



Pedagogická  
fakulta  
Faculty  
of Education

Jihočeská univerzita  
v Českých Budějovicích  
University of South Bohemia  
in České Budějovice

Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích  
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Bakalářská práce

# Stephen King and the Gothic Horror Tradition

Stephen King a vliv tradice  
gotického románu

Autorka práce: Tereza Semaníková, Ajs-Chs

Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Alice Sukdolová, Ph.D.

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Podpis

## **Anotace**

Předmětem zkoumání práce budou vybrané romány autora současného amerického hororu Stephena Kinga (*The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Pet Sematary*). Práce v úvodu představí literární žánr gotického románu v historickém přehledu a nastíní jeho vývoj v porovnání anglické a americké literatury. Teoretická část práce vymezí tematiku a motivy gotického a hororového žánru a v následující části práce se bude věnovat interpretační analýze vybraných románů. Zaměří se na symboliku otevřených a uzavřených prostor, téma násilí, frustrace, nadpřirozených jevů a zvláštních schopností jednotlivých postav. Dále zohlední roli dětských hrdinů a vyprávěcí perspektivu vybraných děl (*Carrie*). Závěrečná část práce shrne literární vlivy působící na autorovu tvorbu a výsledný efekt na čtenáře specifického hororového žánru.

## **Abstract**

The subject of this thesis will be selected novels by the author of contemporary American horror, Stephen King (*The Shining*, *Carrie*, *Pet Sematary*). In the introduction, the thesis will focus on the literary genre of the gothic novel in a historical overview and outline its development in a comparison of English and American literature. The theoretical part of the thesis will define the themes and motifs of the gothic and horror genres. The following part will focus on the interpretive analysis of the selected novels. It will focus on the symbolism of open and closed spaces, themes of violence, frustration, supernatural phenomena, and the special abilities of individual characters. It will also take into account the role of child protagonists and the narrative perspective of the selected works (*Carrie*). The final section of the thesis will summarise the literary influences affecting the author's work and the resulting effect on readers of the specific horror genre.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to give a sincere compliment and a big thanks to PhDr. Alice Sukdlová, Ph.D., for the valuable time and advice she gave during the compilation of this bachelor thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the supervision and patience she provided.

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## Introduction

Roots of the Gothic and Horror literature date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and from then, it still captivates readers of all ages. Despite its initial ambivalence and refusal, when the genre underwent a tough critique, the gothic genre, now often labelled as just “horror”, survived the rebuff, and became an inseparable part of modern literature. With a glance at the present, Stephen King is one of the most well-known writers of contemporary fiction and made Gothic and Horror fiction famous and popular throughout the 21<sup>st</sup>-century generation. He explores plenty of themes and uses many features borrowed from the classic gothic genre, such as death, melancholy, depression and insanity or the occurrence of monsters and the supernatural. However, he gives his soul to his work and adds new anxieties experienced by younger generations. The thesis aims to comment on the tradition and progress of Gothic and Horror fiction throughout the last two hundred and fifty years and focus on Stephen King, the most influential contemporary American writer of horror and science fiction, and his influence on contemporary literature and writers.

This thesis consists of two parts. The first theoretical part focuses on the origin of Gothic literature, extending from the eighteenth century, the comparison of American and British Gothic literature, and the writers relevant to the genre. It comments on the phenomenon of the term “the uncanny”, closely related to the genre and further comments on Gothic literature in modern pop culture. The first part ends with a biography of Stephen King and defines the features and themes commonly used in his work.

The second practical part analyses selected novels by Stephen King and focuses on the text and characters, and it further proves the presence of themes and features typical for Gothic and horror fiction. The thesis contains three items of interpretative analysis of selected novels, such as *Carrie*, *The Shinning* and *Pet Sematary*. It sets the setting and plot and tries to embrace the breakdown of the characters, writing styles, main themes, and symbols. The second part finishes with the final evaluation of the progress and influence of the gothic and horror genre on contemporary literature and the new generation.



# 1 American Gothic

## 1.1 The origin of American Gothic

The term Gothic is well-known among people nowadays. Gothic refers to several areas, from lifestyle and architecture to art and literature. The concept of Gothic literature started to occur during the eighteenth century, and it has been evolving ever since. Some essential characteristics of Gothic literature are, for example, referring to the past or archaic settings, dealing with evil or supernatural aspects, working with the atmosphere, and producing many forms of writing up to now. Initially, Gothic literature worked with themes and symbols from the medieval past. For instance, the story occurs in horrifying castles, mysterious churches, and old ruins. The stereotypical heroes fight against scary creatures from tales and monsters hiding in themselves.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, we come across various forms of Gothic literature, such as modern horror fiction, science fiction, or modified detective genre. However, it stays loyal to its former thought to create a specific dark atmosphere “*of mystery and terror or of pronounced physical or mental horror*”.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, it all started with the work of Horace Walpole called “*The Castle of Otranto*” (1764), which was then recognised as the origin and the start of a new way of writing. Still, it did not get away without criticism as something different from the values and rules they used until then. We are mainly talking about the worth of directions and values of the British philosophical movement, Enlightenment, which dominated writing with features from the Greek and Roman times. It gained from their culture and gathered privileged forms and artistic formulation within classical and cultural rules. Artistic and cultivated motifs were praised and got together with order and consistency. Aesthetic objects were used for their harmony and appearance, and texts were designed to give advice and instruct discipline rather than incite entertainment.<sup>3</sup> It was generally accepted as a time of classical values, cultivation, and maturity.

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<sup>1</sup> PUNTER, D. *The Literature of Terror: Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*. 2014. p. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> ORAL SUMNER COAD. *The Gothic Element in American Literature before 1835*. University of Illinois Press, 1925. [online]. [cit. 12.3.2024]. p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> BOTTING, F. *Gothic*. 2005. p. 14

Gothic, being distinct from this, gained criticism. The term ‘Gothic’ pejoratively referred to the Middle Ages that typically attributed “*ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies, and natural wildness.*”<sup>4</sup> With those characteristics, Gothic literature started to reflect something negative and provoked standard rules. Gothic novels dealt with triggering content, including terror, vulgar expressions, taboos, and terms viewed as nonsense, for example, immortality.<sup>5</sup> Even though Gothic literature found its readers, it never lost its negative undertone.

In reaction to Walpole’s released writing, the market was blooming with significant works during the end of the eighteenth century. The range goes from poetry, for example, Philip Freneau’s “*The House of Night*” (1779), to plays like William Dunlap’s “*Fountainville Abbey*” (acted 1795, printed 1806) and other famous novels such as Ann Radcliffe’s “*The Mysteries of Udolpho*” (1794) or Matthew Lewis’ “*The Monk*” (1796). Even though this was a success for the Gothic genre, throughout the early nineteenth century, it all seemed to be mirrored, lacked originality, and struggled with creating individual stories and new identities.<sup>6</sup>

Writers started to be inclined towards aspects of Romanticism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The focus is on individuals, their journey, and development. Individuals tend to be at the edge of society, and we refer to them as outcasts. They usually represent half evil and half good; no one is always right and good all through. They either overpower villains and tyranny for us to feel sympathy, or they fight with themselves, with their identity and progress. As a result, Dark Romanticism was created and became popular.<sup>7</sup> A big part of redemption rests on creating the short story, which was used by several writers. It became a way for flexible thinking, pushing the limits, and testing the boundaries of life. Gothic literature was, from that moment, characterised by works by Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irving, Mary Shelley’s “*Frankenstein*” (1818), or Bram Stoker’s “*Dracula*” (1897).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> BOTTING, F. *Gothic*. 2005. p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> DAVISON, C. *History of the Gothic Literature 1764-1824*. University of Wales Press, 2009. [online]. [cit. 12.3.2024]. p. 1-21.

<sup>6</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> BOTTING, F. *Gothic*. 2005. p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 31.

The twentieth century brings many possibilities and opportunities to the Gothic genre, and it helps to expand it. The gothic genre is spread across movies, shows, musicals, and video games, appealing to the new generation of young people. Due to that, it has gained popularity and remains a frequently appearing genre. The Gothic genre stays fascinated with all the earlier mentioned objects and terms and even goes further with analysing unpopular topics perceived as irrational, pessimistic, and gloomy.<sup>9</sup> The most prominent writers who influenced Gothic fiction during the twentieth century are William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Stephen King, and more. It is the flirtation with the taboos and messing with the forbidden that attract people within the Gothic genre. Curiosity forces people to continue reading about supernatural themes, such as horrifying monsters, ghosts, and demons.<sup>10</sup> However, realistic themes, for example, murder, mental illness, and addictions, are very well-known by people these days, and they are considered to be very appealing to readers. It is familiar to them because it can represent their fears, anxieties, or life experiences, which urges them to carry on reading.

## 1.2 Comparison of American and British Gothic fiction

There is not much difference between American and British horror fiction just because they are similar in writing and features. Both American and British horror fiction share similarities since they use violence, which varies from physical to spiritual or sexual. Otherness and grotesqueness appear throughout American and British horror fiction, as does death.<sup>11</sup>

Protagonists are threatened by deception, and it does not matter if it is their fault or someone else's fault. Heroes are driven by their selfish, perverse needs and evil spirits, which shows their lack of morality. In the worst case, they can be pushed by insanity, which questions the narrator and protagonists' trustworthiness.<sup>12</sup> Mysterious places and nature motifs play a significant role in creating a dark atmosphere. The relation-

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<sup>9</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> HASLAM, J. *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016. [online]. [cit. 12.3.2024]. p. 44-59.

<sup>12</sup> LLOYD-SMITH, A. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. 2004. p. 65-66.

ship between life and the dead is important for Gothic fiction due to its constant openness to doubt about reality and mortality. It is also characterised by its fascination with the macabre, dealing with psychological states and uncanny events.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to American horror fiction, there were issues of race and ethnicity. American Gothic profited from the problematic history of slavery and racial matters happening in America, which brought new energy and anxieties to writing. With racial otherness also comes discrimination against people with different sexual orientations or class differences. People suffer from violence and rejection if they do not classify themselves according to social norms.<sup>14</sup>

A wave of American women used American Gothic fiction as a tool to demonstrate and display the everyday terror of marriage or motherhood and express exclusion and discrimination. Among them were women such as Edith Wharton and Shirley Jackson.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3 Gothic writers

A considerable number of writers published their works, which were established as Gothic fiction. They all gained recognition due to their unique writing and individualised stories, but some deserve a closer look and recognition.

