

Monsters; from unreal to real; A Peek into the Postmodern

American Selective Psycho – horror Fiction

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in English

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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## Approval

The thesis/project titled “Monsters; from unreal to real; A Peek into the Postmodern American Selective Psycho – horror Fiction” submitted by Anika Tabassum (19103012) of Summer, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts on [Date-of-Defense], 2023.

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## **Abstract/Executive Summary**

This paper aims to discuss postmodern/ contemporary American psychological horror novels *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Doll Master* (2016) by Joyce Carol Oates, and *The girl who loved Tom Gordon* (1999) by Stephen King through exploring psychological issues of characters which includes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder that often cause hallucinations leading a person to introvertism, socio-phobia, or social anxiety disorder. Moreover, using Saussure and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as well as Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection, it further explores how these writers used Gothic Horror elements like spirits and ghosts, aesthetic of dolls, uncanny settings of old abandoned house, dark forest as well as made up evil entity like the God of the Lost in order to blur the psychological or mental problems of the central characters. In a nutshell, the paper summarizes the fact that works of postmodern horror fiction are scarier in a sense that there is no living creature scarier than humans. Reality is becoming more haunting because humans are failing to control their demons in their mind, which as a result is turning them into monsters.

## **RESEARCH GAP**

- Lack of analysis on *Beloved* by Toni Morrison as a "horror" novel because it is mostly viewed as a postcolonial novel.
- *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* being an underrated novel had almost negligible amount of information on how child psychology is related to horror themes.
- *The Doll Master* by Joyce Carol Oates is a contemporary short story which is why there is lack of research materials related to the protagonist or his psychological issues.

## **Dedication**

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Sayeed Noman for being so humble and considerate throughout my journey of writing this paper and a whole – hearted gratitude for guiding me. Last but not the least; I am grateful to my mother, who never stopped believing in me when I thought I won't be able to finish this paper as well as for cheering me up when this 7month journey became exhausting. As a result, all these support kept me focused.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

What is “Horror”? Simple it may sound, but it is highly difficult to define such an encyclopedic term. One plausible way is to narrow it down to its more literary connotations. Now the question is what is “Horror” as a genre, specifically in fiction? Starting from the time of Poe to Lovecraft to Stephen King, “horror” has travelled a long way from its basics. Noel Carroll in her book *Philosophy of Horror* says that there are two kinds of horror. “Natural Horror” is felt through natural causes, for example, when Hitler tortured the Jews and killed them, which are a form of natural horror. On the other hand, Art Horror that is associated more with description through vivid and at times morbid images of gloomy weather, monsters in nightmares, and other supernatural props. Unlike natural horror, art horror cannot be seen but felt. Mostly, the films and novels that are often generalized as horror are actually “art horror”. Writers often use “art horror” in order to camouflage “natural horror” as a background of their novel’s plot. Since horror is generated by art, so, by art horror, Carroll categorizes it as a product of a genre. According to her, Western or American horror is mostly based on the setting of the story. Fictions categorized as horror are designed to affect the readers in such an emotional state where, this emotion is named as art horror. Art horror tends to be mostly eerie and unnerving and using its frightening effects they explore psychological phenomena. In relation to that, correlating horror with appearance of monsters shows a transparent way of recognizing it from terror, especially of the kind embedded in the stories of abnormal psychologies as, in a way the themes contrast each other. Similarly, with the use of monsters or other supernatural entities as a measure of horror, a reader can separate horror stories from Gothic exercises, for example Stephen King’s *It* is horror and Edgar Allan Poe’s *Tell Tale Heart* is Gothic. However, Horror and Gothic are interrelated because; the earliest form of Horror fiction that has emerged is Gothic Horror. In most of the horror

fiction, human characters identify the monsters as abnormal and probably an abomination of nature but horror monsters are different from the ones we find in fairy tales. Unlike fairy tales, the monsters from horror fiction violate the norms of ontological standards imagined by the practical human characters in the story as if it is some kind of an extraordinary creature in our ordinary world of humans. The most important feature of horror as a genre is the “Mirroring effect” where, the emotions of the audience act like a mirror that reflects the same energy as those of the positive human characters in not all but certain respects. So, according to their reflective emotions, the appropriate reaction to the appearance of monsters comprises trembling, nausea, cringing, paralysis, screaming, and disgust and hatred. Thus, our responses are meant to be parallel to those characters. In horror fiction, horrific creatures are so physically unattractive; they often arouse sickness in the characters that discover them. Horror can be divided into many sub-genres, where the earliest form of horror is the southern gothic genre and the postmodern popular choice is the psychological horror genre. As a genre, Horror has elements like fear, terror, creating curiosity and mystery which are related to emotions and experiences of a human being whose existence can be extracted from their actions and behavior in daily life or sometimes through their relationships with other people. We say horror is about monsters. The transition of horror fiction containing alien-like monsters to representing humans as pure evil and monstrous have not been an overnight change.

Gothic itself is supposed to be a mixed genre where traces of many other genres can be found as well. The genre ultimately emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and the first gothic novel, *the castle of Otranto* (1764), was written by Horace Walpole. In most of the gothic texts, it is very common to find old houses, castles, light houses, graveyard, old mansions and church that build up the dark theme and a gothic background. One of the reasons why the writers of that era started writing gothic texts



was because they were interested in the negative aspects of human life and these negative aspects were completely denied by the philosophers of that time. The writers realized that the human beings are not born rational, and they tried to reflect on the inhuman qualities of human beings. Gothic stories or poems usually describe psychological problems and social problems that a negative character is forced to endure. Prominent gothic elements that are often found in gothic texts are antiquated or seemingly antiquated spaces. For example, castle, abbey, vast prison, subterranean crypt, aging city, decaying storehouse, urban underworld, factories, etc. It is the set up that gives the vibe of something macabre, ominous. Within this space the readers will find something hidden or a secret that usually haunts the characters. The haunting takes many forms like ghosts or something supernatural which is one of the subgenres of Gothicism that causes terror in the mind of the readers.

Gothic fiction started including social problems as well as fashion and bejeweling class differences, creating love stories that are impossible for happy endings for example Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. Social problems involved "people judging people", their actions, decisions, choices, and opinions. Additionally, the contemporary or postmodern horror fiction introduces evils or villains with twisted mindset. Evil in the sense, where they feel the kink to torture for pleasure, to hurt others for their own satisfaction and mostly actions based on revenge. Contemporary horror fiction shows destruction of the body, and it is often connected with summoning many of the medical anxieties and phobias which are projected through the sense of vulnerability which, clearly the cause of collapsing. It is now quite obvious that, a vital aspect of the development of the texts we consider as Gothic, from the late eighteenth century to the verge of the twenty-first century is the increase of the available landscape of description: physical events as well as violations and the sickening psychic depictions, for example, in contemporary horror fictions, psychic villains often finds the urge to be some kind of hero in their mind where they murder betrayers or "free" sad

children by killing them, who are ignored by their families. In short, Horror fiction now is just the more intensified and dramatic version of how it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, except for the fact that now, instead of accusing supernatural creatures as monsters, the fictions reveal the real monsters are inside of us.

