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Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích
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Katedra anglistiky

Bakalářská práce

The Role of Child Characters in Stephen King's Novels

Charakteristika dětských hrdinů
hororových příběhů Stephen Kinga

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České Budějovice 2025

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Acknowledgment

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the supervisor of my bachelor's thesis, PhDr. Alice Sukdlová, Ph.D., for her expert guidance, valuable advice, and consultations. I am grateful for her kind approach and unwavering optimism with which she supported me throughout the entire process.

Anotace

Práce se v úvodní teoretické části zaměří na charakteristiku americké gotické prózy v kontextu vývoje žánru a podá stručný přehled představitelů angloamerické literatury v rámci tradice gotického románu. Práce se následně bude věnovat gotickým prvkům americké hororové literatury a propojení života autora s jeho vybranými texty. Jádrem práce bude srovnávací analýza vybraných děl Stephena Kinga (*It*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, *Firestarter*) s ohledem na charakteristiku jednotlivých dětských postav, jejich vztah k dospělým a jejich problematickou úlohu v boji se zlem. Součástí interpretační analýzy Kingovy prózy bude postihnout psychologickou rovinu příběhu a zkoumat příčiny vzniku a existence zla ve vztahu k dětskému hrdinovi nebo hrdince.

Abstract

The introductory theoretical part of the thesis focuses on the characteristics of American Gothic fiction in the context of the genre's development and will provide a brief overview of key figures in Anglo-American literature within the tradition of the Gothic novel. The thesis will then explore Gothic elements in American horror literature and the connection between the author's life and his selected texts. The core of the thesis will be a comparative analysis of selected works by Stephen King (*It*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, *Firestarter*), with an emphasis on the characteristics of individual child characters, their relationships with adults, and their problematic role in the struggle against evil. The interpretative analysis of King's fiction will also aim to capture the psychological dimension of the story and examine the origins and existence of evil in relation to the child protagonist.

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Introduction

Stephen King is best known for his horror stories, but what makes his work stand out is how often the author is able to put children in the position of main protagonists in his novels. Many of his stories feature children who face not only supernatural horrors but also real-life struggles with their families, fears, and their own growing pains. This thesis focuses on the portrayal of children in King's novels, looking at their unique traits, their relationships with evil, and how their parents can affect their lives.

By examining six novels - *It*, *Pet Sematary*, *Firestarter*, *The Shining*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, and *Carrie* - this thesis will explore the different types of child characters King writes about. These children range from innocent victims to heroes, and even to vessels of evil. Their battles with both supernatural and psychological evil are often influenced by their family dynamics, and this relationship is key to understanding King's work.

In the first part of the thesis I will focus on the background of American Gothic literature, a genre that influences King's storytelling. By comparing King's work to traditional Gothic and horror fiction, we can better understand how he takes the genre's themes—like fear, family struggles, and moral questions—and fits them into modern world.

The second part will then focus on the child characters themselves—how they respond to evil, the relationships with their parents and how their stories show themes of fear, innocence, and growing up in a world full of real and imagined threats. This thesis will reveal how King uses his child characters as a lens through which we can explore larger questions about childhood, morality, and the nature of evil.

1 American Gothic prose

1.1 Characteristics and Development

American Gothic prose is an important genre in American literature that was created during the 18th and 19th centuries. If we take into account Gothic traditions from European literature, American Gothic presents a unique way to explore the problems of American history, culture, and identity. While traditional English literature often focuses on decaying castles, upright families, and supernatural forces, American Gothic changes its focus to the landscape, history, and social dynamics of the United States (Botting, 1996, p. 3). American Gothic literature has adapted to show the nation's evolution, mainly themes of violence, the supernatural, isolation, and psychological trauma (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 279). It has developed into a genre that explores not only physical threats but also the psychological struggles of people and the society they live in (Hogle, 2002, p. 167).

