figured out that there was something wrong with Suzanne's family.

To begin with, Suzanne has been physically abused. Ever since she was young, her stepfather has been constantly beating her. Suzanne admits to Caddy the truth about her stepfather's abuse by telling her "[l]ook, I'm really bad at this. Short version is, my dad – stepdad, whatever – used to hit me, like, a lot. And so my aunt came and took me away. And now I live here" (Barnard, *Beautiful Broken Things* 50). Although this abuse has been occurring for a prolonged period of time, almost all of Suzanne's life, there was little or no intervention from any of her family members such as mother, brother and aunt. However, lately, her aunt decided to intervene and take her to live with her in Brighton, another city where her father cannot reach her easily. Unfortunately, nobody else was abused in Suzanne's family. Her stepfather had never actually beaten her mother or brother. "'My dad never hit [Brian], if that's what you mean.' Her voice was resigned, as if she'd expected this conversation. 'That was just

for me.'" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 71). Hence, Suzanne always believed that there is something wrong with her that drove her stepfather to hit her constantly. As he has never hit anybody else, it was only natural to believe that she did something that angered her father and made her beat her all the time. To make matters worse, she felt that her mere presence in life exasperated him. She also believed that he hated her and reflected this hatred by hitting her. She tells Caddy that the extremity of her father's violence would have actually led to her death. This is actually why her aunt decided to take her away from her home. "We moved here because I'd have died otherwise.' She said this bluntly, still not looking at me. 'It would have been a bonus if things had changed, if he'd had this amazing change of heart and stopped treating me like I was the cause of all the problems in his life" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 72). Her stepdad's deviant behaviour made Suzanne traumatised. In general, a resource loss is always concomitant with any trauma that takes place. Resource loss means that an essential part of the resources of a person's life is often lost or severed. "Resource loss is a critical and universal feature of all traumas: Life after a trauma is diminished. Depending on the trauma, the resource loss may be psychological (such as a person's sense of security, optimism, and social support), material (such as a home, family, schooling or employment, and a community within which to prosper), or both" (Cloitre et al. 5). Hence, Suzanne endures both psychological and material resource loss. On the one hand, while she is supposed to feel loved, cared for and supported by her family, she is being abused by her stepfather all the time. As a result, she never feels safe at home. On the contrary, she feels unsafe and insecure at home. On the other hand, the material loss happens when she has to give up her home and go live with her aunt. Moving to another city results in losing her home, her family, her school and friends. Whether she likes it or not, her situation actually forces her to start all over again in a place where she does not feel that she belongs to and does not know anyone there.

In addition to being physically abused by her stepfather, Suzanne was neglected by both her parents, specifically her mother. Neglect is defined as "[t]he persistent failure to meet a child's physical and/or emotional needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to a child's basic emotional needs" (qtd in Howe 112). As a matter of fact, Suzanne's mother neglected her needs regarding different aspects of life. Firstly, she never interfered to stop her father's physical abuse. This means that she failed to provide her with

safety and protect her from the danger her father posed. Not only this, but her mother also failed to provide her with the appropriate medical treatment or care that she needed whether inside or outside their home. For instance, Suzanne tells Caddy that once before when her father had beaten her and she started bleeding, her mother failed to save her

> When I was ten I fell against a radiator after Dad hit me… I must have fallen weirdly, because it cut my shoulder really badly. Blood everywhere. Brian tried to clean it and patch it up, but it was too deep. He was barely fifteen at the time. He said I had to go to the hospital, that it would need stitches… Mum was in one of her moods, when she'd barely get out of bed for weeks at a time, you know? She said no too. But Brian wouldn't let her off. I don't know what he said, but eventually she came downstairs and got her keys. She just put a coat on over her pyjamas and got in the car. Brian sat in the back with me, holding a towel to my shoulder and testing me on Beatles lyrics to distract me. When we got to the hospital, Mum said she'd wait in the car—. (Barnard, *Beautiful* 221)

It is obvious from this incident that Suzanne's mother is heedless to her daughter's needs. She does not even care for her safety to the extent that she had to be convinced by her son to drive her daughter to the hospital. Even after arriving there, she did not care about joining her inside the hospital. Although she is a mother, she is in truth engrossed only in her own little world. Her mother's neglect is the kind of neglect that is classified as "passive or depressed neglect" (Howe 114). This kind of neglect generally takes place when one of the parents feels depressed all the time, thereby becoming uninterested in the lives of his/her children. As a result, the parent fails to attend to his/her child's needs and wants. In fact, Suzanne's family is dysfunctional because "one parent…feels helpless and depressed in their role as caregiver, while the other is prone to anger, violence and aggression" (Howe 157). This instability of the roles of Suzanne's parents makes her traumatised.

