

Burden of Memory: Unresolved Childhood Trauma, Truth, and
Healing in *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*

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 Master of Arts in English

The Department of English and Humanities

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my 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 have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the strong influence of unresolved childhood trauma on adulthood. Through an in-depth analysis of the novels *Home Before Dark* by Riley Sager and *The Paper Palace* by Miranda Cowley Heller, it examines how unresolved trauma shapes the protagonists' identities, inner selves and life choices. Moreover, the paper highlights how other aspects like parental ignorance and generational silence can intensify the effect of trauma. Furthermore, it suggests the importance of confronting the past and breaking the cycle of silence for healing and recovery. This thesis aims to show the profound impact of unresolved childhood trauma on adulthood, the role of generational silence and parental denial on suppressed trauma and the significance of setting in reflecting the characters' inner selves and emotional states in *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*. This thesis also uses Trauma theory, Affect theory and Psychoanalytical theory to explain these points.

Keywords

Unresolved childhood trauma, dual identity, complex relationship, parental denial, family secrets, healing, generational trauma, emotional detachment, psychological wounds.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Grief is tricky like that. It can lie low for hours, long enough for magical thinking to take hold. Then, when you're good and vulnerable, it will leap out at you like a fun-house skeleton, and all the pain you thought was gone comes roaring back."

– Riley Sager, *Home Before Dark*

(Sager 9-10)

In this line, the author Riley Sager has used metaphor and imagery to describe the unpredictable and cyclic nature of grief. By comparing grief to “fun-house skeleton”, Sager illustrates how it can hide for a while and then suddenly reappears when someone is in a weak and vulnerable state. This metaphor represents that grief is not a linear process and does not fade over time; rather, it follows a pattern of recurring emotions. People often experience the same feelings of grief and pain multiple times throughout their lives. However, after a certain period of time it may feel less intense. The pain may seem to be diminished but in reality it has not. During the quiet period, a person may feel better and relaxed. Imaginary and irrational thoughts may bring temporary peace, but that relief does not last long. After moments of calm, grief may be triggered by any painful memories and trauma. When the grief returns forcefully, the feelings of pain and sadness affect the person with great intensity and haunt even more deeply. It shows the duality of calm and chaos within the grieving process. As a result, that person has to endure extreme emotional pain. Sometimes the pain is too intense to forget that it has to be endured throughout the life. This is what happened to Maggie, the protagonist of the novel *Home Before Dark*. Here, she is bearing grief and emotional weight for her lost childhood that continues to haunt her even in her

adulthood. As a result, she has to bear psychological wounds and burden of memory for a long period of time.

1.1 Contextual background of *Home Before Dark*

Home Before Dark by Riley Sager was published in 2020. Riley Sager is the pen name of Todd Ritter, an American novelist who is famous for his bestselling psychological thriller books. It is a psychological thriller novel which includes other elements like horror, supernatural mystery, trauma, suspense and postmodernist features. One of the most interesting aspects of the novel is its unexpected twist ending. It blends classic gothic elements and spooky atmosphere with modern thriller techniques and emotional depth of psychological suspense throughout the novel. This book is so engaging that attracts the readers to the story with its unique structure and emotional depth. The readers are eager to turn every page to know what happens next. Another unique feature of *Home Before Dark* is its structure as a book-within-a-book. In this novel, the author talks about Maggie and her father Ewan Holt's novel *House Of Horrors*. So, Riley Sager uses metafictional techniques in this novel which is a feature of Postmodernist literature. It is not written in linear structure; rather, there is dual narrative structure that alternates between past and present events throughout the novel. One narrator of this novel is Maggie Holt in her adulthood and another one is her father who is telling the story of 25 years ago through his book. So, the author uses fragmented narratives to blur the line between reality and fiction. These two narratives provide different perspectives of the same haunted story and reveals the actual truth at the end of the novel. The dual narrative structure of this novel keeps the suspense high which keeps the readers to be curious. It is also a literary feature of Postmodernist literature. In this novel, the author also plays mind games with the readers, leaving them confused about the real events.

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Readers are confused to figure out which version of the story is true, whether Maggie's mental wounds are due to a supernatural problem or something else. By using unreliable narratives and shifting timelines, the author keeps the readers to constantly questioning what is real and what is imagined. The author not only shows horror story but also the family trauma and distorted childhood memory. It mainly focuses on the psychological and mental condition of the characters, long lasting effect of childhood trauma on the victim Maggie even in her adulthood. He blends how horror events and psychological scars can affect someone's life. This novel *Home Before Dark* became the New York Times Bestseller book in 2020. During this period, psychological thriller with dark plot was a popular trend. This novel perfectly fits in this trend. In the American Pop Culture, haunted house stories were very popular during the contemporary period. These stories contained ghostly figure, curse, and paranormal incidents happening in a haunted house. The novel *Haunting of Hill House* written by Shirley Jackson and *The Amityville Horror*, these horror genre novels were immensely famous at that period. Even the author Riley Sager himself takes his inspiration from *The Amityville Horror*. This book is based on the real story the Lutz family who left the house due to some supernatural issues. Though he is inspired from their story, the novel *Home Before Dark* is fictional. The readers were able to emotionally connect with the protagonist and her inner struggles through this novel. Then the setting of this book is the haunted Baneberry Hall in Vermont acts as a gothic location in this novel. This house plays a significant role in driving the story's plot. In this novel, everything that happens is somehow related to this house. The themes of childhood trauma, healing and self-discovery used in this novel are deeply inspiring to the readers on a personal level as well. Here, the author shows how the pain of the past can shape and influence an individual's personality, identity and behavior in future. He also shows how to fight emotional wounds and face them with full courage, how to be free from past burdens,

no matter how dark the past seems. It also inspires the readers to be brave in their lives. This novel delivers a strong message for its readers that healing from wound needs courage, bravery, determination and honesty. Moreover, the author focuses on female agency, empowerment as well as the struggle in a patriarchal context through this novel. It is not about solving a horror mystery but also about how a woman reclaims her voice and discovers the actual truth and finds her identity in the teeth of a male-dominated narrative established by her father twenty five years ago. She is grown up under the fabricated story of her father. She does not believe the story but she cannot deny it as she has no clear memory of what happened during that period. It cause a lot of trouble and deep inner conflict in her. Though she suffers for a long time, she decides to face it in her adulthood. This time, she investigates herself to find out the truth. So, here the author shows the courage of a woman to fight for her voice and inner peace. Through Maggie's courage and determination, the author conveys a strong message for the readers that woman can challenge and fight against imposed narratives, confront trauma and find out the truth for self-discovery and empowerment. Here, it refers to intergenerational trauma where a woman suffers from psychological problems caused by her family.

The main character Maggie Holt is the victim in this novel *Home Before Dark*. Her life is shaped by Ewan Holt, her father's book *House Of Horrors*. In this book, he writes a so-called true story about haunted Baneberry Hall and their experiences there. His book becomes bestseller and famous that Maggie and her family become popular overnight. It shows the society's fascination with haunted houses, supernatural mysteries and true crimes. People are very interested to know more about Baneberry Hall and the experiences of Maggie's family. Here, the author criticizes the society and its obsession towards haunted houses and horror stories. It does not matter

to people what the victims are going through, they are only concerned about their entertainment and profit. No one is interested to help the family or support them. Throughout the novel, Maggie struggles with the fact that no one is bothered to know Maggie's side of the story. The widespread acceptance of her father's story silences her questions and internal struggles. She has become an object of interest to the society and the world. This lack of validation causes her isolation and helplessness. Then the media and the publishing industry are also interested to know about the horror story and concerned to come up with a new breaking news instead of showing sympathy towards the victims. Then the publishing industry seeks for new stories which will capture public interest. But the aim is to generate more revenue by publishing them. Here, the author criticizes the profit maximization nature of them. No one is interested to know about the truth of Maggie or her real self. However, Maggie's whole life is affected by this book. Her real self is overshadowed by the character Maggie described in the novel *House Of Horrors*. In this novel, her father portrayed her as a shy and vulnerable character who is prone to supernatural phenomena. People used to judge her based on the description of this book. They continue to question about her experience in this house. The sad part is that she does not remember anything about the horrific incidents happened in that house. It shows that something extremely terrible had happened to her 25 years ago in the Baneberry hall which causes her to forget her time in that house. That is why, it is very traumatizing for her to deal with all these repetitive questions. So, she decides to return to the Baneberry hall even though her parents Ewan Holt and Jessica Holt forbid her. Here, the author shows the complex relationship of Maggie with her parents specifically with her father. It also indicates her mental condition that she is already suffering because of her forgotten memories and she cannot even expect help and support from her parents.

