

# Terror Or Horror: A Critical Analysis Of The Effects Of Transition In Horror On The Characters In The Selected Novels

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## Abstract

Horror fiction is comparatively new genre in literature and is widely popular among the young generation. This study distinguishes between terror and horror, and how does such fiction affect the characters in the selected novels. It also argues that in classical fiction, it was terror that was produced by the writers and experienced by the characters and readers, while the modern fiction offers horror to both i.e., characters and readers. Based on this distinction, the present study has used Ann Radcliffe's (1826) perspective when she defines terror and horror based on the effects it produces. This paper implies that the fear that was created by classical fiction was terror while the fear created by and presented in modern fiction is horror. The present study is qualitative in nature and has followed the technique of close reading to critically analyze the texts of both classical and modern novels and has explained the difference between terror and horror and its effects on the characters.

**Keywords:** Abstract; Effects; Horror; Terror; Transition; Material

## Introduction

This study deals with the effects of an emotion called fear, which is produced and presented in fiction through various elements and artifacts. It also explains the distinction between terror and horror. With the passage of time, this phenomenon, the fear aroused, is known by various names. For some it is terror, for others, horror. In classical fiction, fear was produced by the writers with the help of using different abstract elements such as ghosts, witches, darkness, mysterious voices, and superstitions. All of these elements were abstract in nature — they did not have any material or physical shape. People feared them even if they had not seen

these weird things. Since these elements were abstract, so was their effect on the characters. On the other hand, modern fiction came up with something extremely different from classical fiction. The modern writers produced fear with something real, or with something that felt real, and consequently, the effect it produced over the characters was also physical and real. To achieve this end, the researchers have selected *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) among the classical horror fictions and *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006) and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) among the modern horror fictions.

The Gothic writer Ann Radcliffe (1826) distinguishes between terror and horror. She explains that terror and horror are two different feelings based on its functionality. According to her, terror is a feeling of dread, a sort of fear that takes place before an event has happened. It is a fear of something bad to happen. There is uncertainty and obscurity in terror, the abstractness of it, the fear of something that has not been seen or experienced. While horror, she explains, is a different kind of fear, a feeling of revulsion or disgust after an event has happened. Horror in its essence is terror materialized. Based on Radcliffe's notion as the theoretical perspective, this paper argues that classical horror fiction used elements of fear that produced terror; there was a fear of something no one had seen in a perfect physical form. Modern fiction, on the other hand, materialized the fears. The objects of producing fear became concrete, physical and something that is no more abstract. Thus, the modern fear is not terror but horror.

According to Radcliffe, terror expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life whereas horror contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. It is so because terror is fear of the unknown, of something that has not happened, but horror is a sort of fear after experiencing the horrible. Since the terror in classical fiction was abstract, uncertain, and obscure, the characters did not receive or experience any physical assault or effect. It was a continuous fear of something bad to happen. While the horror in modern fiction is material, absolutely certain, and is physically seen and experienced. The classical fiction produced terror in the reader, but that era is long gone and there is no more terror in modern fiction today; it is pure horror. The reader is no more terrified of abstract beings and events but is horrified by something that has happened and witnessed.

### **Key-terms Defined**

**Terror:** In this paper, terror refers to the abstract fear created by abstract objects such as ghosts, witches, myths, and superstitions.

**Horror:** Horror refers to the concrete fear created through something material, real, or something that has the possibility to happen such as zombies, monsters, virus, or pandemics etc.

**Artifact:** The word artifact here means a thing or an object that is either a human creation or modified/manipulated because of human workmanship.

**Classical Horror:** It refers to the fiction of the mid-eighteenth century till the advent of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Modern Horror:** It refers to the modern fiction from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

### **Literature Review**

Etymologically, the word 'horror' comes from the Latin verb 'horrere', which means to tremble, or shudder. In fiction, horror refers to those texts that deal with objects and events that cause fear, revulsion, or disgust in the reader. Xavier (2016) maintains that horror fiction is something that deals with the fantastic and supernatural events. These supernatural events are used by the writers of horror fiction to arouse fear in the reader. The essence of horror lies in the effects that it produces in the reader or audience. Short stories and novels, and more recently the cinema, are the perfect vehicles to create and present horror. Xavier argues that in our age of technological advancement and realistic presentation, horror is now closely associated with the film industry than with the literature.