Ann Radcliffe (1764 – 1823) was born and raised in England. Even though she published Gothic novels, her style remained traditional. Ann herself was a very conservative writer and honoured traditions coming from classical writing and philosophy, unlike the romantic movement in the Gothic, which supported the change and shift from ideals to emotions and imagination. She feared the decomposition of the classical culture she was used to and produced novels influenced by the Romantic Revolution with cation.<sup>16</sup> She concentrated on creating young, oppressed female characters, often smart

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<sup>13</sup> BOTTING, F. *Gothic*. 2005. p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 10

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> DURANT, D. *Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic*. Rice University, 1982. [online]. [cit. 19.3.2024].

or even genius, but they are a victim of patriarchal society. Rich and old men are capable of everything without any restrictions, and those young, independent heroines are in the power of their fathers or husbands. They not only find themselves in a state of mental prison but are also locked inside places possessed by the men, which serve as regular jails for them. Ann Radcliffe criticised the arguable distribution of power and control used toward women within society.<sup>17</sup>

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864) was an American novelist and short story writer who prominently concentrated on the past and history. Hawthorne partly deflected from analysing the protagonist's soul and sanity and inclined more to matured themes. His sphere was marked by exposing secrets and shadows of the haunting past of families, and it focused on the morality of human beings. He wrote about separating the good and evil in people based on twisted statements, and in his work, he doubted the boundaries and lines that divide these two opposites. Still, his novels pride on the presence of supernatural creatures, such as ghosts, witches, and other mysterious figures, and dark, gloomy places presented as family houses, which are familiar to readers.<sup>18</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849) is the writer we associate with the Gothic genre the most, and his work serves as an example of proper writing of Gothic horror fiction. Poe was a poet, a master of the short story form, and an inventor of the modern detective story form. Poe's life started with tragedy and, without a doubt, left a mark on him. His mother died a couple of years after his birth, and his father left him. Only *“pride, incongruous gentility, histrionic habits, a volatile temperament, sensitivity to criticism, self-pity, instability, a perverse self-destructive tendency and an Irish weakness for drink”* were left from Poe's father to inherit from him.<sup>19</sup>

Challenging life experiences shaped Poe. He failed to complete his university degree, was a part of the army, and was dismissed afterwards. He was unlucky in his love life as two of the women he proposed rejected him, and later, he married a thirteen-year-old child. With no close friends, he became an outcast in his life and inclined to complex alcoholism and melancholy, which projected into his work. He lost his control

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<sup>17</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> BOTTING, F. *Gothic*. 2005. p. 76-77.

<sup>19</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 5-6.

over alcohol and himself, and that led to a division of his personality.<sup>20</sup> Despite that, Edgar Allan Poe became a symbol of the Gothic genre, contributed to forming its features, and showed the potential of Dark Romanticism. He mastered work with mood and atmosphere by engaging the reader with sounds and visuals to completely dive into the story. He fully showed the potential of an unreliable narrator and the destruction of a person from the psychological side. Poe wrote about masochism, self-torture, and self-destruction, including thriving on violence and perverseness. His protagonists were madmen and murderers or others who possibly lost their sanity.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, his struggles and life experiences swallowed him. His sadness and depression drove him to usage of drugs and isolation. In his last years of life, he attempted to shut down his fears and melancholy by sinking in alcohol and delirium, which turned out in his death after a couple of years of living in his own horror and depression.<sup>22</sup>

#### 1.4 The Uncanny

The uncanny is a phenomenon that crosses back and forth between the explicable and inexplicable. The uncanny is about our feelings. It is tightly connected with feeling weird or strange and dealing with mystery. Our core experiences nervousness and uncertainty because we cannot properly estimate the situation, whether the things in front of us are real, questionable, or supernatural. It is doubting the natural and hesitating about everything that applies to human nature and reality. As a result, things familiar to us became unfamiliar and the other way around. These terms blend and cause strange feelings.<sup>23</sup>

The uncanny can be a matter of usual fears such as losing a body part or seeing someone with prosthetics. The uncanny can be felt in reaction to regular objects, such as dolls or mechanical objects that suspiciously resemble humans. The uncanny can also refer to something weirdly beautiful or almost perfect and tends to humour, irony, and laughter. Phrases such as “*too good to be true*” or “*déjà vu*” often accompany the

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<sup>20</sup> MEYERS, J. *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*. 2000. p. 57-58.

<sup>21</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 34-35.

<sup>22</sup> PRUETTE, L. *A Psycho-Analytical Study of Edgar Allan Poe*. University of Illinois Press, 1920. [online]. [cit. 19.3.2024]. p. 398-401.

<sup>23</sup> ROYLE, N. *The Uncanny*. 2003. p. 1-2.

uncanny. In the worst case, the cause can be something frightening and hideous, such as ghosts, corpses, cannibals, or resurrection.<sup>24</sup>

The meaning of the word “uncanny” originated from German psychiatrist Ernest Jentsch in 1906 when he described it as “unheimlich”, which means “frightening” and “spooky”. The uncanny is not a synonym for supernatural, but it is associated with it, as well as the real meaning of the English word “uncanny”. The Scottish word “cunny” means “knowing” or “sagacious”, which at first do not fit together. Nevertheless, the prefix derivates the word to “uncanny”, meaning “unknowing”, and the term describes the whole concept very well.<sup>25</sup>

An essay, “*The Uncanny*”, written in 1919 by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, brought a new layer to Jentsch’s “unheimlich”. Freud, in his work, called Jentsch’s approach incomplete and lacked a deeper understanding. In his approach, he touches upon specific themes that build up the ground for understanding and experiencing the uncanny.

There is an example of the story “*The Sand-Man*” by E. T. W. Hoffman where he emphasises the questions of whether something is living or not, where lies the line between objects looking unanimated and becoming too much animated, specifically dolls, or the connection between children’s fears and adulthood fears. Throughout people’s childhoods, dolls served as companies that often represented another living being, and children wished dolls to be alive, unlike grown-ups. “Double” is another term mentioned in connection to the uncanny in Freud’s essay. He uses the term “double” to speak about a person looking alike or identical, mental processes being conveyed from one to another, experiencing doubling or dividing the self, reoccurrence of similar faces and situations, and a reflection in a mirror or shadows. Throughout his essay, Freud wants to demonstrate the fear of not knowing and being stuck somewhere between reality and imagination, between life and death.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ROYLE, N. *The Uncanny*. 2003. p. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> FREUD, S. *The Uncanny*. 1919. p. 1-2, 8-9.

Time has passed, and dolls or mirrors are not the only things triggering uncanny feelings anymore. Due to human progress and the spreading of technology, things like mechatronics, life-like robot dolls, computer game characters and Computed-Generated imagery (CGI) started to appear frequently and look drastically realistic. People feel uneasy and uncomfortable looking into the eyes of a human-like entity with no life in it. With the arrival and improvement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), distinguishing living and inanimate will become even more complicated.<sup>27</sup>

## 1.5 Gothic and Horror fiction in Pop culture

Gothic and horror fiction are overwhelming our television, movies, computer games, music, books, and every possible source of entertainment. It is not a rule to still apply features suggested and used in the past, but the psychological breakdowns of characters or reappearing terrifying monsters continue to play a compelling role in modern gothic and horror fiction. Still, contemporary writing is neither united nor homogeneous. Instead, it is adaptable and uses the anxieties or fears of the new generation and creates many new forms, for example, the paranormal and the apocalyptic genre.<sup>28</sup>

There are a lot of approaches to the Gothic genre and monsters typical for it. Vampires remain bloodthirsty and dangerous in TV programs such as *“Buffy the Vampire Slayer”* (1997 – 2003), but they also became love interests in works such as *“Twilight”* (2008). Zombies are perceived the same way. They are disgusting hideous creatures yearning for blood and brains in movies like *“Zombieland”* (2009) and TV shows like *“The Walking Dead”* (2010 – 2022), or they are creatures capable of love and deeper thinking in *“Warm Bodies”* (2010).<sup>29</sup> All of these monsters went through humanisation and no longer present only a source of fear but also a cause of sexual attraction, sympathy and understanding.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> LAY, S. *Uncanny valley: why we find human-like robots and dolls so creepy*. The Guardian, 2015. [online]. [cit. 19.3.2024].

<sup>28</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 259-260

<sup>29</sup> EDWARDS, J. D., MONNET, A. S. *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture*. 2012. p. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8



Horror fiction predominantly found its potential in motion pictures and screens. It started with silent film in 1915, and the technological innovation of the second half of the twentieth century moved the level of graphic realism from which gothic and horror genres could gain. Horror and terror that were imagined or presented as silent and black and white could now be explicitly portrayed in detail. The visuals and audio helped the shift to more brave experimentation and created the forms of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century body horror such as slashers, splatters and “torture porn” films, for example, the franchises of “*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*” (1974), “*Halloween*” (1978), “*Saw*” (2003) and “*Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*” (2009). These movies’ goals were only to show unsettling graphic torture, “creative” violence and explicit killing and gore.<sup>31</sup> In the case of written work, Stephen King remains the main and the most favourable source of production of contemporary horror fiction. Other famous contemporary writers are, for example, Dean Koontz, who mixes the genres of thriller, horror and sci-fi, and Laird Barron, who writes crime fiction and dark fantasy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> HOGGLE, J. E. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. 2002. p. 215-216, 224.

<sup>32</sup> TREMBLAY, P. *Book clinic: Can you recommend some modern horror titles?*. The Guardian, 2019. [online]. [cit. 3.4.2024.].