1.2 Setting

One of the main characteristics of American Gothic prose is its focus on dark and mysterious settings. The environment plays an important role in these works. Unlike the European castles of English Gothic literature, the American Gothic setting often includes abandoned plantations, farmhouses, wilderness, and crumbling towns that represent a sense of isolation and decay (Punter, 2012, p. 45).

In Anglo-American literature, the setting was an important part of Gothic prose. The wilderness represented mainly the unknown. As settlers moved to the west, they approached the untamed lands that promised both, hope and danger. The borders could be a place of opportunity, but it was also a place where civilization's boundaries were erased, and individuals often found themselves in extreme isolation (Spooner, 2007, p. 38). Writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville frequently used such settings to explore the human mind's darker corners, where fears, desires, and repressed memories hide. (Olson, 2020, p. 112).

In contrast to traditional Gothic settings, which often feature castles, the decaying plantations of American Gothic are not just physical spaces but also symbolic representations of the moral and social decay. The rural, isolated setting often hints to the

legacy of slavery or the weight of religious and cultural repression (Bacon, 2023, p. 87). These settings add to the sense of detachment and horror that fills the genre.

1.3 Isolation and Madness

In American Gothic literature there is an emphasis on physical and psychological isolation. The protagonists of these works are often isolated from the rest of society, whether through their location or their mental state. This often becomes a breeding ground for madness, paranoia, and existential worry. Characters in American Gothic stories are frequently portrayed as being deprived of normal human interaction, and their interactions with others are often marked by a sense of distrust, fear, or violence (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 82).

The psychological part of isolation is often showed through unreliable narrators, who may be experiencing a breakdown in their ability to distinguish between reality and delusion. This theme of madness starts showing in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, whose protagonists often descend into mental chaos. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, for example, the narrator's fixation on his victim's eye eventually drives him crazy. However, the true horror of the story is shown in the narrator's growing paranoia and belief that he can hear the heartbeat of the dead man, which symbolizes his guilt and spiraling mental state (Beahm, n.d.).

In many American Gothic works, madness is not just an individual. The society may be described as morally or psychologically corrupt, suggesting that the madness of the protagonist is a reflection of the whole society. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne looks at the psychological effects of public shame and guilt, mainly in the context of Puritan society. Hester Prynne, who is the main character, is isolated from her community and forced to confront her own guilt in an unforgiving environment, leading to internal conflict and emotional instability (Hogle, 2002, p. 103).

1.4 Supernatural Elements

The supernatural is a significant part of the American Gothic tradition, although it often functions differently than in traditional Gothic literature. In American Gothic literature, the supernatural is frequently connected with psychological horror, creating a blurred line between what is real and what is not. The presence of ghosts, curses, or supernatural

forces is often used to explore the hidden, repressed aspects of the human mind or to symbolize the haunting effects of historical traumas (Olson, 2020, p. 92).

In many cases, the supernatural is not just an external force but a manifestation of the protagonist's inner struggle. This is shown in the works of writers like Edgar Allan Poe, whose stories often feature unreliable narrators whose experiences with the supernatural are shaped by their own psychological states. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the decaying mansion and its strange inhabitants are a symbol of the mental and physical collapse of the Usher family. The supernatural elements, such as Roderick Usher's strange connection to his sister Madeline, indicate the sense of terror but also serve as metaphors for family secrets and the consequences of living in isolation (Hogle, 2002, p. 150).

In contrast, writers like Shirley Jackson used the supernatural to explore themes of social separation and the fear of the unknown. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the ghostly creatures in the house are both real and symbolic of the psychological breakdown of the characters, especially the main protagonist, Eleanor. Jackson's work works with the idea that the supernatural is deeply tied to human emotions and the ways in which individuals relate to the world around them (Spooner, 2007, p. 43).