To make matters worse, Suzanne was emotionally abused by her parents. Emotional abuse is defined as "neglecting a person's emotional or developmental needs, rejection, criticizing, putting down a person, verbal abuse, threatening a person, making someone feel unsafe, openly abusing another in front of a person" (Nesheen et al. 1138). While he always hit her, Suzanne's father also emotionally abused her by making her feel worthless and unappreciated at home. "When my dad told me I was worthless, Brian was the one who'd tell me it wasn't true" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 222). It was as if he constantly emphasized that she was unloved by her parents and was actually their burden in life. Likewise, her mother always

abused her emotionally. She did this unintentionally every time she failed to protect her from her father's battering. In addition, Suzanne admits to Caddy that her mother used to tell her that "[s]he used to say I was the strongest one,' Suzanne said slowly. 'That I was much stronger than her. That . . . well, that I could take it, basically" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 133). Unfortunately, this shows how much useless Suzanne's mother was. As a matter of fact, she even believed that although she is a child, Suzanne should endure the stepfather's physical abuse because she is strong and can actually tolerate it. Moreover, as Suzanne's mother "had once told her she was a disappointment" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 155), Suzanne internalized this feeling of unworthiness, which made her believe that her parents hate her and that she is unworthy of their love and protection.

The Negative Impact of Abuse on Adolescents

As adolescents are already in a developmental age, they become very sensitive to everything happening around them. Hence, they are more prone to become traumatised by the actions of those surrounding them as they are undergoing several physiological and psychological changes. Specifically, when they suffer from erratic and turbulent treatment from their parents such as all types of abuse, they can easily become chronically traumatised. One of the negative effects of abuse on the traumatised adolescent is that they find difficulty in formulating their own self- concept. Thereby, their opinion of themselves is always dependent on how others perceive and treat them. "Self-concept is that part of the self which is aware of itself, the perceptions one has of one's own characteristics, feelings, attitudes and abilities" (Olowu 263). Nevertheless, a person who is abused fails to create this awareness about oneself. This happens because an abused person loses all respect for oneself and feels attacked all the time, thereby shattering one's self-image. Because Suzanne's parents fail to provide her with an atmosphere of love and protection, both her self-image and self-concept are challenged. She finds difficulty in formulating her own personality that is ready to deal with the world outside of her home. She rather believes that she is her parents' biggest disappointment. As she is unprotected and unloved by her parents, she internalises the belief that she is unworthy of the love of other people as well. Therefore, she chooses to have relationships with those who respect and think highly of her. For example, she admits to Caddy that although her boyfriend sometimes mistreats her, she still has a relationship with him "[b]ecause he can be so sweet to me. And, sometimes, the way he looks at me – he looks at me like I'm worth looking at" (Barnard, *Beautiful* 124). This foregrounds the fact that because Suzanne is maltreated by her

parents, she has a reduced self-esteem and her opinion of herself depends on how others perceive her.

Defining Posttraumatic Growth

Although a trauma results from a harsh life experience that mostly affects a person's life negatively, sometimes the traumatic experience can result in positive change of the character of the victim. This type of growth and maturation would not have happened, had it not been for this traumatic experience. This positive type of change is known as posttraumatic growth, often referred to as PTG. Specifically, when an adolescent endures a trauma, his or her development will be impacted. As a result, the trauma that occurred may actually be a factor in the identity formation of the teenager. If a person experiences posttraumatic growth, it will help him/her in undergoing a normal and healthy process of maturation.

Posttraumatic growth is defined as the "positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with traumatic or highly challenging life circumstances" (Tedeschi and Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth" 1). An experience may be regarded traumatic if it transcends the person's capability of endurance such as accidents, natural disasters, or death of loved ones. Also, any repetitive pattern of events that activates a person's fight or flight response such as child abuse, wars or violence of any kind fall under the category of traumatic experiences (Giller 2). As such, if a person encounters any of these occurrences, then undergoes a radical positive character transformation, this person is actually experiencing posttraumatic growth.

Similar to the concept of trauma, posttraumatic growth is an old well-known notion. Nevertheless, it only became known as such in the 1990s when both Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, the psychology professors coined the term posttraumatic growth. Throughout history, it has been proven that people and sometimes even communities can drastically change after struggling or going through extremely challenging and threatening events. As a matter of fact, "trauma is not only viewed as potentially devastating but also as a catalyst for positive change" (Tedeschi et al. 31). Because posttraumatic growth is a universal and widespread idea, and for the purpose of this study, focusing on posttraumatic growth of young adults requires close examination.