## 2 Stephen King

### 2.1 Biography

Stephen Edwin King was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1947 in Main, USA. He was born into a working-class family to Donald King and Nellie Ruth Pillsbury and has one older brother, David King. One of the biggest shocks that can happen to a child arrived in Stephen King's life, which was his father's leaving. At Stephen's young age, Donald decided to leave his family for selfish personal reasons, and Nellie stayed with her two sons alone. King has no memory of his father, and even though that does not bother him on the outside, inner anger and issues with his father can be found reflected in his work. A box of old comics and sci-fi or horror books is the only thing that remained after him and served as a blessing for Stephen. When Stephen found this box, he immediately fell in love with the work of H. P. Lovecraft and the whole genre, which changed his entire life.<sup>33</sup>

Comics became best friends to Stephen due to an ear infection he suffered from in first grade. From the age of 6 to 10, his mother read the comics to him and his brother every night despite the fact they would not be considered appropriate. It inspired Stephen to write his own stories, and his mother would give him rewards and words of affirmation for every one of them. His first written story was "*Mr. Rabbit Trick*". He even received his first typewriter when he was twelve years old. From that moment, he started sending some of his early works to professional magazines throughout the whole elementary school.<sup>34</sup>

Besides comics, King loved to visit the cinema. He loved to visit the cinema to see horror movies or pieces dealing with the theme of the World War. He also liked to watch movies from Walt Disney, he considered them terrifying. He enjoyed below-average horror movies, but at the same time, he feared them. Despite his fear, he continued to devour these pieces, and that escalated to him having nightmares and waking

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<sup>33</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 41-43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50-51.

up in the middle of the night screaming, but that did not stop him from loving this genre. He became dedicated to fear and addicted to writing.<sup>35</sup>

New sorrows and growth came with attendance at Lisbon Falls High School in Lisbon. King was a smart child who always lied in books, but nobody considered him a typical nerd. Subjects such as Chemistry and Biology were not his favourites, and that affected his grades. Even though he had a bigger stature, he was not good at sports, which bothered him. On the other hand, he excelled in English. He liked people. He loved to show his wit and humour, which was popular amongst his classmates. He always had something to say and entertained other people. Regardless of his popularity, some classmates and teachers gave Stephen a hard time at school by making fun of him, doing pranks, or looking down on him. He benefited from his secondary school experience and used his knowledge while writing his novel "*Carrie*". Stephen became the chief editor of the school press even though he despised it. And finally, in 1965, the magazine *Comics Review* decided to publish his short story "*I Was a Teenage Grave Robber*".<sup>36</sup>

In 1966, he entered the University of Maine in Orono with a full scholarship, but he still needed money for school supplies. In his free time, he worked at a textile mill. At university, he specialised in English and attended some lectures at the pedagogy faculty to switch to teaching in case of a failed writing career. During his first and second semesters, he was able to produce his first novel, "*The Long Walk*", and sold his short story "*The Glass Floor*" to *Startling Mystery Stories* magazine and made some money from it. While studying, Stephen engaged himself actively in politics. His childish ideals disappeared as a result of actions happening around the world, for example, the war in Vietnam. He shifted from being a Republican to supporting strong radical liberalism.<sup>37</sup>

He participated in public protests, and to express his opinions broadly, he started to write articles for school papers again. Stephen wrote about his beliefs, although they were sometimes controversial and provoking. He criticised the school system for not

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<sup>35</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 34-35, 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56-62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70-75.

giving lessons on modern and popular culture and literature. He published his short stories and mentioned his favourite music and movies there, too, because he would not miss an opportunity to see a movie in the cinema during his university years. One of the best things that happened to King at university was the meeting with his wife, Tabitha Jane Spruce, who he has been married to until now. They became very close thanks to their love for writing and reserved personality.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of the good that university enabled King to do or have, it commenced his addiction. King came across plenty of drugs throughout his studies, for instance, LSD, marihuana, and pills. Drug abuse and alcoholism occurred frequently on the campus, and King fell for it hard. He tried different kinds of hallucinogens and hard drugs, but prominently, he relished alcohol. This bad habit and addiction stayed with him for a very long time.<sup>39</sup> The death of his mother in 1973 aggravated Stephen's state. Alcohol and drugs became the only cure for his depression. Achieving fame and status as a celebrity brought cocaine to King's life, and it was added to his everyday routine next to the alcohol. It took more than 20 years for King to understand how his addiction was hurting him and his family. In 1989, he went through dreadful withdrawal therapy.<sup>40</sup>

Stephen graduated from the University of Maine in 1970 and earned his BS degree, Bachelor of Science in English, which allowed him to teach at the secondary school. Shortly after, his first daughter, Naomi Rachel, was born, and King tasted an indigent lifestyle again. He struggled with finding a job in the educational sphere and was forced to continue with manual work for another year.<sup>41</sup> Eventually, King found his employment at the Hampden Academy as an English teacher. He was a natural. He had a talent and proved to be a remarkable storyteller, but being a teacher exhausted him, and this career did not benefit from money. Finding time for writing was hard for him, and his teaching duty consumed almost all his free time. During the summer holidays, he made some extra money by working at the laundry, where the first idea for his famous novel, "*Carrie*", struck him.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 81-91.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 130, 159, 255.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 99-100.

<sup>42</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 110

From 1973 to 1978, Stephen King published his enormous hits: “*Carrie*”, “*Salem’s Lot*”, “*The Shining*”, and “*The Stand*”. These titles catapulted King’s life and completely changed his fate. They all became classics that deserved movie adaptations and writing awards, and they remain popular to this day. This success guaranteed him a well-known reputation as the father of horror and a comfortable life for him and his family, consisting of him, Tabby and their three children, Naomi, John, and Owen. King needed to know if it was really his writing that people liked or if it was only the power of his name, so he decided to publish under the pseudonym Richard Bachman. In 1978, he started to provide books and short stories consecutively and discovered the life of a celebrity, which did not help his addiction. In the same year, he honoured his old university and accepted the post of an English teacher there.<sup>43</sup>

In the 80s, King struggled a lot with his addiction and lost his control over drinking. Tabby gave him an ultimatum, but Stephen feared his work would not be as superior. King was publishing one book after another and received awards for the majority of them. He participated in implementing many film adaptations of his work, but he was also so blazed he did not remember most of the time. On the other hand, the 90s turned out to be the golden years for King. King was clean and successful, Tabby was happy thanks to Stephen’s condition, and their children started to break through in the world.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, King was hit by a car in 1999 and suffered a severe injury. He went through a couple of surgeries but luckily came back home alive and well, within the bounds of possibility. Healing took some time and did not get away with complications, but Stephen eventually got back on track in the new century.<sup>45</sup>

Now, Stephen King is rich, still actively writing, clean from drugs and alcohol, enjoying time with his family, and watching his children succeed. He fears only the moment he will not be capable of writing due to incompetence and death as such.<sup>46</sup> His addiction to writing, publishing and terrifying people stayed and partly filled the hole after

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<sup>43</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 146, 151, 152, 181.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218-231, 253, 300.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 327-333.

<sup>46</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 389.

drugs. He owns two thriving charitable organisations and still questions why somebody should care about his life instead of what he writes.<sup>47</sup> Stephen King truly achieved his place through hard work. Throughout his life, he has produced over 60 successful novels, such as “*Dark Tower*”, “*Misery*”, “*It*”, and “*The Green Mile*”, and 200 short stories and collections, such as “*Skeleton Crew*”, which is not his final number. King is not stopping and plans to publish more.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 Themes and features in his works

The thing that was projected into his work was not only the loss of his father, but also his own fears, and King has a lot of fears.<sup>49</sup>

King considered himself and his family members of the working class, which was distinguished by not having enough money for basic needs or splurging but still maintaining a decent life. Because of his deep knowledge of this class, Stephen keeps writing about people from the same background as him.<sup>50</sup> Usually, writers mention the American dream, but King focused on the American nightmare. He writes about outsiders living in the shadow of the wealthy, being jealous and envious, which is how he describes himself. King perfectly portrays the demons and states of mind of these ordinary people who went through uneasy situations and trauma and masters the internal battles of his deranged and broken heroes.<sup>51</sup>

King learned to perceive the story visually through colourful pictures in comics or movie shots. His type of writing is characterised by inspiration from films and visuals. Young Stephen King used to read comics and visit cinemas quite often, not only for the horror movie itself but for the horrified reactions from the viewers. He used to write notes about events in the cinema and then transfer the notes into his stories. Stephen observed the story happening on the screen and copied it by himself; after that, he added notes that he made, like screams and comments happening during the movie. His whole writing gives the impression of watching a film, which is very appealing to

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<sup>47</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 386-387.

<sup>48</sup> MCROBERT, N. *Where to start with: Stephen King*. The Guardian, 2022. [online]. [cit. 3.6.2024].

<sup>49</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151.

readers and different from other writers.<sup>52</sup> That is reflected in his directorial talent. He used his abilities in the movie industry and helped create many movies, not just film adaptations of his own stories. He even played a little role in a few of his works.<sup>53</sup>

King writes about things he knows. He writes from experience, and very often, he comes back to his past and tries to dig for details. His learning and teaching experience was excessively helpful while writing "*Carrie*". Frequently, he exaggeratedly analysed his classmates, teachers, and, afterwards, students, and that came in handy. "*The Shining*" has a darker meaning for Stephen. While writing, Stephen suffered from alcoholism and addiction and had some hard times with his own children. He was angry with them, frustrated and exhausted. He then decided to project his feelings into writing. Many bad situations from his private life ended up in the book, for example, when his son decided to destroy King's work with paintings as Danny in the book, or bad experience with the father overall.<sup>54</sup>

Problematic or miserable fathers are a reappearing theme in King's work. It cannot be hidden that the fathers in Stephen's stories mostly have anger issues, hate their children, drink a lot, or simply do not exist. King presents the parents in the light of failure, the worst light possible. Stephen never intended to overshare about his father or mother, but disappointment and poor family relationships occur routinely in his work.<sup>55</sup> His stories have roots in his childhood trauma and injustice. King wanted to eliminate his problems and feelings by ventilating and writing about the powerful children he wished to be.<sup>56</sup>

King's obsession with studying and analysing people was already mentioned. Stephen felt no shame in asking people inappropriate questions and using their stories and secrets for his benefit. Human behaviour interested him. His observation skills helped him to maintain straight contact with the reader. According to King, his story should be alive and dangerous, as well as his characters. The readers should feel animal-like behaviour and rage. It should punch the reader into the face and his guts but at the

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<sup>52</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 53-54.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 494.