Once a science writer named Walter Sullivan said, “Horror resides in the transformation of what we know best, the intimate and comfortable details of our lives made suddenly threatening” Cheng ’18). Therefore, in this paper, I intend to emphasize briefly how “horror” as a literary genre evolved from old fashioned scary stories to realistic horror of our surrounding in terms of postmodern American fiction, firstly, by discussing how the effects of post-slavery can contribute to trauma that generates fear as an element of “horror” in Morrison’s novel *Beloved* and fear causing loss of identity in *Beloved* and *The Doll Master*. Secondly, how parental conflict and divorce can affect children causing traumatic behavior as another element of horror in Stephen King’s *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* and Joyce Carol Oates’ short story *The Doll Master*. Finally, the paper also analyzes mind of a human – monster as well as symbols of horror using Kristeva’s theory of abjection and Semiotic theory of Saussure and Barthes in *The Doll Master* and *the Girl who loved Tom Gordon*.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

How postmodern horror fictions utilize dark fantasy themes of southern gothic genre to reveal human monstrosity through selective psychological issues of the protagonists of *Beloved*, *The Doll Master* and *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon*?

Since the paper is on the critical analysis of Psychological horror themes in Postmodern American fiction, the major aspect that this paper intends to focus is on how postmodern horror fiction uses supernatural creatures like ghosts and made up Gods as well as gothic aesthetic of dolls from southern gothic genre in order to bring out selective psychological issues of the characters that connect actions caused by trauma and fear with horror in reality.

To begin with, Horror as a genre came from the themes of many famous literary heroic pieces like Poe's macabre tales were also inspired from historical events such as King Charles burning himself alive in the middle of a ballroom whereas Lovecraft would create supernatural creatures inspired from combining men and octopus, rats, witches, werewolves and ghouls. Through *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Poe enters a dimension where his work could be related to a human body. According to Victor Sage, the aging house could be used to refer to the human body's decaying process and represent that the house dying could be a symbol of mortality of human beings (Morgan 42). Secondly, Linda Badley talks about the environmental factors and the setting of horror fictions before the postmodern era. She explains that the classic macabre fictions and films had settings like campfire, cave-like setting, Dracula's castle, or any dark castle near the sea, tombs and a certain level of darkness in everything would be emphasized (Morgan 43). However, not to forget, religious beliefs and practices played a great role in old horror fictions. The concept of hell and heaven, angels and demons, worshiping Satan, believing in sacrificing souls for goat like creatures and necromancy led to the tradition of calling priests and performing exorcism. The supernatural

horror fictions were mostly popular back then because people believed in them. People believed in evil and that, if God exists with great positive power, there might be possibility that Evil exists with extreme negative power too which the people would use as an excuse to explain one's wrongdoings in the society. And of course, from today's perspective, if a woman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century talked about science and facts, she would be hanged for being a "witch". Gothic and supernatural horror fiction before the 20th century was more about the nature and superstitious beliefs that made people fear. For example, storms and floods wiping one's home and family would make them feel cursed, believing that the wind has power to heal and trees that give fruits shall be worshiped for more benefits for the future and first born children to be sacrificed for greater fortune and redemption from sins and believing that people will be reincarnated in order to fulfill promises. In contrast to these, horror today has taken a great shift based on science, technology and the human mind. Before, the version of horror was simply gothic being a sub-genre which slowly got replaced by psychological horror. This is where Joyce Carol's *The Doll-master* comes in. Problematic people of society creating monsters has become a vast territory but it's like what they say, "Monsters are created at home", and this centralizes the family issues affecting a person or a child mentally in such a way that it turns them into monsters. Oates in her article "*In Olden Times, when Wishing was having... Classic and Contemporary Fairy Tales*" seemed to criticize the "fairy tales" and the underlying truths behind the "happily ever after". It is her idea of seeing the beautiful fairy tales as something vague and dark that inspired me to rethink every horror fiction I have read so far. She argued how over the years, women have been victimized for men's happiness. Her example includes stories like Hansel and Gretel; children left to die by their own father, Snow White's step- mother's torturous death, etc. Not to forget the story of Maleficent from *The Sleeping Beauty* and the recent story that reveals her power threatened the king so much that he chopped off her wings and caged them. In another interview with

Stuart Spencer, Oates reveals that she likes to picture herself in every story she writes. Not to forget, this is the same woman who pointed out women are mostly the victims in horror fiction or fairy tales. The bone-chilling writer says, “I like bitterness. Bitterness has some tang and some power to it. The opposite might be sweet, which seems to be superficial, cloying. But bitterness- there’s more to it” (Spencer 44). Oates is mostly famous for her writings that include chilling stories about murderers, sociopaths, etc. And these are the monsters that I intend to point out in my paper through criticizing the protagonist of *The Doll Master*, because these monsters are not from fairy tales or supernatural. They are very real, as real as I am and they are the man-made monsters; created either by their families or by the judgmental society.

Oates explores one of the greatest elements of horror in her article “The Aesthetics of Fear” and before coming to a conclusion, she explores the earliest pieces of literature hiding fear under different situations. She starts with Homer, connects fear with deaths of heroes and how continuous brutality has been turned to aesthetics of fear. Adding details from *Odyssey*, mentioning about *The House of Death*, she intends to explain that previously when death and brutality were related to horror, in this contemporary era, reading back at those Trojan death of war heroes does not really seem like horror anymore. Oates manages to gather around quotes on why would anyone wish to experience fear and how is fear depicted as a universal experience of every living creature as well as related to horror and reality as I quote, “We can presume that the aesthetic fear is not an authentic fear but an artful simulation of what is crude, inchoate, nerve- driven and ungovernable in life; its evolutionary advantage must be the preparation for the authentic experience, unpredictable and always imminent. In times of war and social upheaval, suicide is reported to be virtually unknown, for life, the merest shred of life, becomes infinitely precious” (Oates 176). In continuation to that, Oates explores the themes of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* about gothic dimension which includes vampires, blood