1.2 Contextual background of *The Paper Palace*

Then another novel is *The Paper Palace* by Miranda Cowley Heller was published in 2021. She is an American writer. This novel is her debut novel. Before starting her career as a novelist, she was a TV executive at HBO. The author from a journalism background, has demonstrated her artistic qualities through showing complex human relationships and a blend of different genres through her literary work. She writes based on her experience as a journalist of human psychology and social issues. It is a literary fiction. The author also includes other themes like marriage, divorce, betrayal, child abuse, exploring complex human relationships and emotions. This novel is also about internal conflict, and psychological struggles and the weight of traumatic past. In this novel, the author plays a mind game through non-linear storytelling, weaving the past and present timelines to deepen the emotional impact. This fragmented storyline keeps the readers engaged and attached to the novel. Her storytelling style reflects a deep understanding of the complexity of human emotions and internal conflicts. She also focuses on how people silently carry emotional burden like guilt, desire, regret and trauma which makes their life more miserable. This novel feels so realistic that some readers may feel their connection with the characters on a personal level which makes this book a bestseller novel of the contemporary period. In this novel, the author plays a mind game through non-linear storytelling weaving the past and present together to reveal the truth. It also justifies the Elle's emotional weight and life choices. By using these techniques, the author is creating a layered reading experience of truth and memory, how the past is shaping the future self. Then she also portrays the nature as a reflection to Elle's emotion throughout this novel. This book was New York Times Bestseller in 2021. The story is set in a summer house in Cape Cod which is named the paper palace.

Elle Bishop, a 50-year-old woman is the main character of this novel. She had a very traumatic childhood with brutal scars. She spent her childhood in the summer camp by a pond which evokes both the nostalgia and her past traumatic memories. Though she is married to Peter and has 2 children seemingly a happy family, she is not happy and is suffering from her inner conflict. She is amorally complex protagonist unlike the traditional pure heroine. She is flawed by her forbidden desires and attraction towards her best friend Jonas. Here, the author criticizes the traditional roles of women as wives or mothers, showing how these roles prevent her from pursuing her emotional needs and desires. It also challenges societal expectations. Her unresolved childhood trauma still haunts her even in her adulthood, preventing her from fully embracing her present life. She has never moved on from those emotional scars but she is not ready to talk about her insecurities. Here, she needs help but she cannot even ask for help. Moreover, her life is also deeply influenced by her relationship with her parents and family dynamics. Then another issue is her parents' divorce and complex human relationships affect her for a long time as well as her future relationship with her husband Peter. This is not something new in her family. Her mother and even her grandmother divorced their partners and had unhealthy relations with their husbands. Even her mother had an extra marital affair when Elle was a little child. She does the same in her adulthood. It also highlights on the conflict between desire and duty by using Elle and other characters to highlight personal mental struggle and social expectations. Here, the author presents how unresolved trauma can cause the person to do the same things in their adulthoods. Here, the author also portrays the intergenerational trauma through the similar childhood experiences of Elle and her mother. She also shows the complex relationships of three women from the same family and how they normalize it. Both of them had endured similar kinds of childhood traumas and broken families. It challenges the traditional concept of women according to the society. Trauma does not

only affect emotion but also the behavior, life choices and personality. It seems to be proved in the case of Elle and her mother how both end up doing the same mistakes in their lives. So it shows how traumas can transcend generations, the tendency to do the same things in future as well as the importance of healing for a better life. This is how, the author shows the complexity of female desires and broken marriages. It fights against the socially constructed concept of women's sexuality by the female characters in this novel. It also criticizes the happily ever after concept of marriage. However, in the novel *The Paper Palace*, the author Miranda Cowley Heller gives voice to the quiet and speaks for the people who fight with their psychological struggles in silence. Here, the author is criticizing the notion of perfect family and shows how the appearance can hide the struggles of mental health.

Both the novels *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace* delve deeply into the unresolved psychological struggles from the past, showing how the traumatic memories shapes and effects the characters' present life and mental health. In the novel *Home Before Dark*, the main character Maggie's adulthood is manifested by her dark past. Then in the novel *The Paper Palace*, the protagonist Elle is also driven by her past trauma and childhood experiences. Both novels present how memory is subjective and unreliable. Additionally, the settings of both novels, the Baneberry Hall in Vermont from *Home Before Dark* and the summer house in Cape Cod from *The Paper Palace* represent the human psyche and mental states of the characters Maggie and Elle. Both the characters belong to divorced families which add another layer to their childhood trauma. Both the settings serve as metaphors for their buried painful pasts and the solutions through healing and confrontation. The fragmented narratives of the novels serve as therapy for the central characters. Then they both focus on women's silent struggles and their journey of self-discovery.

Their journey towards the resolution of inner struggles help them to understand their own desires, identities and self-improvements. The writers also highlight the social expectations as well as the resistance of the main characters against those established norms and rules. Despite these thematic similarities of these two novels, there are differences between them in terms of tone and genre. *Home Before Dark* is mainly on psychological thriller with mystery and suspense. On the other hand, *The Paper Palace* is based on family drama and complex human relationships. Then Maggie is portrayed as an innocent character who suffers from her past without doing any harm to others while Elle is a complex character who is not beyond human flaws, she is having an affair with her best friend Jonas even she has a family. It indicates the anti-hero concept in this novel where no one is completely pure. This concept is given more attention in the 20th century English literature especially in American and European fiction. Then Maggie completely forgets about her experiences in the Baneberry Hall but she continuously questions her parents and tries so hard to know the truth. So she is vocal and ready to face it with full courage. On the other hand, Elle does not forget the brutal memories instead she fears to face it for a longer period of time. She does not try to resist or fight for herself. It shows the different approaches of childhood trauma.

This paper explores the psychological struggles of the characters who live with this burden in silence, their childhood trauma, and its impact on mental health. This silence works like a barrier to healing. Sometimes it is very hard to talk about these issues. As the pain is not revealed no one can feel what the person is going through in his/her life. Even this paper also focuses on sometimes parents play the role of ignorant rather than solving those which causes the child to suffer even more as well as in their adulthood. Trauma also affects the victim's decision making though the person does not realize it. Moreover, it highlights the importance of confronting

these issues rather than ignoring the past wounds and scars. By analyzing how the characters process trauma, guilt, pain and memories, this work encourages open conversations about mental health and the importance of facing emotional wounds in order to heal. In terms of showing the reality, both the novels, *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*, serve as reflections of reality and human experiences. Both the novels show how trauma is remembered until it is resolved. It is not forgotten or removed by overlooking.

1.3 The purpose of this thesis

The purpose of this paper is to explore childhood trauma and healing in the novels *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace* focusing on the impact of unresolved childhood trauma on identity, relationship and decision making, how family silence, denial, and emotional ignorance work to suppress traumatic memories, and how do the physical settings of the Baneberry Hall in *Home Before Dark* and the summer house in *The Paper Palace* serve as symbols of repressed traumas and the journey towards healing. Then Trauma theory, Affect theory and Psychoanalytical theory are used in this paper to support the points.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Childhood trauma refers to a range of disturbing experiences that can significantly disrupt a child's physical, emotional or psychological development. Such disturbing experiences may include physical or mental harm, abuse, accidents, bullying, sexual assault, domestic violence, the loss of a loved one. This could be a one-time event or it could happen repeatedly. Such events effect child's upbringing and work as a barrier to a normal life. Research has shown that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), whether one-time or repeated, have long-term effects on adults' mental and physical health. The victims who have experienced such things in their early stages of lives may struggle with anxiety, depression, and psychological disorders like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It does not go away from people's minds that easily, and some even have to endure it until death. As a result, some of the individuals may experience difficulty in maintaining healthy relationships, decision-making, and peace of mind. Even though the person is physically alive, but he or she may not have a good mental state. Because even after a long time, that person feels scared, guilty, or lost because of the painful memory. It makes the person to feel insecure about himself or herself. Whoever goes through it can feel the pain of being stuck in the horrific past. It makes life miserable. The study of trauma has been advanced by the works of many leading scholars, including Judith L. Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, Vincent J. Felitti and many more. Their research have greatly contributed to the understanding of childhood trauma, distressing memories, and its long-term effects. The foundation of Trauma theory was established in 1896, when Sigmund Freud published a paper named *The Aetiology of Hysteria*. In this book, the author shows the connection between childhood trauma and hysteria. This means that adult mental disorders are deeply rooted in childhood trauma and memories. He explains that traumatic childhood experiences, such as abuse, emotional neglect, bullying, can have a profound impact on the victim