<sup>54</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 133-134.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 201-202.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 237-238.

same time persuade him to enjoy it.<sup>57</sup> It is noted how King thinks about people's nature: „*I believe that people are subconsciously urged to commit brutality. And we are still genuinely primitive creatures with violent inclinations.*”<sup>58</sup>

As King ages and approaches the possible and inevitable end of his life, his stories more often explore the theme of ageing and speculate about death. He shifted from recklessly killing his characters to having thoughts about death, the afterlife, or what will happen after death in general. His shortening time motivates him to write and publish even more. He is not planning to ease up.<sup>59</sup>

The most entertaining feature adopted from Gothic literature is the Kings' adoration for monsters, tragic atmosphere, and dark landscapes. He writes about scary and hideous supernatural creatures hiding in the woods or people's dreams, but he also highlights and analyses the monsters locked up in the humans. Monsters that were created by trauma or stress. Afterwards, they feed on the mind and soul of the person, and they patiently wait to be realised. He gladly uses places that are familiar to people instead of big scary castles but adds a dark, gloomy undertone to shift the story's mood.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> ROGAK, L. *Stephen King: Mistr strachu*. 2010. p. 82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201.

<sup>59</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: Čtyřicet let hrůzy – Život a dílo krále hororu*. 2017. p. 389.

<sup>60</sup> BEAHM, G. *Stephen King: From A to Z*. 1998. p. ix-x.



## **3 Literary analysis of Carrie**

### **3.1 Setting of the story and protagonists**

#### **3.1.1 Plot**

We are following the story of a young girl named Carietta White. Carietta White, shortly Carrie, is an atypical girl studying at high school. Margaret, Carrie's fanatically religious mother, is mainly responsible for her atypicality. Carrie was born under uncanny circumstances. Not only was Carrie's birth a strange event, but her whole life was full of odd incidents, and it had a big impact on her. The most enormous curiosity about Carrie is her telekinetic power.

It all starts with an utterly shocking part when Carrie begins to menstruate for the first time. Due to her mother's ignorance of educating Carrie on those things, she has no idea what is happening. Carrie thinks immediately about dying and starts to beg for help, but only laughs and violence are given to her in return. Girls from school start to attack Carrie with women's products, such as tampons and pads. This presents how exactly Carrie is treated in the school, with rude and aiming abuse. Even though a PE teacher, Miss Desjardin, appears in this situation, she has no interest in helping Carrie at first. Because of the distress Carrie is feeling, she shows her powers for the first time in the form of an explosion and movement of objects. After this incident, Carrie remembers supernatural things happening to her before, but now she feels like something has been unleashed in her. Her mother's reaction is to educate Carrie on her sins and punish her as always.

This incident has consequences for the girls initiating it. They must attend a week of detention with Miss Desjardin. The main bully, Chris Hargensen, is furious about Miss Desjardin's actions and decides to ignore her. On the other hand, there is Sue Snell, another girl joining the bullying, who regrets everything and feels quilt. Sue comes up with a plan for her satisfaction. Sue persuades her boyfriend, Tommy, to ask Carrie to attend the prom with him as a gesture of apology and kindness. Carrie surprisingly agrees and decides to make herself a beautiful dress. During this, Chris enlists her boyfriend to help her realise her plan for revenge. When she discovers that Carrie and Tommy are on the list for King and Queen of the prom, they plan to pour a sow blood on them.

Margaret cannot stand the fact that Carrie is going to the prom with a boy in a seductive dress. They get into a fight, and Carrie uses her powers against Margaret because nothing is coming between her and going to the prom. At the prom, Carrie finally comes out of her shell a bit and interacts with other people, but everything rapidly changes when they win the post of Queen and King. While Carrie and Tommy are standing on the stage, a liquid starts to flow over their heads, so blood. Unfortunately, one of the buckets falls right on Tommy, and it hits him in the head so severely he drops down unconscious and dies immediately. Carrie feels humiliated and runs away while everyone is laughing at her, but Carrie has had enough of this bullying, and she yearns for revenge.

A massacre starts with Carrie locking down the school full of children and killing the majority of them by electrocuting them. This is only a start; Carrie is coming for the whole town and, most importantly, for her mother. Carrie takes care of fire hydrants so nobody can put out the fire. She takes care of burning down the school and town, takes care of Chris and her boyfriend, and even her mother. Sue follows Carrie's path all along because Carrie communicates with her through her powers, and with the realisation that Sue is innocent regarding Carrie's humiliation, Sue stays alive, and Carrie dies.

### **3.1.2 Protagonists**

Carrie is introduced to us as an example of a loser and outcast. Carrie is not only atypical because of her looks and actions but also because of her powers. Not only is her acting considered weird, but her appearance is also insulted "*Carrie stood among them stolidly, a frog among swans. She was a chunky girl with pimples on her neck and back*".<sup>61</sup> She often expresses herself only by weird noises and exaggerating reactions in public, but at home or even in her mind, she can express herself well and often vulgarly "*stupid frumpy old bitch break that window*"; "*old bitch hated my momma*".<sup>62</sup> That can represent Carrie's instability and frustration projected to her through the unstoppable pressure generated by her mother and classmates. It also represents Carrie's pathological behaviour and mental disorder that comes with it, for

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<sup>61</sup> KING, S. *Carrie*. 2013. p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

example, her detachment, submissiveness, negatives, and final psychoticism.<sup>63</sup> Thoughts about hurting someone never leave her mind, and in those parts, she even sounds insane “*Imagine Chris Hargensen all bloody and screaming for mercy. With rats crawling all over her face. Good. Good. That would be good*”.<sup>64</sup> Carrie is only a child, and still, she has faced many disturbing occasions. Abuse from her religious mother started it all. If Carrie had been accepted as who she is, even though she has special powers, she would have developed as an ordinary girl as she possibly could. Unfortunately, her mother was the worst role model “*Carrie had once fainted from the lack of food and the smell of her own waste*”.<sup>65</sup> Even though Margaret did horrible things to Carrie, she is still Carrie’s mother. Carrie is only used to her mother, being with her, being dependent on her, and that is why she thinks about her while she is dying. After killing her mother in rage, while dying, she is desperately calling for her in her mind, which shows how deranged Carrie became because of the incident in school “*momma would be alive I killed my momma I want her*”; “*o momma I’m scared momma*”.<sup>66</sup> Not only Margaret is responsible for Carrie’s development but also her classmates. They insulted her and abused her frequently, and that is why Carrie was incapable of making friends. Dealing every day with insults appearing around school and hearing them directly “*White bitch, Carrie White eats shit, scratch-ass, truck-face, pig poop was spelled C-A-R-R-I-E*”.<sup>67</sup> That damaged Carrie enough for her to explode after the incident on the prom. All these factors affected Carrie. It was destined for Carrie to become mad. There is a relevant possibility that a particular person who experiences that much trauma, violence, and abuse will eventually develop a mental illness and become unmanageable and uncontrollable. The fact that Carrie’s mother also had a mental illness and lacked all the parental responsibilities only contributes to the fact she suffers from pathological behaviour.<sup>68</sup>

Margaret is a mentally ill, abusive, hateful, ignorant, and mad woman “*that woman bayed at the sky. And then she started to...to hurt herself, scourge herself. She was*

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<sup>63</sup> OLTMANN, T. F., TURKHEIMER E. *Person Perception and Personality Pathology*. Sage Publications, Inc., 2009. [online]. [cit. 3.6.2024].

<sup>64</sup> KING, S. *Carrie*. 2013. p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p. 233.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15, 16, 20, 21.

<sup>68</sup> LOEBER, R., STOUTHAMER-LOEBER, M. *Family Factors as Correlates and Predictors of Juvenile Conduct Problems and Delinquency*. The University of Chicago Press, 1986. [online]. [cit. 3.6.2024].

*clawing at her neck and cheeks, making red marks and scratches*"; *"the woman was grinning. Grinning and drooling"*; *"praying and sobbing and screeching"*.<sup>69</sup> Carrie was born under uncanny circumstances, and that is why Margaret views Carrie as her curse *"You spawn of the devil, why was I so cursed"*.<sup>70</sup> Margaret had no idea about her pregnancy because everything related to sex was a sin for her. Her love for God was the most important thing. Only praying and torture can help people according to her *"Pray to God and your sins may be washed away"*.<sup>71</sup> But her extreme obsession twisted her mind, and even basic things and actions are sins *"Momma said showers were sinful"*.<sup>72</sup>

Sue Snell is another important character. Sue is an ordinary girl who is studying at high school. She mostly cares about her reputation, her friends, her boyfriend, and her appearance *"And Tommy was, of course, popular. As someone who had been popular herself all her life"*.<sup>73</sup> Sue seems to care only about herself at first, but we follow her development through the book and come to the conclusion she is more complex than it may look. Sue impersonates satisfaction. She represents the opposite of Carrie, someone who is popular, pretty, and balanced. She used to be a bully of Carrie but decided to change. Sue chooses to become the better version of herself. She has a plan for helping Carrie. She gives up her dream prom with her boyfriend and wants to give this experience to Carrie. After all, she truly hopes Carrie enjoyed that prom *"I hope it was good for her, that prom. Until the terror began"*.<sup>74</sup> Sue embodies a good-hearted person who wants to be better. She even starts to care about Carrie and thinks about her as someone who deserves mercy despite what Carrie has done to her and all her friends. Carrie was still a normal teenage girl *"This is the girl they keep calling a monster. I want you to keep that firmly in mind. The girl who could be satisfied with a hamburger and a dime root beer"*.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> KING, S. *Carrie*. 2013. p. 41, 42.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

### 3.2 Style of writing

The story itself is not written from Carrie's point of view; the narrator is unknown. There are parts where the story is narrated explicitly through different forms. Often, we come across fictional articles from magazines and autobiographic books by Sue Snell or other publications dealing with Carrie White (*From Carrie: The Black Dawn of T.K. (Esquire Magazine)*, *My Name is Susan Snell*). Sue decided to publish a book about this incident, and we are reading the story from her point of view. Another fictional source used is *The Shadow Exploded*, and this book shows us another point of view on the story of Carrie White. This book summarises events that happened, and they are supported by known facts. For example, the fact of Carrie's powers is theoretically and scientifically explained and presented to us as a normal thing in this world. In the snippets from this book, the author analyses her powers and their impact on the events that happened. The book also provides more details about the story. It describes previous events, e.g. Carrie's birth or the rock rain. It gives more information about Carrie's interactions with her classmates and details about what happened after Carrie's death.