1.5 Religion and Burden of the Past

Another defining feature of American Gothic prose is its exploration of religion, particularly the ways in which religious enthusiasm and fanaticism can contribute to psychological and moral decay. Many early American Gothic works were influenced by the Puritan legacy, a deeply religious and morally strict movement that emphasized the importance of sin and the need for punishment. These themes often find their way into Gothic narratives, where characters struggle with guilt, fear of doom, and the moral consequences of their actions (Olson, 2020, p. 108).

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*, the protagonist goes on a journey into the forest where he encounters a mysterious figure who leads him to witness the dark, sinful side of his community. The story critiques the Puritanical mindset and the hypocrisy that often underlies religious devotion. The forest serves as a space where Goodman Brown's faith and morals are tested, ultimately leading to his spiritual collapse. The supernatural elements in the story, such as the devil's presence and the ritualistic

ceremony, symbolize the tension between religious beliefs and human nature (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 130).

The burden of the past is also a significant theme in American Gothic. Writers often choose characters who are haunted by past sins. This can be seen in works that engage with the legacy of slavery, Native American displacement, and the Civil War. The past in American Gothic is never truly gone; it continues to project its influence on the present (Botting, 1996, p. 74). In Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*, Emily Grierson is a product of a decaying Southern aristocracy, and her actions are driven by the huge expectations of her society. The decaying family home she lives in symbolizes the death of the Old South, and Emily's refusal to confront the changing world around her illustrates the destructive power of clinging to the past (Hogle, 2002, p. 124).

1.6 Social Criticism

American Gothic prose also serves as a tool for social critique, particularly about issues of race, gender, and class. Writers often use Gothic tropes to explore the fear and anxiety surrounding social groups. In many works, the fear of the "other" becomes a central theme, with the "other" often represented by those who do not fit societal norms, or those who are portrayed as threats to the established social order (Spooner, 2007, p. 89).

In the Southern Gothic tradition, writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor explored the issues of race and class in the American South. In Faulkner's *Light in August*, the character of Joe Christmas resembles the struggle between identity and society's expectations, particularly in the context of race. The horror in the story is not just supernatural but violence and racism that define the region's social dynamics (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 212). O'Connor's stories, such as *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, similarly use grotesque characters and horrific events to expose the moral flaws and racial tensions in Southern society (Rogak, 2009, p. 195).

The "other" is often portrayed as a figure of horror, embodying the fears of societal breakdown or moral corruption. However, in many cases, these figures also represent the victims of social oppression, offering a critique of how society constructs and marginalizes certain groups (Botting, 1996, p. 61).

1.7 The Development of American Gothic prose

1.7.1 Early American Gothic (18th - Early 19th Century)

The origins of American Gothic prose can be traced back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Early American Gothic writers were influenced by the European Gothic tradition, but they adapted the genre to point at the unique challenges and anxieties of life in the new nation. Writers such as Charles Brockden Brown helped to shape the genre in its early years. Brown's novel *Wieland* is one of the earliest examples of American Gothic fiction, blending elements of psychological horror with themes of religious fanaticism and moral corruption (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 45).

Brown's work is notable for its psychological effects of isolation, guilt, and the supernatural. In *Wieland*, the protagonist, Clara, is caught in a web of family secrets and religious fanaticism, leading to a tragic descent into madness. The novel's description of a decaying family home and the psychological instability of its characters created the foundation for future American Gothic writers (Beahm, n.d.; Hogle, 2002, p. 56).

1.7.2 Dark Romanticism (Mid-19th Century)

In the mid-19th century, American Gothic prose became more associated with the literary movement known as Dark Romanticism. Writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville dived deeper into the themes of Gothic literature to explore the darker aspects of the human mind, particularly the aspects of sin, guilt, and existential despair (Spooner, 2007, p. 129).

Poe, in particular, is known for his mastery of the Gothic genre. His stories, such as *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Black Cat*, feature protagonists whose descent into madness is closely linked to their increasing paranoia and guilt. Poe's works often blur the lines between the supernatural and the psychological, creating an atmosphere of horror that reflects the instability of the human mind (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 168; Beahm, n.d.).