sucking, victimizing and manipulating women in the name of love and seduction. According to her article, sacrifices in the name of religion, and brotherhood bonds were the earliest visions of true horror that has been feared by readers. Oates explains that the dark gothic imaginations and nightmares of the readers has come to life using example of Dracula, she says that since the main source of survival for Dracula is blood, if human lives come to an extinct, he will have no food and that, is something to fear for. She explains that even the villains who scare the readers have also fear for their own existence. Other than fear, another element of horror that Oates mentions is about categorizing “good” and “evil” as I quote, “Personifying “evil” - like personifying “good” over the incalculable and impersonal forces of nature of which of which we are a part, but only an infinitesimal part” (Oates 184). Oates gives a glimpse of horror of the realistic world from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where the character Philomela after being raped, her sister takes revenge by chopping the living boy and feeding the flesh to his father (Oates 178). Even though in the end it is shown that the victims are turned into birds but the monstrous acts of rape as well as the way her sister took the revenge is the act of human beings, humans and not monsters as I repeat over and over again. Lastly, she questions that when the vampire in gothic horror novels are used to create fear to the readers, vampire is not really a monster however, it is simply an extension of our “animal-self” which sane people tries to keep in control and some of us fails. Therefore, Oates article gives me a clear vision on my topic how the horror genre evolved through time from being supernatural, dark and gothic to logical, scientific and psychologically real, even through Ovid’s reference she brought to light how supernatural ideas likes turning people into birds are used over to mask the heinous acts of human beings for lust and anger. According to Melissa Bailar’s article, “Uncanny Anatomies/ Figures of Wax”, human models made of wax were used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in French literature in order to represent cultural visualization of women during the time of Enlightenment. First of all, wax dolls are used in occult

intervention by putting women's spirit in it and using it for sexual pleasure by lovers in certain novels because the use of uncanny wax models or dolls were previously used for medical studies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for anatomy as well as underline "cultural efforts to contain and dominate female agency and sexuality" (Bailar 30). In short, it says that objectifying women were in next level when woman like wax dolls were sexualized. Additionally, the article mentions about a famous wax figure, "anatomical Venus" which was a female figure with special quality where seven of its parts were removable with revealing organs. The most uncanny or terrific about the whole idea is that the wax dolls have hair and teeth and nails like women as well, not only just the private body parts. Bailar mentions, "The contrast between the hyper realist visualization of the interior of female anatomy and the conventional representations of female beauty renders the Venuses both unfamiliar and familiar as they recall death through their dissectibility and dispel it through their placid expressions" (Bailar 32). Based on this explanation, it can be assumed that dolls are used for sexual fantasy because they can be controlled completely and unlike humans, dolls do not die so they can be "used" as long as one wishes to. In addition to the conversation on normal dolls, the article further explores the unusual ones with broken hands, tumors all over the face, disfigured, missing fingers, etc. It also discusses, in some literary pieces human corpses are also used to turn into wax dolls creating a fear that the dolls might come back to life someday yet another disturbing imagery are that Bailar says, "The disembodied" wax moulds of diseased female sex organs represent misogynistic acts of mastery and submissiveness as well as sexual penetration as I quote, "Rachilde's female protagonist dominates her male lover, anatomically fragments him and has sex with his waxen replica" (Bailar 33). Even though the wax dolls were first used for medical training, it has to be claimed that humanity should be kept away from science speaking after the existence of the uncanny dolls and their use in literature. When stories use characters that are dolls and the dolls start speaking, it

becomes horror but the underlying truth is, dolls are human alternatives and they are not supposed to talk back. Male characters not being able to control female haunted dolls is not really horror instead, sign of reality that women are not supposed to be treated the way these dolls are being treated and they are not to be objectified. Bailar concludes saying that the wax stories are actually to express the anxiety about women by objectifying them and expressing positions of power. According to James Kneale's article "From beyond: H.P. Lovecraft and the place of Horror", if we are to discuss horror as a literary genre, then Lovecraft has unique contribution through his creation of creatures like shapeless moving slimes, or the famous Cthulhu, a creature that never existed until Lovecraft introduced it, the soul-eating creature, that are not so mainstream like ghosts and vampires. Lovecraft creates unique spaces like "mountains of madness", as well as vivid unreal visuals like "shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles" (Kneale 111). His creatures are absurd and shapeless sometimes faceless but somehow prints out the evil nature of human beings. Additionally, while looking for Oates' style of psychological horror the article "Don't You Know Who I Am?: The Grotesque in Oates's *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*" by Joyce M. Wegs discusses one of her psychotic serial killer character Arnold roaming around in the form of a teenager and he is described as evil as the Satan himself. Even though he appears as someone distorted which makes him fake as well as brings out his true face. The fact that this character is directly compared with the Satan is like imposing demonic horror to the readers. Wegs says that, just like Oates does not emphasize on Arnold's existence in the story is how existence of evil is also less emphasized which is why most evil doings has no solutions. Oates through one of her characters dictates about evil that it is "not merely a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality. Mysterious and frightening" (Wegs 70). Secondly, Wegs focuses that Oates uses her character's conscious and unconsciousness and how they experience terror in order to bring horror into reality as I quote,



“Connie’s fear drives her into a grotesque separation of mind from the body in which her unconscious self takes over and betrays her” (Wegs 70). Based on the explanation on this article, Oates is someone who wants her readers to first focus on the identity of the characters of her work as her character Connie’s identity is compared to being pretty which her mother claims. Which means here, their identity is how they look in the story. The fact that this story is summarized as a “demon lover saving his helpless victim”, Oates brings out that evil is a characteristic of a human being who is also capable of loving as in, when we call monsters as evil, Oates readers can conclude that the evil nature is just a part of every human which we all have. As if we are all evil for some and heroic for the people we love and her story also has the underlining meaning that the evil of the society remains unresolved and the character Connie is not really possessed by any demon but by the evil restrictions of the society, her family as well as herself who is captivated between her conscious and unconscious and all of this together does not let her escape (Wegs 72). The reason behind collecting data from this article is because, Oates has a similar pattern for her stories and similar to this, even in *The Doll Master*, she focuses on a character who is not possessed by any demon but by his own demons which lives in his head, a victim of bullying and bad parenting.

In addition to the previous articles about Oates, Siegfried Erich Kraus’ article “Joyce Carol Oates in search for the Sense in Human Life” concentrates on the natural pattern of Oates’ American characters in her fiction. Kraus’ says that “In Oates’ novels, Americans are always in motion, colliding, pursuing, running from each other, hiding, seeking privacy” and then in the end they try to look for something fill up that secret void (Kraus 40). The reason behind why she mostly focuses on the family background is because the family she creates is from the time of depression where many people suffered from mental as well as financial struggles which make her characters a bit more distorted than the readers, who are mostly from the contemporary period. Since Kraus’ article illustrates on Oates’ writing style, he says that Oates includes the

philosophy of existentialism in order to look for the meaning of human life. Oates uses hope as an element which signifies living life in contrast to destructive existentialism (57) as I quote, “It is important to show the repudiation of the one – sided distortion of an existential human framework to a purposeful human life” (56). Lastly, Kraus points out the techniques Oates uses as an alternate to destructive existentialism which includes “hope” opposing “fear” in order to build reliable relationship to future, “in opposition to the abstract dominance of reason, there are means of communication between men to overcome dangerous conflicts” (56). In addition to these, there is one aspect in terms of Oates’ characters; a meaningful life for a character is when they succeed to locate themselves in a certain place, a ground to claim their own space. Other than the techniques, Kraus points out that the parents at home are important figures for children of Oates’ fictions but unfortunately, even after becoming adults, those characters do not seem to escape from their earlier relationships with their parents. This explains, even after finishing school, the boy from *The Doll Master* did not stop being resentful to his father. Last but not the least, Kraus says based on the fact that Oates is a contemporary writer, her characters are aware of “dual reality” which he says is the “gap between the appearance and the actuality of words” (62). This means that her characters act very lively as they can understand “what is said” and “what is meant”. He also notes down how Oates uses mental breakdowns, murder and divorces as a result of “communication break” which is clearly seen in *The Doll Master* that, less communication caused the divorce of his parents, which led to his mother’s sickness, and she got sick to such extent that in the end she could recognize that her son was collecting human child instead of dolls. The concept of dolls used by Oates in her story concerned me on how the matter of dolls became a subject of fear in American literature and Donald Consentino’s article “Spirit and Image: The Art of Voodoo” talks about the “emergence of Voodoo chic in American culture”. He uses his article to protest against the term “voodoo”