According to Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1927), fear is the oldest and strongest emotion of humans, and the strongest fear is the fear of the unknown and he believes that it is a psychological fact. This fact makes the horror a genuine and interesting literary genre. Literature is replete with fiction that centers on love, romance, and

happiness that engages the reader in a certain “degree of smirking optimism” (p. 3). The element of pleasure and happiness being dominant in literature seemed redundant to Lovecraft for he believed that fear is the primal and oldest emotion and it must not be ignored. He argues that the appeal of horror is limited because it is in its infancy, and it also requires a certain degree of intense imagination from the reader. Lovecraft’s criterion of horror is the cosmic fear – the fear of the extraterrestrial objects such as aliens. He maintains that horror requires something more than ghosts, mysterious murders, and events.

Dashiell Hammett (1944) discusses the efficacy of horror and suggests that during reading of a horror text, readers adopt the attitude of willing suspension of disbelief. They know that such horrible things cannot happen to them. It also depends on the writer who makes them realize that they are safe, and these weird events are limited to the pages of fiction only. He argues that horror fiction attracts its readers because they know that such events are not possible in real life, but they believe it in the context of the story, even if it produces the feelings of dread and fear. Hammett’s argument is interesting, but his approach is mainly concerned with classical horror fiction and neglects the horrors that do not require any sense of disbelief from the readers and audience.

Edmund Wilson (1944) criticizes the traditional concept of ghost story and believes that it is something outdated. He is surprised that how in the age of cellphones, radio, and electricity, people are attracted to such outdated concepts. He comes up with two possible reasons. Firstly, he asserts that people try to find some mystic and spiritual pleasure in the ghost stories in times of social confusion, panic, or trouble. Secondly, when people face horrors of real life, they try to console themselves with stories in which the wicked and awful things are defeated in the end.

Treading upon the significance of ghost stories, Wilson states that such fiction would hardly “scare anybody over ten” (p. 174).

According to Charles Derry (1977), the most dangerous and horrible creature and the cause of creating horror is man. He asserts “what was horrible, however, was man. It was horror that was specific, non-abstract and one that did not need a metaphor” (p. 19). He is chiefly interested in horror fiction in which the horror is caused by some psychotic killer, and he believes that the appeal of such horror is timeless because the consciousness nourishes the seeds of its own destruction. Derry’s approach to horror is quite different and interesting. He holds responsible the human as the sole contributor to the creation of horror. Thus, modern horror is not abstract to be defined but physical entity to deal with. The horror of the modern world is dreadful and yielding destruction at its core.

Noel Carroll (1990) presents a theory of horror in which he argues that horror owes its essence to the emotional effects it produces in the readers and audience. He maintains that horror functions as catharsis for the emotion of fear. This cathartic outcome is referred by Carroll as art-horror. Moreover, he explains that there are certain characters, metaphors, and distinctive structures that are essential tools for the arousing of fear and creation of horror. He is of the view that the presence of a monster is necessary in a horror fiction or film to trigger the emotion of fear. The monster should be aesthetically violated so that the reader is left with no other option but fear. The fear created through the aesthetic violation of the monster is the characteristic aspect of the horror genre.

Walter Kendrick (1991) argues that horror has no social meaning. It is useless to try to find any meaning in horror. He discards the idea that horror has any role in giving meaning to some social aspects of life. For him, horror has no ultimate purpose or implied meaning; its only

function is the feeling that it arouses in the audience. Kendrick too, believes that fear is the oldest of all emotions that constantly deals with death and dead things and the only purpose of horror fiction is to arouse that emotion. He asserts that people are no longer scared of the abstract elements of creating fear such as ghosts or spirits. They are more scared of the dead thing itself, of its rotting, or of its coming back to life. They can see the evidence of such horror in the text or on the screen.