Posttraumatic Growth in *Fierce Fragile Hearts*

Narrated by Suzanne herself, the novel *Fierce Fragile Hearts* is the sequel to *Beautiful Broken Things*. The events of the novel take place two years after Suzanne leaves the care system and returns to Brighton to meet her old friends, Caddy and Rosie. The shift in the

narrative voice from Caddy's perspective to that of Suzanne foreshadows the positive change she has gone through and her ability to form a life narrative and analyze her actions. The novel focuses on Suzanne's attempt to rebuild an independent life and how she tries to overcome the complexities that result from her past trauma. The novel also shows how she finally embraces forming friendships with people she never knew before such as Kel, Matt and her elderly neighbor Dilys.

Before analyzing Suzanne's PTG in *Fierce Fragile Hearts*, it is necessary to highlight that not any type of positive character change is considered posttraumatic growth. In fact, this change should necessarily follow the occurrence of a traumatic event in order to be regarded as PTG. Nevertheless, those who go through PTG were initially attempting to survive the harsh event and cope with their adversities. As explained by Tedeschi and Calhoun, PTG must take place "concomitantly with the attempts to adapt to highly negative sets of circumstances that can engender high levels of psychological distress" ("Posttraumatic Growth" 2). In other words, growth and maturation are not counted as PTG unless they were brought about by adversities and difficulties.

Additionally, the outcomes of PTG are mostly manifested in different personality features. The changes become obvious in the thoughts, emotions, actions and sometimes even in the physical appearance of the person (Tedeschi et al. 25). Also, when compared to the normal growth of a person who was not traumatised, it is apparent that PTG results in a better, more mature and more developed personality. To be precise, individuals who experience PTG show more "cognitive processing and affective engagement" (Tedeschi and Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth" 5) than those who never experienced traumatic events.

The character development and maturation that happen post trauma usually take place in several features. For example, radical positive changes mostly occur in "1) relationships with others; 2) personal strength; 3) new possibilities; 4) appreciation of life" (Viola 3). In other words, the posttraumatic change that takes place is often reflected in how the traumatised person deals with others, in the person's capabilities to endure and deal with different events, in seeing new opportunities in the future and in appreciating life in general. In fact, Suzanne's character undergoes changes in all these personality aspects, which proves that she has experienced posttraumatic growth.

Firstly, Suzanne's character became stronger than she was when she was still in school. This is actually obvious in the fact that after therapy and after living with foster parents,

she tries to gain control over her life by being independent and living alone. In fact, she refuses any help from her aunt and her brother in an attempt to totally rely on herself.

> I'm much more stable than I used to be, which is a lot to do with my medication and also, you know, actual stability, but that's the problem now; the ending of the stability part. Me moving on from Christie and Don – leaving the care system – to live on my own is pretty *un*stable. And I've got previous on falling apart. They've got good reason to worry. But I can't stay in this Southampton limbo forever, and I've waited what feels like such a long time to have some kind of control over my own life. However scary this is, and however badly it might go, I have to believe that it's worth it. Otherwise, what's the point?" (Barnard, *Fierce Fragile Hearts* 9)

This quote highlights the positive change that happened to Suzanne's character. Actually, she realizes that leaving the care system and deciding to live on her own mark the beginning of a very unstable period of her life. Nevertheless, she still insists on being independent. "And now I'm moving on again, and this time there's a plan to follow. Me, now officially a care leaver, returning to Brighton to learn how to live independently. I'll be living in a bedsit on the second floor of a converted Victorian terrace, the kind that's ten a penny in Brighton. I'll pay my rent with my wages from my job, housing benefit and my care leaver's allowance. It'll be tight, but doable" (Barnard, *Fierce* 10). As a result, she returns to live in Brighton, but this time she refuses to live with her aunt. She would rather rent a bedsit, which is a very small studio, and work at a coffee shop. This means that she will be responsible for her own expenses. She will pay rent and buy her own food. Moreover, she has gained the ability to ruminate and form a life narrative out of the events that took place in her life. This is apparent when she explains that "I used to think that there must be something so, so wrong with me, that my parents didn't love me enough. Something bad, something they could see, and maybe other people could too. I don't think that anymore – I'm older, I've had therapy. I understand that the wrongness is all on an abusive parent, not the child. I get that. But knowing something and feeling something are two different things" (Barnard, *Fierce* 10). As a matter of fact, therapy and living with foster parents have strengthened her personality and made her gain a little perspective in life. Thus, she now understands that her stepfather's abuse was actually his fault, and it has nothing to do with her personality.