Stephen King himself is known for writing about forbidden things. He likes to say things that other people find disturbing and instead uses expressions that could offend the majority of people. He is not afraid to use a lot of vulgarisms, sexual and perverse expressions, social taboos, and explicit content. Through the book, we can find many examples. He likes to use insults and vulgarisms "*bitch, you fuck, big dumb pudding*".<sup>76</sup> He uses a lot of raw expressions that do not sound very appealing "*a tampon stuck in the middle of her pubic hair, a large bubble of green mucus*".<sup>77</sup> The purpose might be to shock the readers and make them uncomfortable while reading. Still, we can imagine being in this situation and are destined to sympathise with Carrie or feel ashamed of her. His main goal is to make us feel disturbed.

Animal comparisons are also frequently used by Stephen King in this book. Within the first part, there are several comparisons. Carrie is described as "*a frog among swans*" because of her appearance. Carrie's dull stare is described as the stare of a

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<sup>76</sup> KING, S. *Carrie*. 2013. p. 19, 66.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

“sacrificial goat”<sup>78</sup>, and even her movements are described as animal-like “she stood like a patient ox, she looked like an ape”.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the book’s first part, Carrie tends to act as an animal in general. She makes random noises when somebody other than her mother speaks to her “ohuh”<sup>80</sup>. Animal behaviour related to humans may indicate primitive instincts. Carrie fears her mother and classmates, so she acts impulsively. It even looks like Carrie is a slow and unintelligent girl, but as we explore her character more, Carrie shows the opposite. Carrie gets rid of her fear and proves her intelligence. Despite that, Carrie is still mentally ill and mad.

### 3.3 Themes and symbols

Religion is a significant theme throughout the book. Margaret relates only to God and religion, and she uses it against Carrie. This shows how dangerous it can be to worship things in an extreme way, like Margaret worships religious fanaticism. Because of her obsession and hostility, she becomes a hated person for her whole neighbourhood. Her belief forces her to abuse Carrie, and the fact that it is her daughter does not matter. References to religion in this book mainly show its flaws and downsides.

The motif of blood is prominent throughout the story. It all started with blood, and it also ended with it. There are several incidents referencing actual blood. Carrie begins to menstruate for the first time in school. Bullying and pranks that her classmates played on her often include blood. The prank with sow blood on the prom happens, and finally, Carrie’s death ends up badly and bloody. Red colour emphasises and highlights these moments to make them unforgettable and point out their importance for the storyline. Red is the colour of blood, but it is also the colour of sexualisation, which is significant for the story. Red colour has many meanings, either positive or negative. Aggression, anger, power, energy, or fire are among them. Colours generally have hidden meanings and set the mood and atmosphere.<sup>81</sup>

Bullying and being an outsider are other themes that keep appearing. Carrie experiences bullying because of her abnormal and strange acting. Her abnormal appearance

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<sup>78</sup> KING, S. *Carrie*. 2013. p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 18, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> LITOWITZ, A. *Colors: Symbolism in Literature*. 2013. [online]. [cit. 3.6.2024].

and behaviour are opportunities for her classmates to make fun of her, and she distances herself. Her abnormal powers and her sins are another opportunity to abuse her, but this time for her mother. Carrie's abnormality could be taken as a gift, but it is the right opposite. With the right influence, Carrie might use her powers for good and helpful things, but instead, she uses them as an act of revenge. She releases the power of evil that has been hiding in her, and she utilises it in response to violent abuse as revenge. All the bullying and abuse are connected to trauma. Trauma triggered the worst side of Carrie.

Fear and death are closely related. Carrie fears her classmates and mother most of the time, but she overcomes it. She is not afraid anymore because of her powers. She feels powerful and invincible. She causes suffering and death, which makes her even happier. But she feels fear again when she is dying. Death scares her, and what scares her the most is being without her mother. It is ironic because Carrie killed Margaret, and Margaret caused Carrie's death. The knife Margaret uses to kill Carrie symbolises power and influence, and she does not unleash it until the very end. It will remain with Carrie forever.

Terror, as the psychological idea of trauma and suffering, is presented in abusive behaviour coming from Carrie's mother throughout the book; not only passive but also aggressive abuse is present. On the other hand, horror, as the explicit and graphic actions of the Gothic genre, functions in the case of arguments and fights between Carrie and her mother. Another example is the final deaths of characters explicitly portrayed and performed by Carrie.

Other themes and symbols reappearing in the book are typical for horror fiction, such as violence, madness, the uncanny, and evil within the self. Carrie is changing, and her evil side manipulates her to come out and take over. Her goodness is rotting inside of her. As the embodiment of "weakness" and "weak nature," she creates her path, heading to her self-destruction and awakening of her suppressed inner villain.

## 4 Literary analysis of *The Shining*

### 4.1 Setting of the story and protagonists

#### 4.1.1 Plot

The story follows, at first, an ordinary-looking family. The head of the family and the main protagonist is Jack Torrance, the father. Jack is a former teacher and potential writer, but he is facing the struggle of alcoholism and self-destruction. Due to the loss of his job, he is compelled to find a new one. Jack's wife is named Wendy. Wendy is a loving mother and a patient wife who cares about her family much more than her mental and physical condition. The last member of the family is their son Danny. Danny is extraordinary, intelligent, and unusually exceeding his age. He was born with supernatural abilities, and his life is accompanied by an "imaginary" friend.

The story begins with Jack having a job interview with Mr Ullman, who is presented to us as an important businessman, but Jack views him as an "*officious little prick*".<sup>82</sup> The job involves looking after an old hotel named Overlook during the winter period. Mr Ullman expresses his concern about Jack and his family being there, especially Jack himself, due to his alcoholic past and the reason for losing his last job. Overlook has a dark past, too, including, for example, the suicide of the last keeper and the mass homicide he has committed on his own family. Despite that, Jack accepts the job and is taken to check the hotel by Mr Watson, another maintenance man. Thanks to Mr Watson, Jack discovers more about Overlook's dark and unfortunate past. Many accidents happened here, suicides and unsightly incidents that Mr Ullman wanted to cover up at any cost. Meanwhile, Jack gets flashbacks to his own biggest mistake. He remembers the night coming home drunk and horribly hurting his little son. Jack is quite often lost in his own thoughts, and even after coming home to his family, he wonders about another incident that happened and helped him quit drinking. Jack and his friend Al drove drunk and hit a children's bike, leaving them terrified of what they had done.

Danny shows he is not a regular boy. He can sense people's feelings and transport himself to places he has never been before. He can dive into thinking of his parents,

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<sup>82</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 21.



even though he does not yet know what their thoughts mean. Danny goes into states of balance between known and unknown, where he is guided by his imaginary friend Tony. At first, Danny thinks of Tony as his friend, but further he goes, Tony terrifies him more.

The whole family arrives at the Hotel Overlook, where they are welcomed by Mr Ullman and other staff members. Jack and Wendy are thrilled by the beautiful hotel and the opportunities to spend time together, but Danny has bad feelings. In his dreams, he had already visited the hotel and had nightmares about it. But his concerns are softened due to a conversation with Mr Hallorann, the chef. From the first moment, Danny and Mr Hallorann understand each other on another level. Not only can Danny sense Mr Hallorann's feelings and thoughts, but it works the other way around. They both share this ability called "the shining", even though Danny is much stronger than Mr Hallorann. After a friendly and soothing conversation between Danny and Mr Hallorann and a tour of the hotel, where Danny sees and feels odd and scary things, the Torrance family is left in the hotel alone.

At first, the whole family enjoys their time at the hotel, but it starts influencing them. Jack thinks about his past and alcohol frequently, which reflects on his behaviour. He also finds a scrapbook that hides all the dirty secrets of the hotel and becomes obsessed with the hotel's dark history. Danny's relationship with Tony shades, and due to his father's fault, he has an unlucky incident that awakens Jack's bad habits, Wendy's anxiety, and his own fears. The hotel's power starts to have an impact on the mental state of the whole family, and uncanny and supernatural events occur to Danny and Jack as well, but he is convinced it is not real.

Wendy realises the hotel wants to hurt Danny and her husband, but it is too late. The hotel controls Jack and uses all its power to seize Danny and eliminate Wendy. Jack undergoes a complete change, and the hotel replaces his consciousness. Now, he gathers all the negativity and yearns for revenge and power. He becomes the monster, ready to hurt them and eventually kill them. Fortunately, Danny and Wendy escape with the help of Mr Hallorann, who was called by Danny earlier. Jack no longer exists, just the monster in his body and is destined to be destroyed with his hotel by an explosion.

Wendy and Daddy manage to get away from the evil with injuries and trauma. They are together and safe, for now.