Linda Badley (1995) is of the view that horror is produced by the writers through displaying of grotesque images and distorted parts of the body. It can be some sea-creature, or a monster with distorted or rotten body parts or a human altered because of some bizarre scientific experiment. She maintains that horror exists because of these several discourses of the body and works on the basis of fear and anxiety. She further adds that horror has become a kind of genre chiefly represented through damaged body parts that are described and presented in an explicit and realistic way. Her analysis demonstrates that the objects of creating horror changed from abstractness to graphics scenes and images that create a kind of real fear that is more appealing to the readers and audience than the terror that was presented in the classical fiction.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

This paper argues that in classical fiction, the fear that was created in the texts was terror while in modern fiction it is horror. It also discusses the distinction between terror and horror based on the effects they produce on the characters, highlighting that the effects of the terror on the characters in classical fiction were mental while the effects of horror in modern fiction are physical.

### **Methodology**

The paper provides a comprehensive examination and analysis of the effects of transition in horror fiction on the characters. It is done by selecting four novels i.e., *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764), *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James (1898) among the classical novels; and *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* by Max Brooks (2006), and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi (2018) among the modern novels. Moreover, the present study is qualitative in nature, selecting important passages from the selected novels, examined under the technique of multimodal close reading. This research focuses on the characters, events, and setting of the novels through the technique of close reading using Tison Pugh and Margaret Johnson's (2014) model of close reading that concentrates on the characters, setting, point of view, tone, themes, and style. At some points, Sylvan Barnet and William Cain's (2004) model of close reading that focuses on the treatment of plot, setting, character, atmosphere, and symbolism was also consulted by the researchers.

### **Data Analysis**

It is a fact familiar to everyone and especially to the readers of scholarship in the field of literature, that literature of an age is partly true and partly fictitious history of the age which produces it. It is also a point of interest and of course the beauty of literature that it not only narrates the past or the present, but also has the power to predict the future. This prediction is imaginative, telling and suggesting what might be coming or what is the possibility that something might happen next? Literature thus shapes itself with the zeitgeist as Hudson (1913) has rightly put "it is a product of evolution; its history is a history of unceasing transformation" (p. 271).

### **The Terror in Classical Fiction**

The first recognized Gothic novel was *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Walpole. McMahan (2017) suggests that "in a narrative or creative writing, a

plot is the sequence of events that makes up a story, whether it is told, written, filmed, or sung (pp. 21-22). The story of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) begins with a prophecy which states that the castle and its ownership should go from the current family at any time, the true owner is grown too old. The rest of the events follow a logical order, and the story unfolds when the central character decides to marry Isabella, the bride of his dead son (Walpole, 1764, p. 11).

Isabella is scared of death and the whole castle is shrouded in a kind of atmospheric terror. Incest was forbidden in religion and was considered a heinous sin in ancient mythologies. It was believed that incest brings catastrophic diseases, plagues, and other forms of evil. Manfred arranges the marriage of his son with Isabella because he fears that the ancient prophecy might fulfil. The prophecy is still not convincing, and it is also not obvious how this hasty marriage is linked to the sudden death of the lord's son Conrad? The people in the castle are really scared because of the prophecy and the lord being intending to commit incest. So, terror is created in the characters with the help of abstract beliefs and superstitions without the happenings of something.

Prophecies and the unexplained happenings are central to the story as the readers can witness when additional pieces of the giant's armor begin to materialize, seeming to come from a statue of Prince Alfonso; and the castle of Otranto is besieged by supernatural terror. Paintings come to life, lightning destroys the castle, and vision of Alfonso appears on the horizon when his son comes to reclaim his throne. In the final moments of the story when Theodore enters the court room, the walls of the castle behind Manfred fall with a prodigious force. The figure of Alfonso is formed on the walls in the center of the castle (Walpole, 1764). The giant figure of Alfonso proclaims Theodore as his heir, and the people accept this spectral verdict. Thus, the ambiguous and odd

prophecy was fulfilled. A certain kind of terror prevails throughout the story that something terrible is about to happen.