in adulthood. It opens up a broader scientific discussion on the long term impact of childhood trauma on mental health. After him others started to work on this issue. Another scholar named Pierre Janet, a French psychologist and a contemporary of Freud, worked on trauma and fragmentation of memory. In 1889, his book *L'automatisme psychologique* was published. This book mainly focuses on how trauma affects the mind of the victim and causes fragmentation of memory. Later a critical psychologist named Judith L. Herman published her foundational work *Trauma and Recovery* in 1992. In this book, she shows how people who have suffered childhood trauma can have problems trusting others. She focuses on its long-term impact and gives a step-by-step solution on how to heal the wounds. Then another psychologist Bessel van der Kolk published a book called *The Body Keeps the Score* which was published in 2014. In this book, he sheds light on traumatic memories and how to heal from wounds. It shows that the significance of discussing these problems has been increasing over the years. Childhood trauma can lead to changes of brain structure and connectivity which is harmful for a child. Sometimes, trauma can transcend generations by doing the same thing that someone experienced in his or her childhood. This is how a cycle of intergenerational trauma can be transferred to the next generation through negligence and abuse. Additionally, the theme of childhood trauma and complex mental health issues are given importance in English literature for a very long time. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, the author Mary Wollstonecraft shows the sufferings of Maria as a child “to express the experience of growing up motherless, without affection and care, in an environment that failed to provide even the most basic sense of security and familial or social acceptance and support.” (Schönfelder 9). Here, Maria is a symbolic representation of the emotional and mental suffering of women of this time. Then, Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847 is a good example of it. This novel is one of the earliest novels to deeply explore childhood trauma and its impact on adult life.

In this novel, the author highlights the humiliation, abandonment, ignorance a young woman experiences in her childhood and how all of these later shape her future life, identity, and personality. After that, many novelists started writing their literary works based on this theme. A good example of this is Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. In this semi-autobiographical novel, he shows how he had to face cruelty from his step father and child labor. This is how the writers become vocal about their own childhood traumas through their literary works. It attracts the readers even more as they can easily connect to those. Moreover, by writing these kinds of literary works, the authors focus on the most ignorant of human life as no one is willing to talk about these in public during the contemporary times. So, by their writings they are actually trying to aware the society about the sufferings of mental illness and its cure. Then *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison is a great novel. In this novel he shows childhood trauma due to experiences of racism, discrimination, and poverty and child abuse. So, the marginalized people are often ignored by the mainstream, but he decided to give them a voice and excellent work of appreciation. The experience may vary from person to person. This is how this issue becomes an important topic for discussion over time. Even in recent times, many novelists also write about this issue through their literary writings. *The Paper Palace* and *Home Before Dark* are good examples of childhood trauma-based novels.

The book *Studies on Hysteria* written by the authors Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer serves as the foundational text for understanding the modern trauma theory. It was published in 1895. This book focuses on the psychological condition which is known as “hysteria”. It explores how “sexuality seems to play a principal part in the pathogenesis of hysteria as a source of psychical traumas and as a motive for ‘defence’” (Freud and Breuer 3). So, hysteria is deeply

connected to the unresolved sexual experiences and inner conflicts of the victim. It is often triggered by a specific event of the past. These unresolved experiences and trauma, which are buried in the unconscious mind, yet they influence the conscious behavior and action without even understanding its impact. It can be seen in the characters Maggie and Elle from the novel *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*. Their unresolved emotional conflicts are similar to the symptoms of hysteria described in this book. This book also highlights how the mind develops defense mechanisms in order to cope with the painful memories which includes removing the painful experience from the conscious mind or repression. In the novel *Home Before Dark*, the character Maggie witnessed the murder of Petra which triggers her hysteria in this novel. It shows how a specific disturbing event is the cause of her psychological condition. It affects her very badly. However, her mind causes her to forget the unresolved trauma in order to survive. Though it is always present in her unconscious mind, she herself is unaware of its existence. Furthermore, the book also explains how hysteria can be caused by multiple traumas experiences in the past which can be seen in Elle. In *The Paper Palace*, the character Elle was sexually assaulted by her stepbrother Conrad and she saw him to be drowned in the pond. Here, she is suffering from multiple traumas. These disturbing experiences cause her to suffer deeply. She remembers everything but uses repression as a way to survive from the brutal past. She tries to hide her brutal past from others and keeps avoiding in order to escape from it. There is the line, "In traumatic neuroses the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the affect of fright - the psychical trauma." (Freud and Breuer 8). It suggests that hysteria is developed from psychological wounds rather than physical injury. So, the physical injury recovers with time but the emotional wounds do not recover or are forgotten. It continues to affect the victim until it is resolved. Elle was raped by Conrad, her physical injuries recover but she is never able to go over the brutal

memories which haunts her even in her fifties. It shows the long term impact of trauma on victim's emotion and psyche. According to Debra Elise White, hysteria refers to the inability to tell the story (1035). It creates mental pressure for the victim as he or she cannot tolerate it or cannot confess to anyone. That is why, the mind tries to deal with the unresolved trauma for the sake of survival. Moreover, Freud and Breuer introduce the concept "Leidengeschichten". It is a German word which means the history of sufferings. The victims' memory of sufferings are not linear simple story rather these are fragmented and distorted shape by pain. It can be in the characters Maggie and Elle. Maggie is deeply hurt by the murder of Petra. The brutality of the incident overwhelms her ability to process it. As a result, she carries the fragmented and distorted memory of her brutal past as well as she forgets much of it. Still it continues to haunt her unconsciously through nightmares. In case of Elle, as she experiences multiple traumas in her childhood, these events overwhelm her capacity to process it or remembering them in a linear way. It causes her fragmented memory of her childhood trauma and she has non-linear flashbacks of her past. This is how, the concept of Freud and Breuer is reflected through the characters Maggie and Elle. This book suggests "cathartic method" or talking cure and confronting the unresolved trauma for healing and recovery (Freud and Breuer 3). If the victim freely talks about her unresolved trauma, it will work as a way for healing. Thus, the victims can be cured from the hysteric symptoms permanently. So, facing the unresolved trauma with emotional engagement works as a therapy for them. Both the characters Maggie and Elle get relief from these hysteric symptoms and heal from their traumas by applying this method in their lives. The longer they try to avoid or repress their dark past, the more deeply they are haunted by this. But when they decide to talk about it and try to accept the brutal past, they could easily come out of their trauma. That is why, internal silence should be broken in order to achieve the internal peace and happiness.

In the article “Studies on Hysteria: Case Histories and the Case Against History.”, the author Debra Elise White focuses on Steven Marcus’s perspective of Sigmund Freud’s case story of hysteria. According to him, the understanding and treatment of hysteria are closely related to the “phenomenon of language” rather than the events (white 1036). This process of healing shows the role of language in understanding the patient’s condition as well as in reconstructing the personal history. It shows the gap between language and actual experience.

In the book *Affect, Imagery and Consciousness* (volume II), the author Silvan S. Tomkins describes about the negative effects of the unpleasant feelings such as fear, guilt, distress, disgust, and anxiety. These negative effects have powerful influences on human behavior and personal development. He argues that these are not temporary rather they are deeply connected to human psychology, behavior, feelings and activities. He says that these negative effects and feelings are not bad or harmful rather they help people improve in life through learning, self-awareness, correcting mistakes, and resolving them. Then, he criticizes two prominent psychological theories Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis how do these two theories ignore the influence of emotions and effect on human behavior and actions. Focusing on the limitations of existing theories, he is attempting to present the broader field of Affect theory as a solution. According to him, affect theory not only focuses on reactions to external events but also on their impact on mental health, human emotions, and behavior. Human emotions are automatic and biological which is deeply connected to consciousness. These two are interconnected and inseparable. He also explains how emotions play a significant role in shaping a person's experience and behavior. However, among the negative effects distress is a common one. According to

Darwin, crying expresses “both bodily pain and mental distress” (Tomkins 5). Here, crying is associated with pain and it shows both physical and mental suffering, illustrating the deep connection between the body and the mind. Then distress is not temporary but has a long-term impact. Tomkins also talks about “toxicity of distress-anguish” (Tomkins 9). Distress-anguish can be harmful and toxic if it is ignored and unresolved. Even if a person is experiencing great distress, it is still very difficult for the sufferer to think clearly or make any decisions rationally. If suffering is suppressed, it can cause more suffering for the victim. Because it is not something that can be suppressed or avoided, rather it will emerge and make things worse. The ideas of Tomkins seem to be found on the characters Maggie and Elle. Both of them are suffering from deep emotional distress because of their past traumas. It cannot be suppressed, whenever they try to suppress their distress, it cause more trouble for them. They suffer for a long time in their lives until they face and resolve those brutal truths. Even their unresolved trauma and distress influence their behavior, life choices and relationships. So, the characters Maggie and Elle illustrate the ideas of Tomkins.