#### 4.1.2 Protagonists

Danny Torrance, called “*doctor*” by his parents, is the main child character in the book. He has a specific power called “*the shining*” and happens to be extremely strong. Danny’s powers consist of reading people’s minds or feelings, seeing parts of a possible future, and visiting places he has never been to before in his dreams or hypnotic trance “*because when he had concentrated his mind, it had flown out to his daddy*”; “*Sometimes thinking very hard made something happen to him. It made things – real things – go away, and then he saw things that weren’t there*”.<sup>83</sup> His powers serve him as a gift that Danny uses with good intentions and for the right reasons, but the hotel wants to obtain them. Even though Danny masters such a power, he is just an innocent five-year-old child who loves his parents unbeatably. He still cannot read, but his intelligence exceeds every expectation towards children his age. His raised perceptiveness allows him to act above his age without trying “*he’s right off the scale for his age group. His verbal ability, for a boy who is five going on six, is amazing*”.<sup>84</sup> As a child, Danny is dependent on his parents. Because of his powers, he faces his own problems and fears as well as his parents’ fears “*the greatest terror of Danny’s life was divorce*”; “*the most terrifying thing about divorce was that he had sensed the word...floating around in his own parents’ heads*”.<sup>85</sup> Danny shows his selflessness when he decides to stay at the hotel for his father despite his concerns. Even when Danny goes through dangerous and tense situations, he stays quiet not to bother his parents “*would you be happier if we went away from the Overlook?...I guess so...but it’s Daddy’s job*”.<sup>86</sup>

Danny has a friend, Tony, who appears in his daydreaming. Danny’s parents and even his doctor think Tony is a made-up character that Danny created in his head due to the stress and occasions he is going through “*Danny’s fantasies were considerably deeper*

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<sup>83</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 57, 58.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p. 219.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 296.

*than those that around the ordinary invisible friend syndrome, but he felt he needed Tony that much. Tony would come and show him pleasant things...Always good things*".<sup>87</sup> But Tony is part of Danny that emerged from "the shining". The power within himself created Tony to protect him. Tony warned him from the Outlook, Tony warned him from his own father and helped him in need "*I'm a part of you, Danny*"; "*as if Tony – as if the Daniel Anthony Torrance that would someday be – was a halfling caught between father and son, a ghost of both*".<sup>88</sup>

Jack Torrance is the father of the family and the most elaborated character. Jack and Wendy started as a perfect match, but Jack's nature and personality ruined it. Jack became an alcoholic, and Wendy suffered "*A drink before going off to the Academy. Two or three beers with lunch...Five or six more while grading papers. The weekends were worse*".<sup>89</sup> From the beginning, Jack tends to run away into his own world in his head. Jack shows his schizophrenic behaviour when he talks to people calmly but thinks the complete opposite. He holds his angry inner monologue all the time and thinks about situations that lie heavy on his chest, and that shows his instability and predisposition to mental abuse and insanity "*officious little prick...Jack smiled, a big wide PR smile*"; "*I lost my temper again*"; "*I love you too...kill her, the thought rose up from nowhere*"; "*You can come out, doc. Just you and me, right? ...Come here, you little shit! Right now*".<sup>90</sup>

Jack's hard past is reflected in his personality. Jack's father was an alcoholic, beast and bully who abused his children and his wife. It was incomprehensible for young Jack, and regardless of his effort to be a good father for Danny, the Overlook pulled the worst out of him. Jack was determined to inherit the wicked side and bad habits "*miserable, bullying drunk that he had been*"; "*he had loved the tall, big-bellied man...in spite of the spanking, the black-and-blues, the occasional black eye*"; "*he had beaten their mother for no good reason at all, suddenly and without warning*".<sup>91</sup> Jack came with a broken mind to the hotel Overlook, which made him a target for empowerment. After the car accident, his son's injury and withdrawal symptoms, Jack

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<sup>87</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 223.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 611, 612.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 21, 22, 75, 391, 393, 613.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 325, 326, 328.

was susceptible. The demons in Overlook drove a wedge between him and his family and forced him to hurt them badly. Jack's mind was completely destroyed afterwards and replaced by the demons "you're not my daddy"; "you're a mask...just a false face. The only reason the hotel needs to use you is that you aren't as dead as the others".<sup>92</sup>

Wendy Torrance might be considered the most ordinary member of the Torrance family. She is a responsible and caring mother whose priority is her family, specifically her son. Unfortunately, like Jack, Wendy struggles with her parents, this time with a mother. Wendy never had a good relationship with her mother due to her arrogance and viciousness "her mother drove her from the house, told her never to come back"; "she wants to keep beating you".<sup>93</sup> In her case, it can be seen again how inevitable it is to be similar to our parents. Wendy took mistrustfulness and paranoia from her mother and questioned Jack's parenting. In addition to that, she was jealous of him for being Danny's favourite even though he mistreated Danny and her repeatedly "like mother like daughter"; "he loved his mother but he was his father's boy"; "she felt the old faint pang of jealousy...it's him first and it's always been him first".<sup>94</sup>

## 4.2 Style of writing

The book is structurally divided into parts and chapters, each with a specific name related to a specific event happening in the chapter. The point of view changes during the chapters depending on the character we are following, but the narrator himself is unknown. An interesting chapter is "The Scrapbook", with number eighteen, where the majority of the actions take up newspaper articles about the hotel Overlook.

King continues to use explicit content and different kinds of vulgarism. Vulgar expressions are commonly used by men in the book, especially by Jack, which points out his imbalance and hot-tempered character "oh you goddam fucking son of a bitch"; "old whore"; "cunt of a chambermaid".<sup>95</sup> King is not holding back with detailed descrip-

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<sup>92</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 622, 623.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 87, 94, 192.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 44, 51, 160.

tions of explicit situations. He wants to provide the most accurate narrative and portrayal, even when the content might outrage its readers. He wants to shock the readers and cause a reaction “*tits saggin just about down to her belly button...the jools drippin off her neck and arms an hangin out her ears*”; “*she was bloated and purple, her gas-filled belly rising out of the cold...she was grinning, her purple lips pulled back in a grimace. Her breast lolled. Her pubic hair floated*”; “*great splashes of dried blood, flecked with tiny bits of greyish-white tissue*”.<sup>96</sup>

King frequently provides insight into the mental processes of the main characters. Many inner monologues can be found throughout the book, allowing us to understand what is running through their minds. King offers such an extreme by writing thoughts in the character’s thoughts, and they mutually interrupt each other. That is used in chaotic or tense situations to emphasise the character’s temper and stress. The characters’ thoughts, fears, and observations are frequently written in brackets “*(it’s my last chance)*”; “*(Let it go. Go get Wendy and Danny and get the fuck out of here)*”, as well as the inner dialogues between Danny and Mr. Hallorann “*(!!!HI, DICK!!!)*”.<sup>97</sup>

In “*The Shining*”, King masters the depth of strong storytelling and tension-building. He is milking his narrative talent and provides thrilling reading. King does not let the reader exhale and rest while bombarding him with action piling up. The most remarkable and extraordinary is his tension-building, for instance, in chapter number nineteen, “*Outside 217*”, while Danny inspects the surroundings and happenings outside the evil room 217. King is playing with the reader, and it seems and feels like forever to finally find out what will happen.

King's play with colours is another notable touch-up and detail in this book. Different colours often have diverse meanings but can also represent emotions. Colours or colour spectrums are frequently mentioned and stressed. With the mentioned colour, the information gains emotion or deeper meaning “*her face was all purple and puffy*”; “*painted in red letters*”; “*colored dark violet and shot through with frightening veins*”

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<sup>96</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 49, 147, 321.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131, 478, 479.

*of pure black*".<sup>98</sup> In "*red cloud of rage*"<sup>99</sup>, the colour red uprightly points to rage and anger. It can represent being lost in our own anger or being blinded by it. In "*black rain*" and "*black divorce*"<sup>100</sup>, black refers to mystery and fear because they all fear the divorce, and it is hidden as a mystery from Danny.

### 4.3 Themes and symbols

This entire story revolves around family and family matters. Both parents are trying to be perfect for their only child, but they have their flaws. Neither of them comes from a stable and functional family. They are living proof of hereditary and determinism. Alcoholism and abuse in Jack's family transferred to his own personality and doomed him to make the same mistakes. Even if the demons from the Hotel Overlook did not possess Jack, his faith would remain the same, and his addiction and anger would defeat him. Scorn and viciousness in Wendy's family did harm to her trust. Due to Jack's lifestyle, Wendy would probably become even more like her mother, and would end up getting a divorce, similar to Wendy's parents.

The Roque Mallet is a symbol reflecting Jack's murderous rage and schizophrenic insanity. English game Rogue is very similar to croquet, and the roque mallet has two different ends, one soft and one hard, which is like Jack's personality. Jack uses this mallet as his weapon at the end when he fatally hurts Wendy. The mallet can also be a prediction symbol because of Danny's crazy dreams and hallucinations about this specific mallet. From the beginning, we know, thanks to Danny, that this mallet will play a significant role in the story.

Wasps' nests and wasps generally reappear a couple of times, too. Jack collides with a wasps' nest on the roof. He thinks of the nest as a metaphor for his life, meaning how the world treated him and what his family had to endure. When he destroys it, he perceives it as a new start and a better future coming, but unfortunately, the wasps return and hurt Danny badly. That could mean approaching danger and faulty judgment by Jack.

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<sup>98</sup> KING, S. *The Shining*. 1977. p. 51, 56, 57.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

“REDRUM” has been a word hunting Danny almost from the beginning. He did not know what it meant because he could not read. “REDRUM” is reversed murder. Danny is terrorised by the word itself in his dreams; he is terrified of it. For Danny, it means danger and an indicator of bad. At the same time, it hides mystery. Danny and the reader want to know what it is hiding.

Rotting and loss of mind are the themes depicted in the story in the case of Jack. Because of his past and problem with alcohol, Jack is predisposed to transformation and not a positive one. The holes and cracks in him let in the demons from the hotel, and that twisted his mind. Progressively, Jack loses himself to a creature controlled by evil. The demons sensed Jack's weakness and vulnerability of Jack and used his already broken mind to alter their vision and purpose.