Hawthorne's works, such as *The Scarlet Letter* and *Young Goodman Brown*, also include Gothic elements to explore themes of sin, guilt, and the consequences of living in a strictly moral society. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne looks into the psychological and social

consequences of adultery, with the character of Hester Prynne symbolizing the tension between personal desires and societal expectations. The novel's exploration of shame, guilt, and moral ambiguity shows the darker side of human nature, a main concern of American Gothic fiction (Rogak, 2009, p. 78; Hogle, 2002, p. 102).

1.7.3 Post-Civil War Gothic and the Rise of Southern Gothic (Late 19th - Early 20th Century)

After the Civil War, American Gothic began to take on a more regional flavor, particularly with the rise of Southern Gothic. Writers like William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers used the Gothic genre to explore the moral decay, social dysfunction, and racial tensions of the American South (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 210).

In Faulkner's works, such as *As I Lay Dying* and *A Rose for Emily*, the Southern landscape becomes a symbol of both physical and moral fall. His characters, often trapped by the legacies of slavery and class divisions, suffer with isolation, guilt, and the collapse of social order. The grotesque elements in Faulkner's work reflect the violent history of the South and the ways in which the past continues to haunt the present (Rogak, 2009, p. 195; Spooner, 2007, p. 112).

Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *Everything That Rises Must Converge* similarly explore the moral and social decay of the South. Her characters are often grotesque, isolated, and struggling with issues of race and morality. O'Connor's work is noted for its dark humor and its critique of Southern society's attitudes toward race, class, and religion (Botting, 1996, p. 143; Hogle, 2002, p. 198).

1.7.4 20th Century Gothic and Modern Horror

In the 20th century, American Gothic evolved into a broader genre of horror and psychological thrillers. Writers like Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, and Toni Morrison used the Gothic genre to address contemporary fears, including social isolation or the breakdown of the family. (Olson, 2020, p. 134; Spooner, 2007, p. 168).

Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is a great example of modern American Gothic. The novel explores the psychological and supernatural aspects of fear,

particularly through its protagonist, Eleanor, who is drawn into the supernatural world of Hill House. Jackson's emphasis on the inside of her characters' minds and the ambiguity of the supernatural elements of the story reflect the genre's shift toward psychological horror (Botting, 1996, p. 157; Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 220).

Stephen King, often referred to as the master of modern horror, has also been influenced by American Gothic traditions. In novels such as *The Shining* and *Salem's Lot*, King uses the Gothic framework to explore themes of isolation, madness, and the supernatural. His works frequently depict haunted locations that serve as metaphors for the characters' internal struggles and societal breakdowns (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 232; Bacon, 2023, p. 190).

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is another example of Contemporary American Gothic literature, blending elements of horror, history, and psychological trauma. Set in the aftermath of slavery, *Beloved* explores the haunting effects of the past on African American families. The ghost of Sethe's daughter serves as a powerful metaphor for the legacy of slavery, highlighting how history and memory shape identities. (Hogle, 2002, p. 258; Olson, 2020, p. 82).

1.8 Conclusion

American Gothic prose has evolved significantly since its beginning in the late 18th century, reflecting the many ways of the American experience. From its early exploration of religious fanaticism and psychological horror to its modern engagement with race, identity, and social critique, American Gothic literature remains a vital genre for examining the darker aspects of society and the human mind. Through its settings, themes of isolation, and psychological depth, American Gothic continues to captivate readers and challenge our understanding of fear, guilt, and the legacy of history. As such, the genre remains a powerful tool for exploring the deep-seated anxieties of today's society.

2 Stephen King's Novels and Comparison of the Characteristics of Traditional Gothic Prose and Horror

Stephen King is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential horror writers of the modern era. His novels have captivated readers with their psychological depth, supernatural terror, and deep exploration of human nature. Yet, beneath King's contemporary settings and characters there is a foundation built on Gothic horror's traditions. Traditional Gothic literature is characterized by sinister settings, supernatural elements, psychological torment, and themes of isolation and madness (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 235). While King keeps many of these elements, he transforms them for modern audiences by putting horror in everyday life and emphasizing internal, psychological terror over external supernatural threats (Bacon, 2023, p. 205; Olson, 2020, p. 93).