In the article *Confronting Child Sexual Abuse*, the author portrays on the role of silence and social stigma on child sexual abuse (CSA) even in the late 20th century. This issue used to be a taboo and there was not enough research and discussion on this topic. The society of the contemporary period tried to avoid such sensitive issues. This denial and silence of the society causes the victims to suffer even more. But then a huge change occurred which was visible “In 1969, however, Vincent de Francis, director of the children’s division of the Humane Association, published an influential study of two hundred and fifty cases of children who had been sexually abused in New York City.” (Nurse 54). Although he is not the first person to work on this topic, he is the first person in the United States to contribute to research on this sensitive topic. His work

raised national awareness on this matter. This helped to break the silence. Although people were not interested in discussing this issue in public, they became very aware and concerned about it after his paper was published. As a result, CSA or child sexual abuse became a serious social and psychological problem in the United States. According to research, most victims suffer from “emotional damage” as a result of sexual abuse (Nurse 54). Therefore, childhood sexual abuse has serious and long-lasting effects on victims. They may experience guilt, fear, emotional instability, depression, difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, and many other serious problems. But the research methods for child sexual abuse during that period had many limitations, but it has improved greatly over time. Just like the American society, the character Ellie in the novel *The Paper Palace* has suffered greatly throughout her life, which is the consequences of her childhood sexual abuse by her step brother Conrad. But she never gets any help from her mother. She never tries to understand her situation and even tries to remain silent and avoid discussing such serious issues because of taboo. She does not support Elle in her vulnerable situation when she needs mental support from her mother. Especially when the victims are not believed or supported, it hurts them even more. It can double their suffering. As a result, she suffers from emotional damage and other problems throughout her life, including trust issues, fear, guilt etc. Then in the novel *Home Before Dark*, though Maggie's trauma is not due to sexual abuse, yet her parents avoid facing the cruel reality that shapes her life with unresolved past memories.

Memory can be transmitted from one generation to another. Though it is not about experiencing the same pain and trauma rather it is passive and borrow from other's memory. Here, the later generation emotionally feel the trauma by learning the story. There is the line, “The transition from and juxtaposition of survivor writing to accounts by “nonwitnesses,”...brings into

sharp scrutiny the ways in which memory and the intergenerational transmission of trauma make demands on the imagination” (Aarons and Berger 42). With times, memory turns into history and it is shared to the later generation by the storytelling of the survivors. So, the later generation use imagination to feel the trauma and its long lasting impact. This is how, intergeneration trauma is transmitted to the next generation through inherited memories. It can be seen in the novel *The Paper Palace*. Here, Elle’s mother was assaulted by her stepfather during her childhood and she shares her brutal trauma to her daughter. This is how, her childhood trauma is transmitted to the next generation. Though Elle does not witness the incident, by using her imagination, she can feel how much it hurt her mother to be exploited by her own family member.

According to Debra Kaminer and Gillian Eagle, “Exposure to traumatic events is not restricted to adults who operate in the world outside of the family or home and it is common cause that children (ranging from infants to adolescents) are vulnerable” (122). This suggests that trauma is not limited to adults, rather children are also at risk of encountering it in the outside world and even within their own families though it is supposed to be the safest place for them. Childhood is the crucial time for physical and mental development, but when they experience traumatic and disturbing incidents, it affects them very badly and also disrupts the normal growth. Research has shown that people who become abusers as adults were often abused as children. This shows how being abused can lead to becoming an abuser. It shows a vicious cycle of abuse across different generations. It refers to the intergenerational trauma through this article. Therefore, if a person's childhood trauma is not identified and treated with the right medication, it can turn that person into an abuser for others. It can be seen in Elle’s mother in the novel *The Paper Palace*. Because her mother faced the same issues in her childhood like parent’s divorce, sexual abuse. Later she also

takes divorce from her husband which cause trouble and sufferings for Elle. She does not think about her and she fails to understand how it will affect her. This is how she causes the same trouble for her daughter which she also faced in her childhood. Then her mother was having an affair with her neighbor when Elle was a child. As this traumatic memory of Elle was hidden and unresolved, she does the same thing and cheats her husband in her 50s. Elle's repetition of the same mistakes illustrates that trauma not only affect the victim but also it can affect the next generation if it is not resolved and cured. So, here in the novel, the author presents that the victim has to be free from those burden of the past memories in order to break the cycle. Then Elle is raped by her stepbrother in her childhood but her mother does not try to know about her scars. It shows how children like Elle are not even safe in their own families, can be harmed by their own family members in their vulnerable state. It shows the reality of the society through fictional character. By showing these sensitive issues, the author Heller shows how unresolved childhood trauma can be repeated through generations even without realizing it. It also proves that the issues like childhood trauma is given more importance, attention and are more discussed in literary works than the past few decades. Contemporary literature is highlighting this issue by showing its impact on individuals and different generations. Then "Many studies have shown that the impact of trauma at early stages of development can have a long-lasting impact on personality formation, behaviour and mental health." (Kaminer and Eagle 122). Here, it shows how childhood trauma can influence a person in his or her adult and the affect is not temporary. So, early trauma leaves a long lasting impact on the adulthood of the victim. This idea is totally connected with the characters Maggie and Elle from the novels *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*. Both of them suffer throughout their whole lives.

According to Nancy Bunting, “Traumatic memories in childhood are “far clearer, more detailed, and more long-lasting than is ordinary memory” (59). This means that ordinary memories or everyday memories may fade or be forgotten over time, but memories of traumatic experiences remain vivid and deep in the mind of the victim. These memories do not allow the person to forget but rather affect him or her for the rest of the life. It is also seen in the characters Maggie and Elle.

According to Debra Kaminer and Gillian Eagle, Posttraumatic stress disorder “is the subjective feeling of ‘helpless terror’ during the trauma that is implicated in the development of PTSD.” (31). It depends on the individuals. If a person feels helpless, fear and vulnerability during the traumatic period, it can result in PTSD. So, the feelings and emotions play prominent role in the formation of it. This idea is also reflected in the characters Maggie and Elle. In both cases, it is not about trauma rather it is about their strong emotional responses to those brutal events which cause Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in them. Then, there are three main clusters of symptoms for PTSD.

“The first symptom cluster includes different forms of re-experiencing the trauma in a manner that the trauma survivor is unable to voluntarily control... Through all these symptoms, the survivor finds themselves perpetually stuck in the moment of the trauma.”

(Kaminer and Eagle 31-32)

This symptom is about re-experiencing the traumatic memories through flashback, nightmares or thoughts. The victim cannot help but being stuck into those memories. Nightmares related to trauma disturb the sleep cycle as well as the person. Then having flashbacks multiple times in daily activities make the future painful and miserable. Then encountering something related to the trauma like a smell, place or sound can also trigger the pain and make it even worse. This is how,

the victim cannot stop thinking about the traumatic events, develops PTSD and other mental health issues. All of these symptoms are strongly visible in both Maggie and Elle. Firstly, Maggie does not remember the whole event but she is often triggered by her father's novel or the place Baneberry Hall. Then, she has nightmares related to her childhood trauma. These cause her to think about her forgotten past and gradually develops PTSD in her. She suffers from mental health issues because of it. Secondly, the character Elle is slightly different from Maggie. Unlike Maggie, she remembers her past traumatic memories very well. She often has flashbacks even though a very long time has passed. When she spends time in the summer house, it triggers those brutal memories. As a result, she is never able to move on in her personal life and it causes PTSD without her even knowing it.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Question

This paper examines the impact of unresolved childhood trauma on identity, relationship and decision making, how family silence, denial, and emotional ignorance work to suppress disturbing traumatic memories, how do the physical settings of the Baneberry Hall in *Home Before Dark* and the summer house in *The Paper Palace* serve as symbols of repressed traumas and the journey towards healing. For this research paper, I have used *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace* as primary texts. I have used some articles, books from authentic sources to support my points.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Qualitative method is followed in this research paper. This paper is about the unresolved childhood trauma and healing of the characters Maggie and Elle from the novels *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*. These two novels are used as primary texts in this paper. Then the book *Studies on Hysteria* by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer is used as the primary source. Here, I have collected some journal articles from Jstor about childhood trauma, and its effects. I have also collected some journal articles from Jstor about trauma theory, PTSD and the impact of traumatic memories on the victim's body and mind.