used by Harold Courlander in his letter. He states that dolls are a part of voodoo practice. He also points out that the voodoo culture was shown as the negative aspects of racism since its origin can be located in the African culture. Voodoo dolls are something that is used to capture soul of someone one wish to manipulate and then using the doll, one can control the other person's actions. He claims that voodoo is especially used to make people happy and it is like some celebration to them as I quote, "yet, it is the sense of celebration, a hosting of the deities in the bodies of their serviteurs" "Voodoo service is about flowers, candles, music, drums, swords, prayer ropes, lace,... drums to inspire their manifestation in the bodies of their serviteurs who have prepared this party for them" (71).

In relation to gothic themes, grotesque is the central attraction according to Maximillian Novak's article "Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque". The grotesque is mostly defined through the "estranged world", sometimes the place between the living and the dead as well as demonic entities and things that cannot be seen with bare eyes. In fifth part of his article, he says that Gothic came to life when our dreams and imaginations became suspicious. It was easier for people to believe that one felt heavy in their sleep, which means a demon sat on their chest, which now we call as "sleep paralysis" and Gothic might be considered as a literature close to nightmares. Lastly, he concludes expressing that gothic fiction is a grotesque distortion of all sorts of ordinary things which is vividly disgusting as well as wildly attractive at the same time.

Additionally, Maria Beville's book *Gothic – postmodernism* focuses on the common ground of both forms, which is, creating terror. Based on this text, gothic – postmodernism is a new literary genre that blurs the border of what is real and what is simply fiction. As a result, it causes self-consciousness, dualistic philosophy of evil and good, haunting effects of terror, and un-presentable aspects of reality and subjectivity (Beville 18). The Meta – narratives of gothic postmodernism destroy the original ideas of history, religion, culture and identity in

order to create an inverted version of the same (19). The emergence of gothic postmodernism is the horror itself because of its obsession with terror, irrationality, ideas against humanity at the same time becoming familiar and relatable to the readers. Through the terrors, readers question their own unconscious fears, their beliefs and not just in terms of their desires but also in terms of the backlash of the society in general (19). She says, “Terrorism is a specter that plagues us all as part of our desire for symbolic death and the realization of impossible real” (21). It means, often gothic postmodernist texts offer characters who detach themselves from the real world subconsciously and creates a world of their own where they make the impossible as possible, but all of this be going on in their mind the whole time and invisible to the real world; all of this tends to be part of their imagination. Terror has always been the vital element of gothic horror since the time it first emerged back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, later it got broken down into fear, desires and anxieties as slowly in the contemporary world, faith and meaning of life is lost somewhere. According to Jean Lyotard’s theory of “unpresentable”, terror is considered as an experience which affects the consciousness of a person and distracts one from the basic aspects of being, which are impossible to figure out in our ordinary subjective frames of reference (27). Terror is the ruling principle of the sublime.

Moving on to the mystery research on Morrison’s *Beloved*, James Berger’s article “Ghosts of Liberalism: Morrison’s *Beloved* and the Moynihan Report” identifies *Beloved* as a historical novel about an African- American mother who murdered her child so that no one can enslave the child as in putting an end to the cycle of slavery. Berger calls the murder of Beloved as an apocalypse of the world of slavery and says Morrison used the infanticide by Sethe which is the result of trauma; trauma of slavery as I quote, “I begin by viewing Sethe’s infanticide as an act that is traumatic in the lasting, symptomatic effects of its overwhelming horror” and the action reveals that this horror generates trauma which results into “institutional and

familial violence” (Berger 409). Sethe is described as a heroic character after murdering her daughter because it is portrayed like she kept her most beautiful and precious part in a place where no evil can reach. One could say, this act is normalizing murdering one’s own child in order to protect them as in “Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free” (Berger 410). One of the things the article pointed out is the symbolism of veil. It talks about the scene from a party where the schoolteacher and slave catcher comes at the yard to take Sethe and her children and that is when Sethe pushes her daughter through the veil. Berger says, “Morrison describes an act of unspeakable violence between blacks, within an African American family. The catastrophes of continuing white racism and of African American self-destruction are the twin themes of Morrison’s work” (Berger 410). He calls the novel as a “collective suicide”. Moreover, he defines trauma that it is the destruction of psychoanalytic narrative; it is a disaster that removes memories of old life as well as creates new ones that are more vicious. It discusses the political as well as the psychological link through the comparison of good slave owner and bad slave owner in the novel and also highlights that the recurring return of the spirit of slave’s child signifies that no matter how hard they tried to escape, eventually slavery will return in their lives again as I quote, “The repeated returns of the murdered child’s ghost in the North during reconstruction suggest that racial violence will inevitably return at any time and in any place as long as the systemic nature of racism is not addressed” (Berger 411). The article also focuses on the condition of an African American lower middle-class family with a single mother having mental breakdown that Morrison portrayed through Sethe in her novel. Helpless and jobless mother whose sons left home forever and having left with one daughter and murdering the other sounds more of a tragedy and often it is the tragic events that lead to actions causing terror which makes a story or fiction “horror”. According to Berger’s article, yes, racism ended in 1965 which means racism ended before Morrison published *Beloved* but the idea of racism in the 1980s was a

forced double denial as in “Reaganist conservatives denied American racism and descendents of the New Left denied any dysfunction within African American communities” (Berger 414) and Morrison’s novel opposes both the forms of denial. That is, the novel should be read as an excerpt of passed down historical trauma. Lastly, the article states, according to Freud’s logic traumatic memories can never be forgotten. They might fade for a while but never gone. They always return every time the actions causing that trauma are repeated. Even though Beloved’s ghost disappears at the end of the novel, but it shall return if the actions that caused the return of ghost are repeated again. Moving on, I am fortunate enough to find a short interview of Toni Morrison where she talks about the curious questions of Beloved with Marsha Darling, which is titled as “In the Realm of Responsibility: A conversation with Toni Morrison”. When Darling asks her about Beloved’s pregnancy as it is impossible for a ghost to carry children, she claims that ghost of Beloved is real “just like a thought”. She made Beloved’s ghost real because she believes it signifies history and that, “making history possible and making memory real” (Morrison 6). She also reveals that in the novel, sometimes the ghost speaks of its mind and sometimes it just responds to others. Responding to the question on the boundary between life and death, Morrison says that in the text Beloved is dead and a returned spirit of Sethe’s daughter on the other hand, Beloved is dead in terms of flesh, but her spirit is a survivor of slave ship. Just like spirits are the bridges between life and death, death of those slaves is the bridge between the gap of Africa and Afro-America. Lastly, she says, it is necessary to remember the horrors, the horrors of slavery and it must be remembered in a way so that the memory cannot be destroyed and by this, it also means keepings the trauma alive in our mind and the act of writing a story like is like her motive to keep that horror and trauma of slaves alive even today as I quote, “There is a necessity for remembering the horror...in a manner in which the memory is not destructive.