2.1 Setting and Atmosphere

One of the highlights of traditional Gothic horror is its setting. Gothic fiction often unfolds in grand but decaying structures. These settings are not just backgrounds; they are characters on their own, filled with the memories and tragedies of the past (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 240; Hogle, 2002, p. 87).

For example, in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the crumbling mansion mirrors the psychological fall of its inhabitants (Spooner, 2007, p. 152). Bram Stoker's *Dracula* situates much of its horror in the dark corridors of Count Dracula's castle, a place filled with ancient evil and covered with an almost alarming evil force (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 242). Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* uses cold landscapes to enhance the feeling of evil and dread (Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 213).

King, while keeping the tradition of haunted spaces alive, shifts the setting to modern America. His horror thrives in the everyday world. The small towns of Derry (*It*), Castle Rock (*Needful Things*), and Ludlow (*Pet Sematary*) appear normal on the surface but hide terrible horrors (Olson, 2020, p. 103; Bacon, 2023, p. 212).

The Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* stands as King's biggest similarity to Gothic horror's love for haunted locations. Isolated in the snowy mountains, the Overlook mirrors classic Gothic mansions: filled with dark history, supernatural hauntings, and an atmosphere of psychological horror. However, unlike the traditional Gothic castle, the Overlook is not a relic of the past; it is a functional, modern hotel where supernatural horror and psychological breakdown go hand in hand (Spooner, 2007, p. 42).

By placing horror in familiar locations King makes the fear more personal and immediate. Instead of decaying ruins that symbolize the past, his settings transform the everyday life into the mysterious, proving that horror can lurk anywhere (Bacon, 2023, p. 214; Punter, 2004, p. 237).

2.2 Supernatural vs Psychological Horror

Gothic literature often revolves around supernatural beings—vampires, ghosts, witches, and cursed figures that haunt the protagonists. The supernatural is typically external, something foreign and unknown that exists upon the world of the living (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 250; Hogle, 2002, p. 90).

In *Dracula*, the titular vampire is a supernatural predator, a creature of the night that preys upon the innocent (Spooner, 2007, p. 36). Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* shows ghosts that may or may not be real, playing on ambiguity and psychological horror (Punter, 2004, p. 251). Poe's *Black Cat* explores vengeance and the idea of supernatural justice (Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 145).

King embraces supernatural horror but often connects it to psychological trauma. Pennywise the Clown in *It* is not just a monster but an embodiment of fear itself (Bacon, 2023, p. 228). *The Shining*'s ghosts may be real, but Jack Torrance's twisted mind is equally terrifying (Olson, 2020, p. 121). King blends Gothic horror's fascination with spirits and curses with modern psychological insight, making his supernatural horrors feel deeply personal (Bacon, 2023, p. 210).

2.3 Characters

Gothic fiction frequently features the tortured, passionate protagonists consumed by their obsessions. Victor Frankenstein, Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*), and Count Dracula are

all flawed, tragic figures who bring about their ruin (Botting, 1996, p. 118; Hogle, 2002, p. 42).

King, in contrast, often focuses on ordinary people. His protagonists are not aristocrats or doomed geniuses but everyday individuals put into extraordinary situations. They are writers (*Misery*), students (*Carrie*), grieving parents (*Pet Sematary*), or bullied children (*It*) (Rogak, 2009, p. 103; Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 162).

This shift makes the horror feel more intimate and relatable and thus uncanny. While Gothic protagonists often surrender to fate, King's characters fight against their circumstances - though not always successfully (Punter, 2012, p. 145). His villains are also often disturbingly human. Annie Wilkes (*Misery*) and Jack Torrance (*The Shining*) may seem like monsters, but they are also tragic figures shaped by obsession, isolation, and madness rather than external curses or supernatural intervention (Olson, 2020, p. 127; Bacon, 2023, p. 215).