Ghosts occupy central place in the story of *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). A governess is hired to teach the two children at the remote house of Bly. One evening, when the governess goes outside for a walk, looking at one of the towers of Bly, she sees something and says that "there came to me thus a bewilderment of vision of which, after these years, there is no living view that I can hope to give" (James, 1898, p. 38). It is the first time that this vision happened to her. It still provides a frightening view of the scene, and she can feel while writing her story, the fear she experienced during her encounter with the ghost "All the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again . . . and battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame" (p. 38). The governess and the ghost visually connect, and it is obvious that the ghost has seen her and that he also realizes that she can see him, yet, they are in an excessive distance from each other to be called or heard. Seeing the ghost, she experiences a strange feeling – a blend of fear and disbelief. This feeling, and her failure to speak with the vision, pave the way for the later terrors to come and her encounters with the ghosts.

One Sunday, when the governess is getting into her room, the vision appears behind the wide window of her room. She turns cold when she sees the figure with clear nearness, yet, he does her no harm. The ghost just stares at her and then vanishes (James, 1898, p. 43). It is the second time that the ghost of Peter Quint visited the governess but this time, she is more scared because he was standing very close. She feels threatened because the ghost only stares at her without uttering a word or doing her any physical damage.

The governess shares the encounters with the vision with Mrs. Grose. She tells her that the vision she saw so clearly, was of Peter Quint who

was a former personal servant of the owner of the house. The old lady informs the governess that “Mr. Quint is dead” (James, 1898, p. 48). Thus, Mrs. Grose explicitly introduces the supernatural into the story with her assertion that the governess has seen a dead man, the ghost of Mr. Peter Quint. In a later scene, when the governess and little Flora are playing by the lake, she sees one more person staring at her and the child. This time it is not the dead Peter Quint but “a figure of quite as unmistakable horror and evil: a woman in black” (James, 1898, p. 54). This time it was a vision of a woman. When the governess shares her terror with Mrs. Grose, she concludes that the shadow which appeared to her at the lake was Miss Jessel, who was a former governess of the children and died under mysterious and sympathetic circumstances.

There had been various interpretations of *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Some scholars maintain that the ghosts are real; others like the immanent critic Edmund Wilson (1944) believe that there are no such things as ghosts in the story. The figures that appear to the repressed governess are only her hallucinations. Whether the governess is visited by the ghosts, or they are mere her hallucinations, is not the point of the present study. Instead, the researchers argue that the fear created by James through the ghosts and spirits was terror because, as maintained by Radcliffe (1826), there was a constant fear of something evil to happen throughout the story and the characters did not receive any physical harm. As James asserts in another preface to supernatural stories, that his chief interest was in the effect of his supernatural elements, simply put, to incite the emotions of fear and terror in the readers (Kendrick, 1991). Thus, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is a text that creates terror, a fear whose effects are mental, rather than physical.

### **The Horror in Modern Fiction**

*World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006) is a story of an outbreak, a pandemic

that is caused by an unknown virus, a virus that turns human into zombies. It is a story of a war against humans who are turned into monsters by a virus. The novel details various accounts of the survivors of the Zombie War. The first outbreak occurs in “New Dachang, China” (Brooks, 2006, p. 2). One of the doctors tells the narrator that the pre-war population of this area was thirty-five million, but the postwar scenario is different. There are now hardly fifty thousand alive (Brooks, 2006). It shows that almost the whole population was infected with the new virus which had turned them into zombies and then were consequently killed.

The doctor also shares his experience of seeing the first human turning into a zombie. It was a girl and she was having high temperature and was shaking fiercely. She had also a grey liquid oozing wound on the right arm that looked like something has bitten her (Brooks, 2006). The doctor realizes that it is not from an animal because it seemed like having come from “a small, and possibly young, human being” (p. 3). As it is a new disease, the doctor has no clue what he is dealing with. The patients are infected, but they have not turned into zombies yet. The doctor thinks it is bacterial infection until he is introduced to Patient Zero, a twelve-year-old boy turned into a zombie, writhing, and behaving like an animal. The doctor tells the narrator that there was no sign of heartbeat or pulse, and his eyes were “wild, wide and sunken back in their sockets” (p. 4). When the doctor tries to extract a sample of blood, he extracts only grey and sticky liquid.