3.3 Research Gap

I have used three research questions in this paper. This paper concludes with a proper understanding of these three claims that describe the impact of unresolved childhood trauma on

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identity, relationship and decision making, how family silence, denial, and emotional ignorance work to suppress disturbing traumatic memories, and how do the physical settings of the Baneberry Hall in *Home Before Dark* and the summer house in *The Paper Palace* serve as symbols of repressed traumas and the journey towards healing. To support my points, I have used a few journal articles from reliable sources like Jstor. The existing research articles examine childhood trauma, PTSD and general healing but there is limited work on differentiating between types of childhood trauma based on different experiences and their varied psychological outcomes, especially the specific childhood traumas that the characters face in these two novels. In the novels *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*, the traumas of the characters Maggie and Elle are different. Maggie witnessed a murder during her childhood and partly forgets the traumatic memory, remains affected by the unresolved trauma. But she wants to know the truth. On the contrary, the other character Elle was sexually abused multiple times in her childhood. Though she remembers everything, cannot express or heal from it. She tries to hide it from other people out of shame and guilt. This distinction highlights a gap in the literature that there are different types of childhood trauma and the varied psychological impact of repressed vs. fully remembered traumas on the victims. But I have not found enough article which can differentiate these types of childhood traumas. As a result, while writing this research paper, I discovered this to be my research gap. This study addresses the research gap and provides a foundation for future research on differentiating traumatic experiences.

3.4 Analysis of theories

Trauma theory, Affect theory and Psychoanalytical theory are used in this research paper. Firstly, Trauma theory emerged as a field that explores how suffering or painful experiences

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can affect the human mind, emotions, and body. It examines how the psychological wounds haunt individuals, influence their behavior, life choices, while lead them to silence or suppress their pain. It also focuses on the importance of resolving trauma in order to heal for a better life. This theory is not a new one, but it has attracted more attention in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, Sigmund Freud's book *Studies On Hysteria* provides the foundation for understanding trauma as a psychological phenomenon. It was published in 1895. According to Freud, hysterical symptoms are the results of repressed traumatic experiences, often connected to the childhood events and memories. There are many types of trauma, one of which is generational trauma, also called intergenerational or transgenerational trauma. This occurs when the psychological effects of unresolved traumatic experiences of one generation are passed down to the next generations. In other words, if one generation is not fully healed or resolved from trauma, it can pass on to their children or grandchildren.

Secondly, Affect theory that explores how human emotions and feelings can influence human behavior, attitudes, and social interactions. Scholars describe affect as a pre-cognitive force, because the bodily response occurs before the functioning of conscious thoughts. This immediate reaction can affect decision-making, individual's personality, and even social dynamics. This is one of the main theories of the postmodern era. Then, Affect theory was first introduced by Silvan Tomkins's book *Affect, Imagery and Consciousness*. It was in 1962. It is widely used in present time, to analyze the feelings and emotions of the characters of literary works as well as to understand the response of the readers to the texts. Outside of literature, this theory is also used in psychology to understand how emotions shape social contexts and collective experiences.

Thirdly, Psychoanalytical theory is a framework for understanding human behavior, personality and psychology. This theory was introduced by Sigmund Freud. In this theory, Freud introduces three levels of mind: conscious mind, unconscious mind and subconscious mind. The conscious mind contains thoughts and feelings that people are aware of. The unconscious mind contains the hidden thoughts and feelings that people are not aware of but it has its strong impact on the conscious thoughts and actions. This theory also sheds light on how the unconscious mind, childhood experiences and internal conflicts can influence people's conscious thoughts, feelings, and daily activities.

Chapter 4: Analysis of *Home Before Dark*

The novel *Home Before Dark*, a work of psychological fiction contributes a meaningful understanding of mental health and psychological disorders. Through the main character Maggie Holt, the author Riley Sager reveals how unresolved childhood trauma and distress can affect a person throughout her life until it is resolved. To portray Maggie's fragile psychological state, he focuses on the complex family relationships, denial and emotional ignorance of parents towards their child instead of confronting difficult truth. Then how the setting of the novel works as a reflection of Maggie's disturbed mind in this novel. Another issue is Maggie's fear; here it is not portrayed as a ghostly fear of gothic figures, rather it can be interpreted as an external manifestation of Maggie's unresolved trauma. Here, the author blurs the line between supernatural events and psychological distress.

4.1: Impact of unresolved childhood trauma on identity, relationship and decision making

In the novel *Home Before Dark*, the character Maggie's identity is heavily influenced by her unresolved trauma. Throughout the novel, there is a sense of the confusion that Maggie is having between what actually happened and what she forgot. Her childhood trauma is tied to her experiences in the Baneberry Hall and the events which led to their leaving. It still affects her life as an adult. Her father, Ewan Holt, in his novel *House of Horrors*, described this house as "haunted by a malevolent spirit." (Sager 6). But for Maggie, it represents the psychological haunting of her unresolved trauma. Moreover, her father describes her as a shy and fearful character. But she does not believe all these. She says, "Even more disconcerting was how my father had turned me into a character that in no way resembled the real me, even though only four years separated us. I saw nothing of myself in the Book's Maggie. I thought I was smart and capable and fearless." (Sager

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94). This distortion of her personality damages Maggie's trust in her father and also deepens her inner conflict. So, she begins to doubt her father's version of the story is not totally true. But the problem is that her memories of the house are fragmented and she cannot differentiate which story is true and which one is not. "I still don't know the real reason we left so suddenly...But I know it wasn't because Baneberry Hall was haunted. The big reason, of course, being that there's no such thing as ghosts." (Sager 8). It shows self-doubt of Maggie. She thinks the established story is fake and fabricated but she cannot remember the actual truth to prove herself. This makes it difficult for her to trust herself which affects her self-identity. It illustrates her dilemma of delusion vs. reality in this novel. Here, she is suffering from dual identity one is fabricated by her father and the other one is her real self. Moreover, but the society continues to judge her based on the character portrayed in her father's novel. Here, she feels a lack of connection with the world. This lack of clarity makes her doubt herself about who she is. It also affects her identity and confidence. This internal conflict creates a fragmented self-identity in her which dominates her life in adulthood. This is how, Maggie's unresolved trauma affects her sense of self. As a result, she tries to avoid being questioned about the Baneberry Hall. It not only affects her self-identity but also her relationship with her parents, especially because they are the source of her confusion and dilemma. Her self-doubt is caused by her father's fabricated story about the house and the whole world is believing this. But they are not answering her questions. Here, her parent's continuous refusal of telling the truth becomes a source of distress for Maggie. She says, "My parents refused to tell me. Maybe they really were afraid to stay. Maybe they truly and completely feared for their lives" (Sager 8). This lack of openness causes her to be stuck in the dilemma. Now, she feels a sense of mistrust towards her parents. Over time, this emotional distance transforms into a deep sense of betrayal within Maggie. It feels like a form of abandonment to her and she feels

helplessness. The very people who are supposed to protect her are responsible for her psychological wounds. This is how, the relationship of Maggie with her parents is fragmented by her unresolved past trauma. Her relationship as an adult is marked by her emotional detachment with her parents as well as with other people around her. As her father's fabricated story is already established, no one seem bother to know the story of her side. So, it seems she cannot deeply connect with anyone. Furthermore, Maggie's decision making is also shaped by her unresolved trauma. She spends twenty years of her life with the internal conflict between her forgotten past and her parents' false story about it. She tries to avoid facing it, which deepens her emotional scars. As her perspectives and questions are always ignored, she tries to remain silent about her psychological trauma and never shares to anyone about it. Though she seeks the actual truth, never shares her psychosocial struggle to others. This is how, she sidelines herself from the outer world. It shows how her emotional scar is influencing her life even in present. It creates a sense of vulnerability in her which affects her decision making related to everyday life as well as her career. She avoids to attend any interview about the Baneberry Hall. Though in her childhood, she went to different talk shows and interviews with her family and behaved the way they taught her, she does not attend any in her adulthood. Even when Brian Prince asks her for an interview to show her side of the story, she refuses it. It shows how much it hurts her to discuss about the house. This is the reason, she avoids social interactions, because people asks her repetitive questions about her experience in that house and her father's novel. She is tired of being asked the same question over and over again. She says, "I was treated as a curiosity" (Sager 9). It makes her feel like her emotion and perspective do not matter. It creates an isolation of her with the world. Additionally, she chooses the career as a designer who renovates houses. Her work allows her to look for the story of a house and sees for the secret of it, which she could not do with the Baneberry Hall. This is

how, she connects with the past of a house to reveal the truth. That is why she says, “Every house has a story to tell and a secret to share.” (Sager 1). She tries to give voice to the hidden histories of a house which represents her desire to reveal the truth of her past life. It also works a form of healing for her as she is denied to know the actual truth of her repressed past. It shows how she always has the desire to discover the truth and she is vocal about it but she has to wait for a long time to reach the goal. However, her choice to return to the Baneberry Hall shows a turning point in her decision making, from avoiding the unanswered questions to seek for the real truth. It shows her growing courage and determination to confront the past which has haunted her for years. The decision to confront the past represents Maggie's personal and emotional growth, as well as empowerment in her life. In this novel *Home Before Dark*, the author Riley Sager shows how the unresolved trauma of Maggie not only destroys her childhood but also destroys her normal life in adulthood. Her hesitation before facing it shows the vulnerability of her in this novel. It portrays how unresolved trauma can distort victim's life choices. But it requires courage to take difficult decisions to break the cycle of trauma. By showing courage, she tries to reclaim her own narrative and control over her own life. She begins to trust herself and becomes independent from the distorted narrative imposed on her.