The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember” (Morrison 6).

The article “Gothic elements in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*” by Blessing Diala – Ogamba claims that literary Gothicism creates suspense and terror, which began back in 1764 whose motive is to generate fear and horror from the readers. It mentions that Gothic emerges from medieval setting like dark castles and gloomy weather to something darker, uncanny and extremely macabre which often deals with peculiar psychological states. The article critically starts analyzing the novel from the very first page where the baby ghost appears and sets the environment as haunting as possible for the readers. Other than pointing out all the scary details of the actions of the baby ghost at the beginning of the novel, the article manages to focus on a more deadly fact and that is, society already isolated Sethe after she murdered her child but Baby Suggs’ protection caused jealousy which is why no one from the community or the neighborhood warned Sethe that the school teacher arrived in her place. Another thing can be said that other than many things it is jealousy that can also generate actions of terror. Additionally, the article mentions about one of the unique African traditions where dogs can sense danger or something ominous or spirits as I quote, “In African tradition, dogs are known to sense ghosts and evil spirits, faster than humans. The arrival of *Beloved* therefore causes the disappearance of Here Boy” (Ogamba 413). One of the things the article helped me through is that, my paper mostly focuses on women or female characters being the victim of horrific actions and Paul D as the article suggests, describes *Beloved*’s appearance in such an obnoxious way, which proves how women are viewed by men as I quote, “Something funny ’bout that girl... Acts sick, sounds sick, but she don’t look sick. Good skin, bright eyes and strong as a bull” (Morrison 56). One could claim, that often from the appearance, women’s mental health is neglected; even though her character is a ghost here, in real life, sometimes women are ignored as ghosts as

well as treated as ghosts with ghostly psychological or traumatic disorders. Later, the article also tries to justify the choice of identity of Sethe; in the time of danger is she a mother or a slave, did a mother kill her child to protect her or did a slave, who knows the consequences of slavery killed the baby and saved her from the trauma, “She finds herself discussing everything with Beloved... who forces Sethe to confront her past in her incompatible roles as a slave and a mother” (Morrison 109). It also mentions about the “shine” surrounding Beloved which only others can see like Paul D but Beloved’s mother and sister cannot. This might signify that only our family can see us as a normal person but the whole world will always find a way to judge us and see us through their critical dark glasses, “while Paul D recognizes the way Beloved shines and wonders why Sethe and Denver do not notice the shine” (Ogamba 414). The article also points out how women, even in the form of ghost are accused of or a subject or a weapon used of manipulating men as Ogamba quotes from the novel where Paul D is shown as a scared man who does not want to betray Sethe by getting seduced and sleeping with her guests as in Beloved. Among the multiple disgusting acts, one to point out is, Denver being a daughter does not stop Beloved from strangling their mother, does not hate Beloved for sleeping and making love with their mother’s lover because Denver acts selfish as she wants Beloved to stay with them. The article not only discusses the bad ghost which is Beloved but also the good ghost which is the ghost of Baby Suggs that reveals Sethe’s love for her children to Denver, “It is only when she steps out of 124 following the advice of Baby Suggs – whose ghost visited her – that she comes to realize that Sethe committed the crime out of love for her children” (Ogamba 416). Finally, the article speaks about the socio – psychological exploitation where Sethe feels the guilt of murdering her child at the same time heals after confronting the horror of slavery from her past.

In continuation to horrors of slavery, Sheldon George also analyzes *Beloved* in his article “Approaching the "Thing" of Slavery: A Lacanian Analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*”. He



describes the novel as a “revision of history” about a real slave woman called Margaret Garner, whose character is portrayed as Sethe in the novel. Morrison’s *Beloved* is all about past and traumatic experiences and in response to that George quotes Lacan’s Psychoanalytic theory that “psychoanalytic thought defines itself in terms of trauma and their persistence” (*Ethics* 10). The novel presents the trauma that keeps coming back every time ones identification is linked to their past location. Trauma of “Sweet Home” is latched to Sethe and her family where, Sweet Home is quite similar as a section of memory in Sethe’s subconscious. George explains that through this character and her traumatic past, Morrison address that even at contemporary times, African American people still suffer from the horrors of slavery less as physical but more as mentally. Lastly, George views *Beloved* as a postcolonial text which does not fuel more anger to the readers. Instead, it aims to let the African Americans grieve their past but also heal to move forward and to stop claiming their identity under the basis of past slavery. He uses Lacan’s theory to explain that trauma is something stored in our unconscious part of mind and horror that causes trauma results into lack of sense of subjectivity as well as loss of identity which helped me to come to realization that horror not only causes trauma and psychological problems like hallucinations but also loss of one’s own identity as I quote, “Subjectivity arises out of a traumatic split... on one hand, the symbolic world of meaning and the consciousness that perceives it... on the other, all that refuses symbolization through language, most properly the unconscious and the real” (George 116). According to his analysis, *Beloved* embodies Sethe’s guilt in a lifeless body as well as a ghost of Sethe’s spiritual death. In order to explain how trauma functions, George quotes Charles Shepherdson saying that it is an experience “in which two chains of signifiers previously kept apart, are suddenly made to intersect, in such a way... that in the place of meaning, a hole is produced, a “cut” in the universe of meaning... that is linked to an obscure “forbidden knowledge” excluded from the moment it appears” (George 122). George

concludes saying that the character Sethe gets psychically traumatized not by the powerlessness to the slave owner but her loss of power against words. She is traumatized due to her powerlessness and failure of differentiating the terms “murder” and “freedom” because when Sethe failed to fake her selfishness and fake identity, she admits to *Beloved* that, “If I hadn’t killed her, she would have died” (200). Finally, the article “Talking about The Girl who loved Tom Gordon” by a school teacher, Christie Jones assisted my research on how the emotions the little girl due to her haunting adventure in the forest from the text becomes relatable to the readers. She chooses the text for her students because divorce is a common factor that many children go through, another thing that was explored in the story is bullying and children’s hatred towards their school for not being able to make new friends. She believed that young students can relate with the character of Trisha emotionally. As I quote, “The Girl who loved Tom Gordon explores issues that students can connect with. As a 9 year old she has to draw on strength she didn’t know she had to sustain herself physically and emotionally” (Jones 82).