Zombie is an extremely horrible and infectious monster ever introduced to horror fiction or film. It is believed to be a human corpse reanimated by some cause, a creature devoid of thought and soul, and a monster with severely impaired cognitive functioning. In the novel, neither this monster nor its cause is known before the outbreak. The first zombie the narrator knows

about, is called 'Patient Zero' by the villagers and the doctors. The term 'patient' used for the first zombie in *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006) indicates that there is an infection that makes people sick for few hours and later turns them into walking dead. The infection is possibly caused by a new virus. Later, most of the people in the novel confuse this new disease with rabies, believing it to be African rabies, or an unknown plague "that transforms dead bodies into bloodthirsty cannibals" (Brooks, 2006, p. 22). The havoc which turns into a worldwide war just like the WWI and WWII, is the horrible result of an invisible deadly virus. The zombie war becomes more dangerous and horrible than the earlier world wars because in this war, people are not only dying; they are also reanimated into deadly monsters, which cannot be killed unless their brains are destroyed.

Zombies are human beings who are transformed into killing machines by a virus. The only difference between zombies and humans is that the brains of zombies or 'The Undead', as they are called by the Israeli intelligence officer, do not need oxygen or blood flow to stay alive (Brooks, 2006). The virus specifically works in the brain and then the brain reactivates the whole body, and the person becomes blood sucking monster. That is why for kill a zombie, the most important thing is to attack the brain. Zombies are reanimated corpses, but they are not humans anymore; they look more disgusting and fearsome when they are reanimated. Doctor Jing-Shu describes to the narrator his first encounter with a zombie "There was no blood on his wounds, not on the gouges on . . . and ulna bones stabbed through his grey flesh" (p. 4). The doctor's account provides us with a clear and very frightening view of horror that zombies create through their looks alone. What they do to their victim is even more awful than their looks. When the narrator travels to Brazil to interview the doctor who assisted Doctor Silva in the surgery of Herr Muller, the doctor tells him the scene

when he entered Herr Muller's room and saw him attacking Doctor Silva. When the doctor entered the room, he saw Muller crouching over Doctor Silva, and then turned towards Doctor Fernando with "bits of bloody meat falling from his open mouth" his surgical wounds were opened and "a thick, black gelatinous fluid oozed through the incision" (Brooks, 2006, p. 14).

The zombie war causes a great deal of damage to the people, both physically and psychologically. Joe Muhammad meets the narrator in Wenatchee, Washington. Shortly after the Great Panic, the government was searching for the remaining zombies to eliminate them. For this purpose, civilians were also directed to take part in the operation. Joe tells the narrator that although the war had ended, people were still afraid because there were zombies left and hidden somewhere in the corners of abandoned houses. At that time, zombies were not many in numbers, the real horrible problem was quislings. They were those people who "went nutballs and started acting like zombies" (Brooks, 2006, p. 92). Upon asking what exactly he means by quislings, Joe explains that some people were so frightened and psychologically damaged by the trauma of the war that they walked as if they were real zombies. They would make writhing sounds like zombies and even attacked people and ate human flesh. Quislings were as dangerous as the zombie itself. They were in a state of psychological shock. They were not bitten but they believed they were infected due to the trauma they faced because of the horror the zombies injected, and in consequence, they became a source of real horror themselves. The quislings were also increasing in number due to the reason that fake drugs like Phalanx vaccine stormed the market and when people would gather buying Phalanx, they would get bitten by a quisling; they thought they were immune to the infection. The quislings are human beings, but they are "as hostile as regular zombies and in some cases even more dangerous" (p. 92). The quislings create a more sense of horror than

the real zombies because they can see, think, and feel contrary to real zombies who only sense movement. As they were traumatized and frightened, they started attacking and eating humans that made them even more horrible and stronger than the real zombies.

The trauma of the zombie war or the Z-shock then becomes an extremely horrible problem. On one side, there is the fear of serious zombies and on the other hand, there is horror created by quislings. They were physically normal humans but mentally they were zombies to the extent that it was impossible to differentiate between a quisling and a zombie. They were turned into something they were not. When the zombies would attack quislings, they would not scream, not even trying to fight “writhing in that slow, robotic way, eaten alive by the very creatures they were trying to be” (p. 93). People were converted into quislings or fake zombies because they were so much shocked by the trauma of the infection that they forgot their own identity and started believing that they were zombies. They were not zombies, but they would attack humans to survive, and would become stronger because not only did they attack humans, but also ate their flesh.