2.4 Themes of Madness and Isolation

Madness is a crucial element in Gothic horror. From Poe's unreliable narrators (*The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Black Cat*) to the paranoia of *Frankenstein* and the psychological torment of *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Charlotte Perkins Gilman), Gothic fiction often explores the thin line between reality and insanity (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 33; Botting, 1996, p. 88).

King continues this tradition but puts it in modern psychological understanding. *The Shining* is a great example of isolation-induced madness, blending supernatural horror with the very real struggle of addiction and domestic violence (Spooner, 2007, p. 58; Bacon, 2023, p. 194). *Misery* explores the delusional mind of an obsessed fan, showing how isolation can create insanity (Olson, 2020, p. 145).

Where Gothic horror often presents madness as an external curse, King internalizes it, making it a deeply human struggle (Rogak, 2009, p. 101; Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 205).

2.5 Fear of the Unknown vs the Mundane

Traditional Gothic horror thrives on the fear of the unknown, the foreign, the supernatural, the ancient. Gothic monsters often represent existential threats: Dracula as foreign invasion, Frankenstein's monster as the dangers of unchecked ambition and experiment (Hogle, 2002, p. 67; Botting, 1996, p. 121).

King shifts this by focusing on fears created by the ordinary. A rabid dog (Cujo), a possessed car (Christine), or a grieving father making a terrible choice (Pet Sematary) (Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 93; Punter, 2004, p. 78). These terrors arise from everyday life, making them more immediate and personal. His horror writing suggests that evil is not just hiding in ancient ruins but in our own homes, our childhoods, and our minds (Rogak, 2009, p. 112; Bacon, 2023, p. 65).

2.6 Modernized Gothic Tradition

Stephen King's works echo the themes and structures of traditional Gothic horror but transform them for a modern audience. While Gothic fiction thrives in decaying glory, supernatural doom, and psychological torment, King bases his horror in realism, exploring the darkness within everyday life (Punter & Byron, 2004, p. 152). He keeps the Gothic's fascination with haunted places, supernatural forces, and mental instability but shifts their focus from distant castles to the familiar streets of America (Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 133).

By doing so, King modernizes Gothic horror, proving that its core themes like fear, madness, and the supernatural are as relevant today as they were centuries ago (Olson, 2020, p. 76; Bacon, 2023, p. 110).

3 Types of Child Characters in Stephen King's Novels (turned evil, inherited evil, evil entities)

Stephen King is a master of portraying child characters that reflect fear, resilience, innocence, and even malevolence. Unlike many horror writers who use children purely as victims, King explores their characteristics, often granting them deep emotional personalities, supernatural abilities, or tragic fates. His young characters are very important to his stories, either as protagonists battling against unimaginable evil, victims

of sinister forces, or even threats themselves. Stephen King's children are far more than passive characters; they are warriors, victims, leaders, and sometimes even monsters. Whether they stand against evil, fall victim to it, or become its vessels, these young characters are crucial to his horror storytelling. Through them, King explores the fragility and strength of childhood, making his work resonate deeply with readers who recognize both the joys and terrors of growing up.

3.1 The Gifted Child

One of King's most recurring archetypes is the "Gifted Child," a young character with supernatural abilities that set them apart from the rest of the world. These children possess powers such as telepathy, telekinesis, precognition, or other psychic abilities, often referred to in King's universe as "The Shine." However, rather than these gifts serving as a source of strength alone, they often become a curse which leads to isolation, suffering, or making them targets of dark forces.