4.2 Generational silence and parental denial

In the novel *Home Before Dark*, the author Riley Sager shows how lack of parental support can cause significant sufferings for their child through the character Maggie. Her parents refuse to explain why they left the Baneberry Hall. Maggie asks many times but they ignore the question. They think thus they can hide the brutal truth from her in order to give her a better life,

but on the contrary, it destroys her normal life and natural upbringing. Because the repressed trauma bothers her even more. The prolonged silence of Maggie's parents causes her to be stuck into the past and creates a sense of helplessness within her own family. She feels a sense of emotional isolation in her family as she does not have the right to know everything about her family. It keeps her trapped in the cycle of fear and uncertainty. As a result, her internal conflict is double by unresolved trauma and trust issues towards her parents. Where she should feel safe in her family, she feels fragmented, betrayed by their denial behavior. Maggie says, "I still don't know the real reason we left so suddenly. My parents refused to tell me. Maybe they really were afraid to stay. Maybe they truly and completely feared for their lives." (Sager 8). Though she does not know the reason, it never goes out of her mind rather she always keeps questioning herself about it. As a result, she suffers from internal conflict and emotional turmoil for 20 years of her life. It shows how hiding some brutal truth for good intention can be more harmful than the truth itself. However, her father says before dying "Promise me you'll never go back there. Never ever."...it's not safe there. Not for you." (Sager 32). Here, Ewan is warning his daughter to not to go to the house but he is not saying the reason. He tries to protect his daughter but hiding truth from her causes her more harm. This lack of clear communication raises a lot of questions in Maggie's mind without having proper answers. It shows an ambiguity as he is forbidding to do something without any explanation. Then, she does not get emotional support from her mother as well. Whenever, she tries to ask her mother about it, she denies and says, "The Book was something we didn't discuss." (Sager 94). It affects her badly. Because the safest place for a child is her mother, but here she refuses to answer her questions. This is unacceptable to her. This is how, the suppression of her childhood trauma leaves her isolated, fragmented and struggling with her emotions. They show emotional ignorance and denial to their daughter on this issue but never dare to face the truth,

which makes Maggie's suppressed trauma even worse. Moreover, after her constant questioning, her mother says, "Your father took inspiration from everything, even though the end result was mostly fiction." (Sager 35). But she does not clear the confusion which part of the book is not true and what is the real story. It shows emotional unavailability of her mother. She never tries to understand her emotional pain rather constantly denies her perspectives. Although her intentions are good, the way she tries to hide the brutal truth is problematic and painful for her child. However, because of the misconception of Maggie's parents regarding the murder of Petra Ditmer, they left the house and came up with the ghost story. Even by publishing the novel *House Of Horrors*, her father established his fake story. It shows how her parents did their level best to hide the murder from their daughter. But they never try to confront their daughter about the actual truth. She says, "Finishing the Book left me feeling slightly abused. I had been exploited, even though I didn't quite understand that at the time. All I knew then was that I felt confused and humiliated and misrepresented." (Sager 94). It shows how parental denial exploits their child without even realizing its outcome. Maggie's confusion deepens when she finds out another secret of her father and the Baneberry Hall. She says, "Why did my father think it was safe for him to return and not me? Why didn't he mention-not even once that he still owned Baneberry Hall and came back here regularly?" (Sager 47). It presents the depth of her father's secrecy in this novel. The ambiguous choice of her father leaves her unable to understand his motif and intention of doing all these. Here, Ewan's silence also represents the unresolved trauma and guilt of him. Generational silence and denial is not one sided rather it also affects Maggie's parents. Ewan and Jessica wanted to give their daughter a better life that is why, they did such a criminal offense by hiding Petra's body in the ceiling. But they could never heal from that psychological wounds ever in their lives which also causes their marriage to an end. Like Maggie, they also suffer throughout their lives because

of their guilt and still have to remain silent which is very painful for them as well. So, this unresolved childhood trauma of Maggie is not her own rather it is inherited from her family and their secrets. Maggie has to bear the burden of inherited trauma through her life where it was not her fault at all. She suffers from childhood trauma, nightmares and psychological wounds because of her parents' mistake. It shows how generational silence and family secret can create significant sufferings for the family. This is how, generational trauma is passed down to the next generation. If they had not done this and tried to find out the real truth, they might have been able to heal together and form a healthy family. Because of the lack of courage, they are forced to carry their emotional burden and wounds separately in silence. Additionally, their silence treatment also teaches Maggie to ignore painful truth instead of facing it with courage. Their behavior makes her unconsciously believe that silence is safety and avoidance is a form of protection. As a result, she tries to ignore questions related to her experiences in the Baneberry Hall for a longer period of her life. It takes her 20 years to have the courage of facing the buried childhood trauma. Her returning to the Baneberry Hall breaks the cycle of generational silence in this novel.

4.3 Setting as a symbol of repressed trauma and journey towards healing

In the novel, the setting Baneberry Hall represents human emotion. It works more than just a setting rather it is portrayed as a living character with a lot of unresolved secrets and mysteries. Here, this house not only embodies the horror elements in this novel but also reflects the psychological state of Maggie portraying her inner sufferings as well as her way to be free from all her emotional wounds. Though this house is a physical place, it also functions as an emotional space for the suppressed fears of Maggie. The spooky atmosphere of the house reflects Maggie's dark and confused mental state in the novel. The way the house is old, ignored and

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abandoned, Maggie's childhood wounds are also ignored for a long time. Her father tries to keep the trauma hidden by writing the fabricated novel on this house. Her lifelong nightmares are related to the house and the buried past. That is why, whenever someone mentions the house or her father's novel, she reminds of her buried trauma which deepens her distress even more. It shows though she forgets about the unresolved trauma but her unconscious mind refuse to forget it and continues to give her hints through nightmares. Here, it illustrates psychological theme rather than gothic. In this novel, the gothic elements metaphorically symbolize the dark side of human psyche rather than just horror. Maggie ultimately decides to go to the house to face her buried trauma. Here, entering the house reflects her decision to confront the hidden past. She stays there alone to find out the truth on her own. This isolation helps her to face the fear without any distraction. Moreover, some of the objects like the almirah in her room, smell remind her of her past memory in the house. It shows how memory is connected to the objects. Then she asks Chief Alcott and she says, "Sometimes, though, I think about that night. How your dad looked. How all of you looked. You know that phrase? 'You look like you've just seen a ghost'? That applied to all three of you." (Sager 69). Here, she is trying to know about the night they left the house from Chief Alcott because it represents a core traumatic event in Maggie's childhood. Then, the phrase "look like you've just seen a ghost" symbolizes the psychological impact of the brutal incident on her. The ghostly fear reflects the fear of ghosts in the house as well as the haunting power of the repressed wounds, which she confronts in order to heal. After staying there, she is finally able to differentiate between the real and fake story of the Baneberry House. She says, "There is some truth behind it. Baneberry's history...I was right-the Book is a lie. Not all of it. But the important parts. The ones that involve us. And Mister Shadow." (Sager 35). This realization works as a turning point for her. By uncovering the truths of the house, she is taking the control over her memory rather than being

defined by her father's false portrayal. Here, the discovery is associated to her revealing the dark past of the house as well as her psyche. She is finally able to understand the source of her fear. This is how, the Baneberry house becomes an empowering step towards healing for her. This indicates that the place where the trauma originates, is the place to find its path to healing. So, the Baneberry Hall is both threatening and protective for Maggie. Here, the house serves as a symbol of the dark place for Maggie's hidden brutal memories, as well as a safe space for her healing and transformation. This novel conveys a strong message that healing from unresolved and hidden trauma requires strong courage and dedication.