Based on Maria Beville’s book, *Gothic – Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Post modernity*, there is a special section dedicated to uncanny terrors of postmodern horror fiction. She says that postmodern horror literature focuses on certain culture of fear where people bloom through terrifying images (Beville 95). This means, reading a postmodern horror novel gives the readers a reality check. One of the common words that are used by the previous article and this book is “lost”. In the article, Jones mentions that most teenagers often have the tendency to feel lost. Similarly, this book describes the postmodern people as the lost generation. As I quote, “It is widely accepted that in postmodern times, we find ourselves as something of a lost generation. Quite possibly, we are the first to face a terror that is globally pervasive and uncanny to our historical memory” (96).

## Chapter 3

### Analysis

#### **3.1 How effects of post – slavery generates trauma causing fear in *Beloved* and fear causing identity crisis in *Beloved* and *The Doll Master*.**

In order to begin, Robbie is the protagonist of the short story “The Doll Master” by Joyce Carol Oates. He has been obsessed with dolls since his childhood but tragedy followed him all his life. The first doll he liked belonged to his cousin who died at an unfortunately young age. Just when his father found out about the doll, he threw it away because he did not want his son to play with girly toys. His father’s hideous action made Robbie hates his parents but mostly he resented his father. Thus, this obsession over dolls made the uncanny twist in the story that made him the “doll master”. On the other hand, Sethe is one of the most prominent characters who happens to be a former slave, murdered one of her daughters and escaped with her sons from Sweet Home in 1855 as well as the mother of the ghost child Beloved in Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*. Toni Morrison (1931 – 2019) is an American novelist mostly known for her famous novel “*The Bluest Eye*”.

According to readers’ perspective, one can predict that the return of Beloved is actually personified grief of Sethe and it is a visual representation of the nightmarish fear from her subconscious as a symptom of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is not easy for a mother to kill her own child no matter the reason. One of the reasons to claim that Sethe has PTSD is because a symptom of PTSD is having vivid flashbacks of traumatic past. She always gets traumatic flashbacks of how the schoolteacher used to treat them. She remembers no matter what they did, it was considered as stealing as I quote, “everything they touched was looked on as stealing ... Schoolteacher took away the guns from Sweet Home men and deprived of game to round out their diet of bread ... they began to pilfer in earnest, and it became not only their right but their obligation” (Morrison 225). In present time, it can be

said, the reason Beloved is portrayed as Sethe's grief is because, often Sethe suffers from identity crisis when she thinks about what she did in her past. She keeps questioning herself, whether a slave killed a baby to prevent cycle of slavery to continue or a mother killed her child in order to protect it from being traumatized. On the other hand, looking from Beloved's perspective, Ella is a monster to her because she helped with the exorcism even though there was no enmity between them. But the reason she did that is because, Ella herself, was a slave who was abused by a father and his son and had a white child. Ella feared of being haunted by her own trauma.

Another thing that the fear caused Robbie is the Avoidant Personality Disorder. The symptoms of this are that an individual stops connecting socially; they never share their thoughts or problems with anyone because they fear they will be judged, people will think they are mentally ill. This disorder is commonly used by today's generation when they claim that they are introverted. But in serious conditions, people with such disorder make fake personalities and imaginary friends because creating imaginary friends helps them to engage with their own thoughts. In *the Doll Master*, Robbie makes a friend who has no name, and he claims that he never saw his face. But he talks to this friend and this friend motivates him to collect the dolls as well as advises him to not make eye contact with people. Based on psychological issues, one might claim that this friend of Robbie is actually his own, alter ego. Robbie's friend would clearly say, "Hurry, take her, don't drop her." He would also claim that there were days his friend would not show up and this could mean that there were days where he did not have any cynical thoughts. He mostly found every doll when his friend was around is a clear sign that his monstrous activity was led by his alter – ego. Moreover, Avoidant Personality Disorder also makes people extremely aware of their inhuman side and they create a barrier and isolate themselves in order to protect that side. Children suffer from this disorder if they are not being heard or felt important or understood by their parents. Robbie's parents never understood how much he liked dolls, in fact, his father hated

the idea. So, when he grew up and was sent to therapy, he knew he had to hide the fact that he collects dolls from the therapist because, if he shared this, he feared he would be sent to mental hospital or treated like someone who is crazy. In short, he feared of being misunderstood. Therefore, this is exactly what fear and past trauma does to a person. It makes u completely shut down as well as builds up trust issues, which, sadly, has become extremely popular in the contemporary period that acts like our own personal demon.

### **3.2 Parenting and family issues cause fear in *the girl who loved Tom Gordon* and *The Doll Master* that result into traumatic behavior as an element of Psychological horror.**

Speaking on the common grounds between *The Doll Master* and *the Girl who loved Tom Gordon*, parental divorce plays a great role into causing trauma to the protagonists. When parents go through divorce, it is obvious the children go through major changes in life which includes they do not get to live with both of their parents and the lack of parents' concern towards their child or children causes permanent damage like childhood trauma which results them into being invisible as well as having introvert issues when they come in contact with public. Since all three novels used for analysis in this paper are by American writers, according to Lansford's article "Parental Divorce and Children's Adjustment", almost 50% of first marriages in the United States result in divorce based on statistics from the year 2008. According to research in 2002, children, whose parents get a divorce have serious long term social, emotional or psychological problems in adulthood compared to the normal children from normal family (Lansford 142).

One major problem that goes unnoticed is how bad parenting and divorces affect the children's mental health; how it causes them to shut down, become an introvert, how much they have trouble speaking up or share their problems as well as create attachment issues. First of all, the

use of dolls in both the texts symbolizes attachment issues. The very first doll that Robbie gets attached to is his cousin's doll and due to his unfortunate luck, his father hides it away from him. He says, "I ran to my mother, crying. I asked where Baby Emily was... My mother told me that my father didn't think it was a good idea for me to be playing with a doll at my age. Dolls are for girls, not boys" (Oates 4). A little child around 4 years was mentally destroyed by his own father due to some gender misconception. This rooted poison in his heart for his father as well as created fear that if he ever brought a doll home, it will be taken away from him. If he certainly likes anything in general, will not be accepted by his family, especially by his father and that teaches him to keep his thoughts and emotions hidden. Growing up, it makes him shut down from the outside in front of everyone. Over and over again, Robbie has been scared of hiding dolls in his room because of his parents, "I could not hide Mariska in my room where she would be found by my mother or our housekeeper" (6). Similarly, in *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon*, Trisha also carries Mona, the doll to her trip as an essential. It is normal when children are seen to play with dolls when they are free but on a forest trip, usually essentials are taken like water bottle. However, in Trisha's case, she takes her doll, her baseball cap and her walkman. On her way to the trip, the way King describes the ignorance of her mother and brother towards Trisha explains how she got attached to her doll instead of her mother after her parents got divorced as I quote, "They were fighting again, gosh what a surprise that was, and that was why she has dropped behind a little bit" (King 1). And it wasn't just Trisha but also her brother Pete who hated being with their mother.