Other horror themes appearing in the book are, for example, violence. Many characters are pleased by brutality and relish violence. Another one is rage and anger. These are the feelings that Jack cannot control, leading to his anger outburst. In the story, we encounter supernatural powers, creatures, and monsters such as ghosts, doubles, living corpses and shrubby animals. The final theme is fear. All the characters have their own fears and anxieties. We follow their actions and fear for them. Fear accompanies the whole book and the reader even after finishing reading.

## **5 Literary analysis of Pet Sematary**

### **5.1 Setting of the story and protagonists**

#### **5.1.1 Plot**

The story focuses on a modest family that moves from Chicago to a small town in Maine, the Creed family. Louis Creed is the father of the family and a qualified doctor. His wife's name is Rachel, and they raise two children together – the older child, Eileen, and the younger child, Gage. The family is accompanied by a cat named Winston Churchill, Church in short. A couple of accidents change the fate of this, at first, ordinary-looking family. The misfortunes that cross their path might not be as accidental as they think, and they might have been planned by supernatural creatures occupying the woods all along.

The Creeds family is moving to a new house remote from their home. It is a big old house located in a secluded place, delimited by woods and a frequented highway. They immediately get to meet their elderly but sweet neighbours, Jud and Norma Crandall, who live across the road. Unfortunately, Norma is ill and suffers from arthritis. After a friendly conversation, Jud is the first person to show the newcomers the local attraction, “the Pet sematary”. It is hidden in the forest, not far away from their living. A nice, maintained path runs to this place where local children decided a long time ago to bury their home pets, ill pets or animals that died on the highway. Louis and his daughter are fascinated by this place; however, Rachel is concerned. After the visit, Eileen thinks about her cat Church and refuses to believe he might die someday. Rachel is very upset about the situation due to her past and bad experience with death, and it causes a fight between her and Louis. This incident leads to Louis deciding to castrate Church to stop his wildness and make sure he will not die on the highway, even though he did not support this idea in the past.

Louis works as a college doctor at a local university. A young boy named Victor Pascow is transferred to the surgery with a fatal head injury without the possibility of saving him. One breath from dying, Victor mentions the pet cemetery and grinds suspiciously before succumbing to his injury, frightening Louis. From now on, Victor becomes Louis's bogeyman, and Louis goes through states of fright and weird inklings.



Louis has realistic dreams about Victor but ends up being confused if it is only a dream. Afterwards, another incident happens when Norma almost dies, but Louis saves her life. Unfortunately, one morning, when Rachel and the kids are at the grandparents' house, Louis gets a call from Jud about their cat. Church was hit by a car. Louis feels desperate and decides to bury the cat, but Jud convinces him to bury him in a specific place. They go even further from the pet cemetery into the deep woods. Jud drags Louis through foggy swamps and warns him not to look under his feet. This journey scares Louis after he hears creepy sounds and feels like he is entering the other side. At the end of their path, they reach a mystical Micmac hill, where Louis buries the cat.

Church comes back, but he is different now. He looks alive, but his smell and behaviour indicate the opposite. That is the price for playing with death, and Jud knew it all along. The buried animals always came back different. Louis is still haunted by bad dreams and is bothered by the cat, too. Another shock arrives, and Norma passes away. As a result of this tense situation, Rachel has a breakdown. She opens up about her disabled sister, Zelda. Rachel went through trauma and witnessed her repugnant death, and she is marked forever. The crowning accident for our family is the death of the youngest child, Gage, who has been hit by a truck. This is devastating for the Creed family, and the outcome is Louis feeling broken and weak after so many incidents. It is the worst nightmare to lose a child, and Louis is hanging on the edge of sanity and madness.

Louis's desperation forces him to do the unthinkable. He wants to bury Gage at the mystical cemetery. While he sends Rachel and Eileen away, he plans to dig out his son's corpse and move it. He hopes that Gage will come back the same, even though Jud tells him how badly it ended when someone tried to bring back a person. He does not listen and does it anyway. A sequence of actions happens. Eileen has nightmares and bad predictions about the future, so Rachel returns to check on Louis. Gage comes back as a monster, possessed by the demons accompanied by Church, and kills Jude and, afterwards, Rachel, too. Louis is forced to be a witness to his child's death again, regardless of the fact it is not his child anymore. As a result, Louis goes completely mad and makes a mistake again. After killing Gage and getting rid of evidence, he brings Rachel back for himself.

### 5.1.2 Protagonists

Eileen and Gage are the main children's protagonists who play important roles in the story and present innocence in conflict with quilt and evil.

Eileen is a five-year-old who goes six in the book. She is a very perceptive and inquisitive girl in her parents' eyes. But at the same time, she can be energetic and obstinate "*Louis, who could sometimes become very irritated with Eileen*"; "*I don't want a bruised apple, Daddy...looking at her father as if he might have gone mad*".<sup>101</sup> As a child, Eileen goes through the stage of understanding new and complex themes such as death or religion, which her parents, especially Louis, want to introduce to her. But they still want to protect her childish naivety and hide from her the answers to the most trivial things like Santa Claus. Throughout the book, Eileen becomes a sort of medium. Her love for family and children's open mind allows her to sense danger and the future. She starts to have dreams about things happening behind her back or warning about upcoming dangers. The innocent children's mind serves as a light in the dark situations the family is going through. "*I dreamed we were at Gage's funeral...opened his coffin and it was empty*"; "*I dreamed that Church got run over*"; "*he was sent to warn but that he couldn't interfere*" (about the ghost of Victor Pascow in Eileen's dream).<sup>102</sup>

Gage lived to be only two years old. In the book, he is a happy, loved child. Both his parents are capable of doing everything for him, and they feel unconditional love for him. Gage is the other case of innocence. Unlike his sister, he presents the type of innocence used and destroyed by evil. The first indicator is the illness he suffers from, which nearly kills him even sooner. His little body is exposed to the evilness that was awoken by his father. He is the easiest target for the demons, patiently waiting for the right time due to his weakest mind and body "*Gage was blushing with the onset of asphyxiation...Gage's neck whiplashed...an amazing flag of almost solid vomit flew from his mouth...be getting an unlimited supply of oxygen*".<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately, Gage dies anyway, and after his resurrection, he becomes the monster itself. The cemetery has empowered his mind. He represents the contrast of innocence and evil, a child

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<sup>101</sup> KING, S. *Pet Sematary*. 1988. p. 20, 145.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 238, 417, 429.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 250, 251.

driven by evil, killing, and spreading wicked. *"It was not Louis's son returned from the grave but some hideous demon"; "I've come to send your rotten, stinking old soul straight to hell...I'm gonna fuck with you, old man"*.<sup>104</sup>

As a father, Louis tries to do his best to raise his children and support his wife even though he never had a father figure in his life. Unlike other King's father characters, Louis reaches the standard and does not have aggressive tendencies towards his family. Louis's father died when he was three years old. As a result, he creates a tight bond with Jud. Louis is a logical person with opinions firmly grounded. Death is the final stage for him, and the supernatural resurrection of the death cat shakes his world, so he tries to find a logical explanation at all costs *"Church had been struck hard and stunned...has been unconscious, not dead. Didn't they say cats had nine lives?"*.<sup>105</sup> Saving his daughter's cat is a selfless act, but desperation changes judgments. After the death of Victor, Norma and Church, the accident of Gage hurts Louis's healthy thinking. The guilt and grief forces Louis to act unreasonably and dangerously, even though he still has a hint of awareness in him due to his strong spirit. Louis's two sides fight within himself *"But I could bring Gage back to life...Did he really, actually believe that?"*; *"Madness. Madness all around, close, hunting him"*; *"I will make a diagnosis...if he comes back...as a thing of evil – I will kill him"*.<sup>106</sup> Louis is punished for his actions. Instead of grieving, he decided to cheat death. When Gage comes back as a monster from the woods and kills Jud and Rachel, Louis snaps. His consciousness cannot handle it anymore, and he goes mad. The last thing he is capable of is carrying his dead wife to the Micmac hill *"as if someone was turning a rheostat up in his brain. Louis's mouth was twitching"*; *"Steve saw that Louis had gone insane"*.<sup>107</sup>

Rachel gives the impression of a mother who freaks out about trivialities, but she has her reasons. She stands on the opposite side of death thoughts from her husband. As a child, she witnessed the terrifying and revolting death of her mean, disabled sister. Rachel hated her sister for the way she was, and she felt relieved when she died. The trauma and guilt left its mark on her soul, and from that moment, she feared death and

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<sup>104</sup> KING, S. *Pet Sematary*. 1988. p. 520, 521, 522.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 392, 423, 424.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 557, 558.

everything related to it, even though she often sounded illogical. That is the reason for frequent opinion collisions between both partners. *“there is nothing natural about the death. Nothing. You, as a doctor, should know that”*.<sup>108</sup> Rachel’s father never liked Louis and thought the worst about him. Rachel sometimes used to look down on Louis as her father always did and used the same method to apologise, but only after they got what they wanted *“perhaps some of this attitude came from her father”*; *“just a pet cemetery to her? It’s going to leave a scar”*; *“Rachel seemed to hold this against him”*.<sup>109</sup>

## 5.2 Style of writing

The story is divided into three main parts, each divided into more chapters and marked by numbers. Structurally, the book appears to be duller and blander than previous works. The narrator is unknown, and the point of view changes depending on developments. The narration is spiced up by the characters' inner monologues and dialogues. It represents their mood and state of mind. We can follow their mental processes and understand their actions more *“You’re not going to try to climb that, are you? Not me, boss. Why would I want to do a stupid thing like that? Great. Had me worried for just a minute there, Lou”*.<sup>110</sup>

It is no secret that King is an expert at detailed storytelling and description. He experiments with his skill and provides a more interesting way to expose the past than regular flashbacks. He uses Jud as a narrator of events and incidents crucial to the story. We follow the story chronologically and are not disconnected by jumping in the timeline. Instead of an isolated chapter, he uses Jud’s monologue or dialogue between him and another character. The reader feels involved in the conversation and might feel intimate with the characters.