Secondly, Suzanne's relationships with others have taken on a different level. For instance, during her trauma, Suzanne had difficulty in forming new relationships and opening up to others. This is shown in how difficult it was for her to form friendships with both Caddy

and Rosie and how she did not open up to them easily. Nevertheless, her posttraumatic growth is shown in the fact that she started to befriend new people such as Kel, Caddy's boyfriend, and Matt and Dilys, her elderly neighbour. Before recovering, she did not actually care about others. She was only concerned with her own needs, wants and happiness. Nevertheless, after healing, Suzanne started to care for others and be considerate of their feelings. For instance, she regularly visits Dilys. When Dilys has a stroke and is transferred to the hospital, Suzanne visits her. Not only this, when Dilys goes to live in a care home, Suzanne becomes keen on visiting her more often. When she visits her, Suzanne always tries to cheer her up and make her feel better. "'You need to cheer this room up a bit,' I say, looking around. 'Put more of you in it. Don't you have any photos of Clarence?' When she shakes her head, I say, 'I've got a few on my phone. I could get a couple printed to put up? And maybe some other little bits. Make it a bit more you.' I wipe my eyes again" (Barnard, *Fierce* 123). Thus, she wants to make Dilys's room more cheerful by printing some photos of Dilys and Clarence, her dog to put them up on the walls.

Thirdly, the increasing personal strength that is gained when a person experiences PTG, individuals will realize that they have new opportunities and new possibilities in life. In fact, these new future opportunities "would have never been considered before the trauma" (Viola 3). To elaborate, individuals may take different decisions that they would have never taken before the trauma. An individual may also take a different approach to life. As such, new activities and interests may be taken. It is notable that these interests only took place as a result of the triggering incident (Tedeschi et al. 27). After recovering from her trauma, Suzanne finally had a plan for her future. Although she did not join a university, she decided to take a specialized nursing course. She tells Sarah that "'I'm going to do an Access course. A nursing one. And then, if I pass, I'm going to apply to Brighton uni to study Nursing properly.' … 'I have a five-year plan now" (Barnard, *Fierce* 305). It is worth mentioning that before healing, Suzanne would have never taken the decision to continue her studies and apply for this Access course. But as she has grown, matured and gained more personal strength, she now has the ability to devise a plan for her future career.

Fourthly, experiencing PTG allows the individuals to appreciate life more. They tend to become more grateful for everything they have in life even if it is very little or was barely noticeable before the trauma. Consequently, their priorities in life change which makes the quality of their life decisions even better than before. In addition, when experiencing PTG, trauma survivors believe that they were offered a second chance for a better life (Tedeschi et

al. 28). Hence, they tend to be more optimistic and hopeful for a better future. Suzanne's appreciation of life is seen at the ending of the novel when she narrates:

> There have been so many times in my life that I'd thought I was starting again, whether I wanted to or not. I thought that was what I had to do to finally get a chance to make things right. But that's not how it works, I get that now. Recovering isn't about fresh starts, or new beginnings. It's about the constant as well as the change. You build a foundation in layers, and that's what makes it strong. Maybe sometimes it means taking a step back, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. Sometimes you have to take a step back to get a better view of where you're going. I will never be better, because better is not a thing. I will always just be me, and maybe that's OK. Maybe that's even great. I am sitting in my garden with my dog on my lap, an arrow on my back that will always point up, and I am surrounded by people who love me. Yeah. I'm doing just fine. (Barnard, *Fierce* 310)

Finally, she's having her life arranged and organized. She understands that being better does not mean necessarily changing everything. It is rather reaching the compromise between the constant and changeable aspects of life. She now appreciates the life she has built. She is more grateful and appreciative of the little joys in life such as being among those she loves. Hence, as a mature adult now who has undergone posttraumatic growth, Suzanne is more in control of her life more than ever before.

In conclusion, the trauma that Suzanne experienced allows her to positively transform her character. Despite suffering from her stepfather's abuse and the neglect of her mother which traumatised her and affected her negatively, therapy and foster care helped her heal and recover. This in turn led her to gain personal strength, improved her relationships with others, allowed her to see new possibilities in life and made her appreciate her life more. Suzanne's life narrative that is seen through both novels proves that although a trauma impacts a person's life negatively, sometimes it can be turned into a chance to grow and mature into a well-developed adult. This happens through posttraumatic growth which improves a person's life and makes it change into a better version.

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