Other than fear, another feature that adds up to traumatic behavior is bullying. Both Robbie and Pete were bullied in their school and they both hated being socially active as the text suggests, "The real reason Pete wanted out was that he hated Sanford Middle School. Then in January Eddie moved away, also the victim of a parental breakup. That made Pete a loner. A lot of kids laughed at him" (King 2). On the other side there is Robbie, from the Doll Master. "Many times

I'd walked to school and home from school, avoiding the school bus where there were older boys who taunted me" (Oates 4). The reason behind Robbie turning into a monster is that he was bullied because of his old house by the school students as well as he was misunderstood by his own parents at home. A child whose mental health was never safe anywhere, is bound to grow up to become a monster. His monstrous actions are actually his traumatic behavior that has been generated from bad parenting, as well as his parent's divorce and from having unsupportive parents, because his father wanted him to join army but never prioritized what his son was interested in.

### **3.3 Analyzing the monstrous mind in *the doll master* and *the girl who loved Tom Gordon* using Kristeva's Theory of Abjection**

In order to begin analyzing about the monstrous mind, here I intend to refer it to explain the monster in the mind of a human that makes them evil or do evil things like collecting skeletons or killing one's own child and the common factor between both the texts is that, the victims are mostly women. The writers King and Oates as well as Morrison successfully captured the vital point of Horror stories, and it is none other than objectifying and victimizing women. Beginning with, missing dead girls are represented as dolls and Robbie enjoyed collecting them, Sethe being a victim of slavery ends up losing her child as well as Denver becomes a victim of her mother's past and lastly, Trisha's mother is so busy at arguing with Pete, that Trisha getting lost goes completely unnoticed by them. One of the reasons to claim that Robbie's father made him into a monster is because, a child learns to respect women when he sees the same thing at his home. However, Robbie's father always mocked his mother, and his mother never had the audacity to convince his father to keep that doll in the first place. This explains how weakly his mother was treated and when he divorced her and left her sick, he would never come to check up on her. This is why, Robbie never considered those missing girls as humans. To Robbie, the girls or dolls never had the right to

speak or act as they wished to; they never had the freedom. It can be concluded that, someone who doesn't have freedom to speak or act as they wish are simply objects or toys and that is exactly how Robbie's subconscious made him see them, because he was never taught to respect women by his father.

According to Julia Kristeva's book, the term abject is defined as a human reaction like horror and fear to the destruction in meaning caused by the loss of understanding the difference between subject and object or "self and other" as in "The abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (Felluga). Kristeva says that abjection is different from "uncanniness" because abjection is considered as more violent as it is portrayed through the loss of recognizing kin; as if nothing is familiar not even a shadow from one's own memory (Kristeva 5). Kristeva gives her personal example in order to explain that "food loathing is the most elementary form of abjection" (Kristeva 2). For example, a glass of milk is supposed to look nutritious but if a glass of cold milk is kept out of fridge for too long, a layer forms on top of it and that made Kristeva feel the abjection. She felt disgusted and her bodies shivered up and made her feel nauseous. Therefore, according to Kristeva's theory, abjection is a mix of feeling which contains disgust as well as nauseous – ness. For example, how we feel when we stand near a dead body. Our consciousness does not accept it. Kristeva explains abjection as something in the middle like the corpse that was once alive but now dead and there is place between these 2. Thus, a theory like this perfectly fits for the condition of Trisha on her mysterious journey while she got lost. Trisha falls sick after drinking unhygienic water and after eating checkerberry leaf, she starts to hallucinate the God of the lost and she terribly frightened of it because she believes it is evil and it is following her. However, according to research, there is no proof that this plant causes hallucinations but since Trisha was already feeling as well as exhausted of strolling mindlessly, she became



helpless as she questioned whether God is even watching her or not and whether he will help her as I quote, “The God of the Lost, the wasp – priest had said. It has been watching you; it has been waiting for you. The wasp – priest had said other things too, but that was what she remembered: Watching you, waiting for you” (King 98). Trisha clearly described about a huge animal which has brown fur and she saw swatch of its fur as well as claw marks. She was sure that she was not hallucinating these signs but what she did not think is that her subconscious did not allow her to believe it could be an animal because of the horror she felt. The fear caused by losing her way back to her mom resulted into loss of her understanding that Gods are not visible, and God does not have claw mark. It was clear throughout the story that as a 9-year-old, the way she imagined Tom Gordon and talked about baseball games with her father, she is quite intelligent but fear did not let her believe anything positive in the forest and she felt as if something creepy was following her and watching her the whole time. The feeling of horror that passed through her is what Kristeva describes as an abject as she says, “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being... ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close but it cannot be assimilated” (Kristeva 1). Abjection simply means “cut off” from the basic norms of society and morality. Abjection is a criminal act of a traitor, a liar, a killer. Abjection can be defined through any crime as the crimes draw attention to human fragility. Kristeva says abjection is immoral, and it is shady because it is an enemy with the mask of a friend, a terror in disguise, hatred behind the smile (4). The boy Robbie from *the Doll Master* has a mask too, which he puts on, in front of his family, in school as well as in therapy. During his therapy sessions, he was obsessed with a wooden doll which his therapist owned. In his mind, he wanted to steal it and add it to his collection but he could not since the therapist, later removed it thinking it might be bothering Robbie. But what’s shady about Robbie is the way he describes the dolls after every time he found a new one as I quote, “She had been partly

broken, one of her arms was dislocated and turned too easily in its shoulder socket, and her curly hair had come out in patches to reveal the rubber scalp beneath” (King 9). This is the most interesting part for the readers. Every time he found a doll, there was something artificial about them which made the readers believe that there is nothing creepy about dolls until, in the end, his mother describes them as “skeletons” as I quote, “In the crude light of mother’s flashlight the found dolls were revealed as small skeletons with rags of clothing and wisps of hair on their battered skulls; their faces were skull – faces, with mirthless grins and eyeless sockets” (King 25). Here comes the logical explanation that says, dolls do not become skeletons like humans because dolls are not made of human flesh. Dolls are not living unless these are not dolls and Robbie has turned so crazy that he cannot see the line between reality and his unconscious mind. Not to mention that Robbie also has a hallucination problem where only he can see his “friend” but no one else. A proof to justify my claim is when Robbie was talking about how his mother would always keep talking to him and he wished she would just shut up as I quote, “My friend laid a sympathetic hand on my shoulder. It was the first time that my friend had appeared inside my house” (King 19). It is surprising that his friend first came to his house but he did not mention his mother meeting this friend of his. And not just that, the friend, which is actually his alter ego says, “You know that it would be better, Robbie, if the woman were silenced. But this is not a task for the lily – livered” (King 19). Another way to prove that this friend is his alter ego is, when he says that his friend never used the term “lily – livered” but his father did. It is obvious that he never had any friends; secondly, his friend never met his father, so no one else knows what words his father uses other than Robbie, himself. A sign of Robbie as a sick boy is when he once thought someone found out about his dolls as he heard footsteps near the stable and he immediately thought that it is his mother and, in his head, he said, “Mother! I will have to kill her...” (King 18).