In the novel *Home Before Dark*, Maggie's experiences can be analyzed through Trauma theory, Affect theory and Psychoanalytical theory. Trauma theory explains how her unresolved trauma continues to affect her in the present as well as her journey towards healing. It also focuses on how a murder causes generational trauma within a family. Maggie and her parents suffer a lot because of the misconception which breaks their family bond. It also illustrates how forgotten traumatic experience of the house causes Maggie to suffer even more. Then Affect theory focuses on the effect of her past wounds on her present life, behavior, action and relationship. It also highlights her mental state when her unanswered questions are constantly refused by her parents. Her mental condition worsens when she is asked about her brutal experiences. Thirdly, Psychoanalytical theory highlights how her unconscious mind controls her action and drives her to confront the buried truth for healing. The unconscious mind gives her hints of her memories through nightmares and flashbacks of fragmented memory.

Chapter 5: Analysis of *The Paper Palace*

In the novel *The Paper Palace*, the author Miranda Cowley Heller portrays an emotional inheritance of trauma and silence within a family. Through the protagonist Elle, she shows how unresolved trauma and experiences in a broken family can influence the identity, future relationship and decision making. This novel also explores how silence can be a form of emotional inheritance. Elle learns to suppress her pain as she sees the same thing in her family through the women from previous generations. This cycle of repression defines Elle's emotional state, preventing her from confronting the truth or sharing it with other. Then the setting of the novel serves as both safe place and prison for Elle, which reflects both Elle's comfort and suffocation.

5.1 Impact of unresolved trauma on identity, relationship and decision making

In the novel *The Paper Palace*, the author Miranda Cowley Heller shows how the unresolved trauma deeply influences the character Elle's identity, relationship and decision making throughout her life. The sexual assault in her childhood becomes the emotional burden which she continues to carry even in her 50s. She has never healed from the emotional wounds. Though she is married to Peter and has a stable family, she is still trapped in her guilt for not telling him about her dark past. Here, she remembers the traumatic experience very well but she cannot express it to anyone out of shame and cannot even live peacefully because of her internal turmoil. Moreover, she suffers from guilt of Conrad's murder but cannot reveal the truth. She faces ambiguity between justice and morality. Whether letting him die counts as a murder from a moral perspective or this is what he deserves for his evil deeds. It focuses on the psychological complexity of her guilt and trauma. This inability to express damages her sense of self and confidence, leaving her emotionally fragmented. Then her mother's emotional detachment is also

another reason for her repressed trauma. In her childhood, she is taught that silence is a form of survival and her pain should be hidden from the world rather than to be healed. By hiding her pain, she tries to behave as a normal happy married woman in order to meet the social and family expectations. Elle says, “Her worst advice: Think Botticelli. Be like Venus rising on a half shell, lips demurely closed, even her nakedness modest.” (Heller 14). Here, Elle’s mother Wallace is referring to Botticelli, advises her to become a flawless and idealized version of woman. She follows her mother’s advice. As a result, she has dual identity, one is her real self, a damaged girl and another one is the pretentious one, a strong wife and mother. Her silence reflects the internal conflict as well as her fragmented identities. The more secrets she has, the more fragmented she becomes. Her inner self is like a shadow of her which she never reveals to the outer world. To others, she performs to be happy, normal and stable where deep inside she is sufferings from psychological wounds. By keeping things secret, she emotionally isolates herself from others and cannot deeply connect to anyone. This is how, her internal trauma transforms her into a living dead. In this novel, the author shows how identity can be performative and can have different layers within a particular person. She also says, “Peter can do no wrong. “If you want to make Peter happy when he comes home from work.” Mum advised me years ago, "put on a fresh blouse, put in your diaphragm, and smile.” (Heller 30). Here, her mother’s advice is problematic and biased as it reflects the patriarchal mindset. She suggests her to mainly focus on her beauty and appearance rather than being honest and emotionally connected in her marriage. She does not blame men for anything which is also a disturbing statement. This is how, Elle is taught since her childhood to be artificial which creates the identity conflict in her. Then her unresolved trauma also affects her romantic relationships in adulthood. Her relationship with Peter is built on lies and dishonesty. Since she has the desire to live a perfect life, she hides her dark past from her husband

to achieve it. She expresses her guilt by saying, "Are you a virgin, Elle?" I wish I could tell him the truth, but instead I say, "Yes." And so we begin on a lie." (Heller 243). Though it is not true, she could not tell him the truth. Maybe she loves her life with Peter but there is lack of emotional transparency in their marriage. She also says, "I told Conrad's secret to no one. Not even Peter." (Heller 355). To run away from the unresolved trauma she marries Peter but in reality, she loves Jonas, her best friend. Even in her 50s, she is having an extra marital affair with Jonas. Here, it indicates her complex relationships in this novel. She could have married Jonas but she did not because he was part of her unresolved trauma. Her love for Jonas is related to her pain, shame and past. Living with Jonas would be a constant reminder of Conrad's death. So, if she marries him, it would be impossible for her to get over her wounds. To have a clean life, she chooses Peter but she has never forgot Jonas, her love. It shows the complexity of the character Elle. This is how, the unresolved trauma can deeply shape a person's relationship with others, makes her suffer even more in maintaining it. It also reflects, how her suppressed trauma forces her to take such decisions in her life. Here, Peter serves as a form of escape from the brutal past and the painful reality. So, her life choices are not made freely rather they are driven by her guilt, shame and pain. Since childhood, she has learned to silence the darkness, so she does the same in her life. She drowns Conrad to cover up her rape. She regrets her choices by saying,

"I think about the choices I've made the ones I've spent my life hiding from. The choice Jonas and I made that blustery day. The choice I made to keep Conrad's secret from Mum; if I had had the courage to tell my mother to allow her life to fall apart instead of mine Conrad would still be alive. It wasn't only Conrad's dreams that died. Stupid, stupid children. Conrad ruined everything. Jonas ruined everything. I ruined everything." (Heller 355).

It indicates her sense of moral conflict and self-blame for her life choices. She regrets for doing such criminal offense. She blames herself as a murderer of Conrad. This regret and guilt is killing her day by day and she cannot even share it to others. She thinks if she had the courage to share the rape issue to her mother, maybe the consequences would be different and better. She thinks her life has become worse since the day of Conrad's death. The weight of this secret isolates her emotionally which prevents her from healing. This is how, repressed trauma can cause more trouble for the victim by influencing her actions. The fear of revealing the brutal truth continues the cycle of her internal suffering. The author Miranda Cowley Heller portrays the character Elle's life as a story about how unresolved trauma shapes people's identity, distorts their relationships, and controls both moral and life choices. Her silence and guilt are responsible for her downfall in the novel *The Paper Palace*.

5.2 Generational silence and parental denial

In the novel *The Paper Palace*, the author shows how generational silence and parental denial worsen the suppressed trauma of their child. In the novel, the character Elle faces loss of autonomy, her trust and agency were violated by her parents during her childhood. They never asked about her likings rather they imposed their thinking on her. When she was young, her parents got divorce and remarried. They never thought how it would affect her. She was never asked where she wants to stay rather she was sent to her father or mother's home based on their will. Both of her parents were cold and emotionally distant from their children, they were busy in their new relationships. It shows a lack of emotional connection between parents and children in this novel. Then, neither had they assured her safety, nor they had showed emotional support for her. They never asked if she is facing any problem with their new family. It shows mistrust of

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adults and negligence from parents. Moreover, she was sexually assaulted by her stepbrother Conrad. She says, "A hand comes out of the darkness then, covers my mouth. "I was watching you," Conrad whispers in my ear... He stabs himself into me then. I feel a searing pain as he tears through my hymen. Rips me open... When he comes, I weep." (Heller 198-199). It is such a brutal experience for her and she is never able to move on from this even after the death of Conrad. But she is unable to share such serious issue to her mother. Though she tries to talk about her traumatic experience, her mother's business and emotional unavailability makes it nearly impossible for her to disclose such brutal truth. She says, "There are no traces of violence, no smell of fear. My yellow floor is bright and cheerful. Mum has left a pile of fresh cotton sheets and floral pillowcases on the end of the mattress. Nothing has changed but me." (Heller 201). It shows psychological layers of Elle's trauma. She sees nothing has changed except her. It breaks her emotionally and shows her helplessness. She feels lack of care and protection during such vulnerable state. She could have done anything bad. But her parents were not emotionally available at that time. She was not able to tell her mother about it because of the fear of not being believed. Because she knew her mother is biased towards men. She says, "In my mother's world, the men are given the respect" (Heller 30). It shows Elle's awareness of her mother's gender biasness and the reason for not revealing her pain to her mother. Her mother's thinking is also a result of generational silence because she also experienced same brutal experience in her life. She was raped by her stepfather during her childhood but her mother did not take any stand for her. She blamed her mother and "lost her respect for women but not for men. Her stepfather's perversion was a hard truth, but it was her mother's weak-willed betrayal that made her go cold." (Heller 30). Here she is frustrated with her mother for her inaction but she is not blaming her stepfather for ruining her childhood. This is the problem. However, her mentality and perspectives are shaped by the betrayal of her mother and