Frankenstein in Baghdad (2018) is a saga of war and terrorism. It is a story of the Iraqi citizens slaughtered by dangerous weapons, explosions, and suicide attacks. After September 11, 2001, the Bush administration began the controversial preparations for the Iraq War, identifying an “Axis of Evil” (Iran, Iraq, and North Korea) that was opposed to Western values and eliding the identities of the Al-Qaeda terrorists and Iraqi government, a connection that objective investigation failed to substantiate. The American and British governments argued that President Saddam Hussein was in possession of nuclear weapons and meant to use them against America and her allies. War, President Bush argued, was the only way to stop this grave threat (Overy,

2004). Nevertheless, they did not find nuclear weapons in Iraq, and as the war dragged on into its second, third, and fourth year, public opposition grew to the raging violence in occupied Iraq.

There is a series of killings and explosions in Baghdad. A recent explosion reminds Hadi of another car bomb that had killed his only friend and partner in the junk business, Nahem Abdaki. The blast had killed Nahem and his horse. It was quite hard to “separate Nahem’s flesh from that of the horse” (Saadawi, 2018, p. 19). Saadawi creates a very clear picture of the horrors that engulfed Iraq during the American invasion. In fact, it is these explosions, the suicide blasts, and car bombs that would later provide the spare parts for the body of the monster. When Hadi is in the process of completing the corpse of the monster, another explosion takes place at the Sadeer Novotel Hotel in Baghdad. The suicide bomber had stolen a waste truck from the Baghdad’s municipality. The truck was laden with dynamite, and it exploded with such force that the bodies it engulfed were unable to be recognized. There remained not a complete single body, but parts of the bodies scattered around the entrance of the hotel.

One of the victims of this deadly suicide blast was the guard of the hotel Hasib Mohamed Jaafar, a 21-year-old man who had joined the duty of the security guard seven months before the explosion. As there was no complete body of him, only his “burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes, and small charred parts of his body” (p. 29) were sent in the coffin. There was nothing left of the guard, the coffin was just a symbol of his horrible death. When Hadi visits the site of this explosion, he finds a nose and takes it with him to complete his corpse which was almost complete but only a nose was missing. Hadi stitches the nose; the corpse is completed, and the nose looks as if it is his own. The nose Hadi stitched to the corpse was that of Hasib.



Saadawi paints a very realistic picture of the horror that was the result of a lethal explosion. The monster has not yet appeared in the story but the scenes of horror the writer creates are the result of violence, bloodshed, and suicide bombers that destroy bodies into pieces. Even their identity is lost because the number of body parts are either scattered on the roads or burned black by the fire.

It is also pertinent to note that no ghosts, monsters, and supernatural phenomenon are involved here to create fear in the reader and in the citizens of Baghdad, but deadly weapons of mass destruction are exhibited by the writer to show the inhuman cruelties of war and terrorism — all the result of the American invasion. The war on terror to eliminate the insecurities of America itself becomes a thing of brutality and an object of horror.

### Conclusion

From this study, the researchers conclude that in classical fiction it was terror that was created by the writers through their texts by using abstract and supernatural elements such as ghosts, spirits, mysteries, mythical beliefs, and superstitions to arouse fear in the readers. It was a constant fear of something evil to happen and the effects of such an emotion were abstract, mental, and not physical because although the characters were frightened and terrified, yet, they did not receive any physical assault; they would be stared and scared by a ghost or a vision and then it would vanish. As the transition occurred in fiction, terror became materialized and took the form of horror. In modern fiction, the reader is brought face to face with pure horror and fear is created with artifacts that are concrete, having a tangible shape and existence. The modern horror has both psychological and physical effects on the characters; they were scared, bitten, killed, cut into pieces, or turned into monsters themselves. The emotional outcome in classical fiction was terror as it was fear of the abstract while it is

horror in the modern fiction because it feels real, lived, and can be witnessed.

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