### **3.4 Highlighting the presence of “monsters” as well as explaining the symbols of “horror” from the three novels using semiotic theory of Saussure and codes of Barthes. .**

Saussure’s contribution to structuralism is mainly about semiotics through his theory of “Signifier- Signified”. As I quote Eagleton, “The word 'structuralism' itself indicates a *method* of enquiry, which can be applied to a whole range of objects from football matches to economic modes of production; 'semiotics' denotes rather a particular *field* of study, that of systems which would in an ordinary sense be regarded as signs: poems, bird calls, traffic lights, medical symptoms and so on (88). For example, dolls are toys for children, but the term dolls can be used to compliment someone who looks as pretty as a doll, it can be used as an object of obsession of a psychopathic killer, and in Oates short story, it is used to signify the missing children. Similarly, when someone mentions God, it is supposed to signify a positive energy but Trisha claims that the thing which is frightening her is actually one of the Gods, who offer salvation, and it is the God of the Lost and she signifies it as something evil. Semiotic theory is a vital part of Structuralism that deals with signs. It is a particular field of study where ordinary objects are considered as signs. For example, the color red and its possible representatives are romantic, murder, anger, sinful act, bold, etc. According to Eagleton’s book, there are three kinds of signs; iconic, indexical and the symbolic. The symbolic is mostly referred by Saussure where a sign is referred with various kind of meaning. In relation to signs, semiotic theory explores the use of “connotation” and “denotation” where denotation means what the particular sign stands for and connotation means what the sign is associated with (88).

In *Beloved*, the schoolteacher can be called a monster from a reader’s perspective. This is because he radiates evil energy towards the slaves and treats them like animals. The reason he

is considered as a monster is for dehumanizing his slaves as well as the children. In part 2 Chapter 19, when Sethe shares a flashback memory of the schoolteacher from Sweet Home, she mentions about Sixo, a male slave who was once caught for stealing and he justified his action by saying he ate so that he can do more work which will benefit the slave master but the evil schoolteacher still beat him as Sethe says, “Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (Morrison 225). The term “slave master” this is used to define the Schoolteacher, is the connotation for Monster. Even though it is obvious that the gothic ghost figure is Beloved herself as in the end, they use exorcism to get rid of her, but the monster in human form is not talked much about. Secondly, in *The Doll Master*, similar to beloved the monster in human form is Robbie and it is his father and mother’s fault of creating a monster. If only, his mother convinced his father to give him the doll to play when he was around 4 years old, he would not grow up to collecting little children as an obsession for dolls and storing them and their skeletons as his collection. The term “doll master” like “slave master” is used as a connotative word for defining “human monster”. Lastly, the monster or the God of the Lost that Trisha meets in *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* which is actually a bear. The connotation of the giant animal is portrayed as a monster in the eyes of Trisha because of her dehydration and pneumonia. She describes it as a God of the lost who provides salvation because she blames herself for being careless and being lost in the forest. Which is why she believes whatever will be happening to her must be something worse and the worse she imagined is the God of the Lost as a monster, which simply is a bear.

In continuation to semiotic theory of structuralism, Roland Barthes is also known for his contribution to Structuralism and even though he used his 5 codes to analyze another story, I intend to use the Proairetic code, Hermeneutic code and Connotative code in order to analyze the primary texts used in this paper. As I quote,

“1. **Proairetic code (the voice of empirics)**: The code of actions. Any action initiated must be completed. The cumulative actions constitute the plot events of the text.” For example, *The Doll Master* is a short story which began with Robbie’s obsession with a doll that belonged to his cousin as well as ended with him protecting his secret of collecting “dolls” as in children’s skeleton in the outhouse from his mother. Similarly, *The Girl who loved Tom Gordon* started with Trisha packing her baseball cap for the trip as well as ends with the hospital scene where she tapped the same cap and then pointed her index finger to the ceiling that she survived like Tom Gordon survived his match. This is the same with *Beloved*, where the story started with the haunting for a baby ghost of Beloved as well as ends with exorcism of the same character; Beloved.

2. **Hermeneutic code (the voice of truth)**: The code of enigmas or puzzles. This can be explained through *the Doll Master*, where Oates confuses her readers through Robbie’s discovery of the dolls or children. Every time Robbie found a new doll, he described their skin as ceramic, plastic, porcelain so that the readers think that the boy is simply collecting toys but in the end when his mother finds him at the barn and mentions the “skeletons”, this is when the readers find the missing piece of their puzzle that connects the whole mysterious connection of dolls with missing children.

3. **Connotative [or Semic] code (the voice of the person)**: The accumulation of connotations. Semes, sequential thoughts, traits and actions constitute character. “The proper noun surrounded by connotations.” In *The Doll Master*, Robbie mentions about the lost children’s missing announcement in his school. This might also be considered as the connotation for the “call of the dead” which creates terror to the readers.

## Chapter 4

### CONCLUSION

There is a saying by Carey and Gross that, “We make our own monsters, then fear them for what they show us about ourselves” (Carey and Gross, 2011, n.p). Oates, King and Morrison all together created their horror environment in the selective novels where the monsters are simply haunting fearful past memories in the head of the characters, side effects and trauma of broken relationships and change of human behavior due to bullying and isolation which in short are all in the head of the characters. Growing up, the children who were scared of Lovecraft’s monsters coming out of the closet are the adults caged in their own unconscious struggling to justify right or wrong, good and evil is how horror novels have evolved from using unknown creatures to turning humans into evil beings and then defining this evilness as a part of human personality. Once Oates in her article said that it is not death which we fear, neither do we fear mental breakdowns, but one truly fears to lose the meaning. Meaning of life, meaning of existence, and once someone lose the meaning of life they lose their humanity because looking back, all those supernatural creatures, vampires, witches, were not humans, they did not have humanity which is why they could kill effortlessly, and feed on blood of the victims and losing humanity is more horrific than fearing death itself because death is a lot like putting an end to something but losing humanity means the rise of monsters and evil that is inside every human being and losing humanity means losing control over those monsters. The fear and anxiety of an individual of becoming extinct is dramatized through nightmares and grotesque themes over the centuries. Therefore, fear is nothing but a common emotion like happiness and sadness and grief of human beings and “the aesthetic of fear is the aesthetic of our common humanity” (Oates 185) and monsters and ghosts are like our inner self, which is the part of us which lets us reminisce like Beloved helped the whole community reminisce our past, our trauma and help us deal with it and make room for mental

healing because the exorcism of Beloved was only possible when everyone accepted that the past should be left in the past and what is done, is done and taking revenge on each other will never bring peace but might awaken many more ghosts like Beloved.

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