she does the same thing to her daughter by showing negligence. It shows how parental ignorance beaks the child completely and it can cause a cycle of generation ignorance and silence. This is how, unresolved trauma of one generation can cause sufferings for the next generation. Though she had such brutal past still she was not aware of her daughter's situation and failed to ensure a healthy environment for her. It shows the lack of maternal protection in Elle's life. However, she also advices her daughter to be a submissive wife for a perfect marriage. Her mother says, "Dear Eleanor, I like your Peter very much. Please make an effort not to be so difficult all the time. Keep your mouth closed and look mysterious. Think Botticelli. Love, Mummy." (Heller 15). Here, her mother is advising her to focus on her appearance rather than being honest and respectful in her marriage. She thinks beauty is more important than truth for a happy marriage. Then by using the phrase "Botticelli", she is expecting her to show femininity rather than showing her real thoughts and perspective. Here, it is unacceptable. Her mother is trying to control her rather than protecting her. So, she does the same thing in her life by bearing her painful past in silence. It shows the pattern of generational silence in Elle's life. Her mother's silence is teaching Elle that silence is safer option than confrontation. As a result, Elle spends fifty years of her life in silence and fighting with her internal pain alone. Here, the author is criticizing the traditional idea of women according to the society. Moreover, her mother is also pretentious and dishonest with her. Her advice is ironic because she used to have an affair with Mr. Dancy but suggesting her daughter to be silent and submissive in order to have a perfect married life. There is the line, "My mother has sent us next door to her lover's apartment to play with his children while his wife babysits us...I look across the interior courtyard from his apartment into ours and see Mr. Dancy holding my mother in his arms" (Heller 21). It shows the flaws of the character Wallace and her emotional detachment with her daughter. Elle also says, "In my mother's family, divorce is just a seven-letter word Letters that

could easily be replaced with I'm bored or bad luck.” (Heller 70). It shows the hypocrisy of Elle’s mother how she peruses her own desire whereas imposing the established social norms on her daughter. She always highlights Elle’s role as a wife and mother but never tries to understand her emotional and psychological condition as a mother herself. It shows the gap of her thinking. It also explores the irony of advice and action. Her mother’s hypocrisy causes confusion and internal conflict in Elle as she sees her mother to go beyond the social expectations but forcing her to follow it blindly. It also cause Elle’s emotional detachment with her mother. She knows that her mother would not be able to understand her pain and problems. Here, the author criticizes the established social norms and the culture of silence that are practices in the families. Additionally, Elle’s father like her mother failed to provide emotional support for her. Though he was physically present in her life, emotionally he was absent throughout her childhood while she needed him the most. This is how, parental ignorance causes her to be silence about her pain, isolation as well as she tries to suppress her emotional wounds. She learns that parents cannot be relied upon for protection and security. Without a supportive father figure, Elle decides to bury her childhood trauma which deeply bothers her throughout her life. Therefore, Elle fragmented identity is the result of her family silence and emotional ignorance. In this novel, the author also portrays the sufferings of the children from a broken family.

5.3 Setting as a symbol of repressed trauma and journey towards healing

In the novel *The Paper Palace*, the author Heller shows the significance of the setting in portraying a character’s emotion. The summer home in Cape Cod is more than just a physical location. It is a symbol of Elle’s memory, secrecy, and emotion. Here, the summer house which is known as the paper palace also reflects Elle’s trauma on different levels. The house both

symbolizes the joyful and painful memory of Elle in this novel. In her childhood, she spent her good time there as well as experienced sexual abuse. There is a pond next to the house that has witnessed Elle's good and bad times. This is the place where she used to swim in her childhood, Conrad was drowned, and she loved Jonas. So, the house represents Elle's psyche reflecting both good memories and unresolved trauma. Visiting the house reminds her about the rape and the death of Conrad. It causes internal pain and suffering for her. She hides her guilt for nearly twenty years. Here, the paper palace is mirroring the emotional world of Elle presenting the beautiful memories of her childhood as well as the weight of her unresolved trauma. However, she finally confronts her buried trauma by going to visit Conrad's grave in Memphis. By visiting Conrad's grave, she is facing her brutal past and emotional truth. Here, the healing process starts. She admits to herself by saying, "You did something terrible, I say, but I did something worse." (Heller 355). Here, she is accepting her guilt and brutal truth for the first time. Now, she has the courage to face the repressed trauma and trying to find out a way for healing. It shows the emotional growth of the character Elle in the novel. Here, visiting Conrad's grave serves as symbolic confrontation for Elle. She is breaking the emotional silence of her trauma by releasing her long buried guilt. It shows the connection between setting and memory. This act indicates her emotional strength to heal and move forward in her life. It also shows the transition of Elle from hiding her guilt to accepting the brutal truth. It requires a lot of courage and bravery to do such amazing job and she finally seems to gain it. Then she also meets Rosemary, Conrad's sister and confesses how she saw him drowning in the pond but did not try to save him and how this guilt is killing her day by day. Here, for the first time, she is accepting her crime to someone. It shows the mental development of the character Elle. Now she does not have any fear to accept her mistakes and guilt which she carries for decades. This is how, she breaks the cycle of her family secrets and hypocrisy. It shows her relief from the

weight of emotional wounds which makes her feel even better. This act of confrontation symbolizes her mental freedom in the novel. This is how, she purifies herself from the regret. Her physical movement from the summer house to Memphis symbolizes her internal transformation in this novel. She has gained immense courage and determination for this transition in her life. Here, Memphis and Conrad's grave represent her acknowledgement and accountability. She finally decides to end her relationship with Jonas. It indicates a key turning point in Elle's life. Thus, the victim's life becomes easier and more comfortable by healing from the repressed trauma. By ending the relationship, she reclaims her control over her body and mind as well as frees herself from bearing another secret in silence. It portrays Elle's emotional maturity in this novel. This is how, letting go of the dark past allows Elle to reclaim her real self and identity. Then she is able to confess her mother, "It was Conrad. Conrad raped me." (Heller 399). Here, she is not only revealing truth but also seeking a better emotional connection with her mother. This is how, the setting serves as a bridge for Elle to accept the past and understand the present for a better future. Through the symbolic representation of the setting, the author Heller highlights the change in Elle's mind and mental state.

The character Elle from the novel *The Paper Palace* can be analyzed through the theories Trauma theory, Affect theory and Psychoanalytical theory. Trauma theory explains how unresolved trauma affects her psyche, behavior and action. She suffers from different traumas in her life. It starts with her parents' divorce and lack of care from them. It worsens by the sexual assault of her. She suffers how Conrad was leading a normal life even after destroying hers. It brutally damages her. Then her involvement with Conrad's murder breaks her even more. Trauma theory focuses on those suppressed brutal memories in order to heal the victim. It encourages the

victim to confront the traumas which is an essential part of healing. Then Affect theory focuses on the effect of the suppressed wounds on her identity, relationship and action. Her attempts to escape the past is also a part of it. She does not have to courage to face in for a longer period of time but she cannot even erase it from her mind. Finally, Psychoanalytical theory illustrates how unconscious guilt, desire and pain influence Elle's decision making and psychological development. It explores how the summer house or the paper palace symbolizes the emotional space for Elle rather than a physical structure. It also highlights how parental denial and ignorance unconsciously shapes her identity and life choices.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In both novels, *Home Before Dark* and *The Paper Palace*, the authors Riley Sager and Miranda Cowley Heller portray how the repressed and unresolved trauma shapes the inner selves of the protagonists. In the novel *Home Before Dark*, Maggie's entire life is driven by her trauma. She is not able to take neutral decisions or find peace in her life. Then the parental silence worsens her situation even more. Though she is vocal about her pain and unanswered questions but she does not get any support from her parents. Her internal turmoil is presented through the setting of the Baneberry House. She ultimately finds relief from her pain and the answers of her questions by uncovering the brutal truth. On the other hand, the character Elle in the novel *The Paper Palace*, she is never vocal about her traumatic incidents rather she is concerned about hiding it from people's eye. Her thinking is the product of her family culture of silence and secrecy which creates trouble for her. Her mental state and psyche is depicted through the symbolic representation of the summer house in this novel. Only when she breaks the cycle of the generational silence, she finds internal peace and emotional stability in her life. Finally, together these two novels suggest that one's identity and self-discovery are closely related to internal recognition, accepting the painful memories and navigating the complexity of human life.

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