King stays loyal to the things he knows and does the best. In the book, we find many explicit contents complemented by vulgarism. Although vulgarism and the use of

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<sup>108</sup> KING, S. *Pet Sematary*. 1988. p. 76.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 64, 72, 255, 404.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

swearwords are not as extensive as in the previous books. King enjoys the use of explicit descriptions that will make the reader uncomfortable “*his head was crushed...from his head, blood and a yellow, pussy fluid seeped sluggishly into the carpet...the man’s brain, whitish-grey and pulsing through a shattered section of skull*”.<sup>111</sup> To make the reader even more angry and disgusted, King, yearning for outrageous reactions, is not afraid to use a young, innocent child as a provider of the most offending and obscene insults during a final fight between Gage and Jud.

In addition, there are present erotic parts between Louis and Rachel. Despite that, it is a normal act; in contrast to the horror and terror, it feels pointless. However, in contrast to the children’s subjects, this decision might annoy and outrage the reader again.

Since Louis is a doctor, professional terms from the medical branch can be frequently found in the book. Not only terms but also medical and logical clarifications. This strikes the reader and reassures him about Louis’s trustworthiness. Another diversification in the text is the common usage of comparisons and idioms “*if sleep is a pool from which emerging is more difficult than entering*”; “*branch that felt to be the thickness of a brawny man’s wrist*”; “*stiff as a poker*”; “*being licked by Spot, was like getting rubbed up the side of your face with a dead carp*”; “*now the cat slept like a stone, like the dead*”.<sup>112</sup>

### 5.3 Themes and symbols

The book is interlaced with themes related to family relationships and parental love. This book goes to the extreme with the things that parents are capable of doing for their children. Because of the first part of the book, where the family relationships are depicted in detail as being full of mutual love, the subsequent actions and reactions of the parents are even more believable. Love is strong, and love conquers all.

In the story, we encounter a few cemeteries. The pet sematary made by children symbolises the right way of grieving. It is the innocent version of a cemetery that was

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<sup>111</sup> KING, S. *Pet Sematary*. 1988. p. 98.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122, 178, 224, 226, 257.

created for the right reasons: to help children and people cope with the death of their loved pets. Even the fact that it was created and treated by children means it is a good thing. The same meaning carries the cemetery where Gage is buried first. It is the right way to deal with the death of our loved ones. On the other hand, the Micmac mystical graveyard is forbidden and evil. The place is full of bad powers that do not serve to please a person. The demons here wait for the weakest to cause only harm to them. It shows the bad way of coping with grief.

The path leading to the pet cemetery symbolises the person's journey to the moment of death, which is part of the life cycle. You will be punished if you try to walk around or leave the path, as well as if you try to alter the faith and cheat death.

Death is an enormous theme in the book. As King gets older, it is more tangible from his work that he is aware of his own ending creeping behind the corner. The whole family deals with the inevitability of death and feelings of hopelessness. Eileen is very curious about the theme, and it is questionable if it is right or wrong to expose this complex theme to a child at such a young age. Death is followed by grief and loss. Everybody goes through tough times differently, but it is necessary to overcome our fears over loss and reconcile. With grief also, some depression and desolation. In the case of parents, they can even go insane.

Kings flirt with the idea of resurrection and what might have happened. Resurrection is a forbidden theme and taboo for many people, and living death crosses the line. The bad side of returning our loved ones from the beyond is portrayed in this story. The people change after death; it twists their minds and robs them of the things that were typical for them. As a result, an empty human shell comes back with the mind of a demon. They become a double that might have the looks but rots inside. Animals are not as smart and capable as people, and due to that, they come back just empty and dulled. Meanwhile, possession of a person offers the possibility of hurting more people and gaining new power.

Other gothic and horror literature themes reappearing in the book are, for example, monsters. In the woods, we indirectly meet monsters and ghosts hidden from humanity. Directly, we meet monsters in the people's dreams and their souls. Another theme

is the supernatural in general. There is present the paranormal incessant feeling of terror and danger, the supernatural powers of Eileen and more. Motifs significant for gothic and horror fiction, such as déjà vu or doubles, are mentioned too.

## **6 Influence of contemporary Gothic and Horror fiction**

Gothic literature, which slowly turned into horror literature, has remained popular for over two hundred and fifty years. Within many years, the genre has evolved and conquered its position amongst the most-read genres ever. Credit to its popularity goes to its diversity. Gothic literature now includes many sub-genders such as the detective genre, thrillers, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres, dark fantasy, science fiction and many more, which is appealing to younger readers.

Gothic literature started as a dark narration revealing stories about old scary houses haunted by ghosts and monsters or other supernatural creatures. Or they often presented a story about killers and murderers hiding from justice and experiencing torture. Initially, the stories focused on the broken hero going through a certain trauma and his forthcoming fight with the monster, but the closer we move to the present, the more complex the stories get. With scientific progress, authors started to dig deeper into human nature and analyse the brutality and evil hidden in human beings. The topic of humans turning into real monsters became increasingly desired by readers.

With time and genre shifts, readers are inclined to reliability. The authors moved the story from old castles to ordinary houses or from dark romantic gardens to scary woods. The protagonists now have more depth to them. They are complex, and their dark past haunts them. Unlike being destined to torture and die, the protagonists can now cause a change. They have an impact on the story and on their development. There are specific stories that deal with the theme of determinism, but the protagonists still have their own will. As a result, the heroes are more relatable, and readers feel more involved in the story because they can relate to the protagonist and sympathise with him or the other way around.

As well as readers want to read about familiar, the authors stick to the things they know. The new gothic and horror fiction stays true to the fundamental feelings and themes which occurred in the stories two hundred years ago. These basic themes are, for example, death, madness, depression, guilt, and melancholy. In addition, modern science can tell why a person is feeling a certain way. The authors now play with



diagnoses and discoveries and subsequently gain a better understanding of the human mind. That does not only apply to the human mind but to progress alone. Time is running quickly, and things are changing rapidly. The authors take advantage of this process, and they can make a story about everything. Even the craziest and the most dreadful predictions about the future are possible within horror fiction.

Especially the technological progress is crucial to horror fiction. With the arrival of motion pictures, horror obtained a new layer. Gothic and horror fiction was moved to big screens filled with blood, frightful screams, and hideous monsters. The way a movie can capture a horror story is irreplaceable. The scary atmosphere of books and the clear demonstration of a movie complement each other and create mad harmony. That might be one of the reasons why Gothic and horror fiction are so popular. Young people reach for a movie first, and as they enjoy it, they return to the book. Film adaptations of classical horror books have unflagging approval, and they still influence the younger generation.

## 7 Conclusion

The thesis focuses on the tradition of Gothic and Horror literature present in the novels of contemporary writer Stephen King and the influence on modern literature.

The theoretical part of the thesis introduces the origin of American Gothic literature. It describes the journey of the genre from being considered barbaric writing that ignores the values of society to an adequate genre used and loved by many authors. After the Romantic shift to Dark Romanticism, the genre was determined by its specific atmosphere and themes that were mostly grounded in the work by Edgar Allan Poe. Since then, Gothic literature has been characterised by its gloomy atmosphere, melancholy, death thoughts, insanity, and fear. Further, the thesis focuses on the differences between American and British Gothic, as well as other signature writers and phenomena of the uncanny. The thesis also dedicates the influence of Gothic and Horror fiction on modern pop culture. In addition, the thesis includes the biography of Stephen King and establishes the style of his writing and the features occurring in his novels.

The practical part of the thesis centres around selected novels by Stephen King (*Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*). King is a striking figure who is either loved or hated by society. But his talent and dedication cannot be denied. His horror stories give people goosebumps, haunt them in their sleep, and, most importantly, shock and disgust them. Considering the novels mentioned, all of them differ, but the core is very similar. The story is built on a family. The family, or a member of the family, often went through trauma that marked them. It is up to the family how, they handle the situation. Predominantly, family trauma is caused by a violent incident, fault or guilt of a parent or supernatural events. Their trauma and story are then explicitly portrayed in detail.

King stays loyal to certain topics and themes and writes about specific things. These things frequently come from his life experiences and troubles. King writes about people suffering from addiction and the consequences it has on their surroundings. Further, he focused on families and parents, especially on fathers and their positive and negative influence. Other themes and topics used in all the novels are, for example, abuse, rage, insanity, hereditary, supernatural elements, monsters, fear, and death.

In the novels mentioned, children play a significant role. King chooses children characters for a specific reason. He never had a childhood that reached his expectations, and he used his protagonist to be someone else for some time. He gives the child protagonist special abilities and powers to express his own inability. He provides a way of defence to protect themselves from danger around them, frequently lurking in their family. Children in horror literature hold a specific power. The contrast between atrocious fright and an innocent child is enormous. They are the main characters in stories that are banned from them, and in that lies the unpleasant feeling and desolating concern and interest. The children's protagonists are often unpredictable, and that makes them scarier. King, by using children's unpleasant destiny, shows the decay of the American dream family and proves the negative effect on children.

All the analysed novels have their movie adaptations, regardless of whether they are good or bad. A couple of them are viewed as cultural classics favoured to this day. For example, "*Carrie*" from 1976, filmed by Brian de Palma, remains well-liked by people due to its crudeness and excellent acting performances, even by Stephen King himself. On the other hand, "*The Shining*" from 1980, directed by the famous Stanley Kubrick, is a controversial take. Movie enthusiasts consider this movie as one of the best horror movie adaptations, rightfully. The movie itself is atmospheric, terrifying, and mesmerising. The faithful King readers have the opposite conviction. King, as well as his loyal readers, hates the movie and thinks of the book and the movie as two different stories.

Stephen King remains a relevant and popular writer of modern Gothic and horror literature. He gives his readers supplies of entertainment, anxiety, concern, and shock. His legacy and influence are significant to the development and evolution of the genre because King is not scared to push boundaries. He writes about things sickening and provoking people. Pushing boundaries and experimenting are the keys to movement and change. Without a doubt, Stephen King's work is going to be remembered and consumed with delight from now on.

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