Perhaps the most iconic example is Danny Torrance from *The Shining* and its sequel, *Doctor Sleep*. Danny's ability to "shine" allows him to see spirits, glimpse the past and future, and communicate telepathically. While this makes him incredibly perceptive, it also makes him vulnerable to supernatural entities like the malevolent spirits of the Overlook Hotel and the soul-draining True Knot cult in *Doctor Sleep*. Similarly, Charlie McGee in *Firestarter* is born with pyrokinesis, a power that makes her a target of the secretive government agency known as "The Shop," which seeks to exploit her abilities. Charlie's character reflects one of King's major themes—the fear of childhood innocence being corrupted by adult greed and scientific manipulation.

Another well-known gifted child is Carrie White from *Carrie*, whose telekinetic powers grow into an uncontrollable force fueled by emotional distress. Unlike Danny and Charlie, Carrie ultimately succumbs to her abilities, unleashing destruction upon those who hurt her. The contrast between her and characters like Danny highlights how King's portrayal of gifted children varies; some learn to control their abilities, while others become overwhelmed by them. Finally, Jake Chambers in *The Dark Tower* series is another psychic child, possessing strong intuition and a deep connection to the series's mythic world. His abilities make him both powerful and tragically doomed, reinforcing King's motif that such gifts often come with heavy burdens.

3.2 The Innocent

King frequently introduces child characters who represent pure-hearted innocence, often set to fight against dark, unforgiving environments. These children are rarely granted supernatural abilities but instead act as emotional anchors within the story, their vulnerability heightening the horror around them. Their deaths or suffering often serve as starters for greater consequences, emphasizing themes of loss and corrupted innocence.

A great example is Gage Creed from *Pet Sematary*, a toddler whose accidental death devastates his father, Louis, leading to the tragic decision to resurrect him through an ancient burial ground. However, Gage's return is not one of innocent revival but of horrifying transformation—his purity twisted into something monstrous. Similarly, Tad Trenton in *Cujo* is a bright and loving child who becomes trapped in a car with his mother while a rabid dog prowls outside. The novel's brutal ending, in which Tad dies to dehydration, delivers one of King's most gut-wrenching blows, underscoring the fragility of childhood innocence in an uncaring universe.

In a different perspective, Kyra Devore from *Bag of Bones* is an innocent child entangled in a supernatural mystery, with her purity acting as a contrast to the dark forces surrounding her. Whether as tragic figures like Gage or survivors like Kyra, these innocent characters often reinforce King's idea that childhood, while beautiful, is never truly safe.

3.3 The Courageous Leader

While King's child protagonists often start as victims or underdogs, some rise to become leaders in the face of horror. These children, though young, demonstrate remarkable resilience, intelligence, and bravery, leading their friends against forces far beyond their understanding.

The most famous example is Bill Denbrough, the stuttering yet determined leader of the Losers' Club in *IT*. Bill's character is driven by the loss of his younger brother, Georgie, to Pennywise the Clown, and his main goal revolves around overcoming personal fears while encouraging his friends to fight the supernatural entity. His leadership qualities mirror the common "reluctant hero" archetype, where a young character is forced to grow up too soon. Similarly, Roland Deschain, the protagonist of *The Dark Tower* series, is

shown in his youth to be a hardened warrior-in-training, demonstrating his leadership abilities even as a boy. Though he is not a child in most of the series, flashbacks reveal how his journey shaped him into a formidable figure.

Another example of a young leader is Trisha McFarland in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, a nine-year-old girl who gets lost in the wilderness and must rely on her wits and imaginary conversations with baseball player Tom Gordon to survive. Though she faces no supernatural monster, her story is a statement that children can survive even when the world seems hopelessly dangerous.

3.4 The Outcast and Misfit

Many of King's child characters are defined by their status as outcasts, either due to their physical appearance, social standing, or personal struggles. These children are often bullied or ignored, making them easy targets for supernatural forces—or, in some cases, the very real horrors of abuse and neglect.

Once again, *Carrie White* is perhaps the most famous outcast in King's work, a girl isolated by both her classmates and her abusive mother. Her revenge-fueled destruction is a twisted form of empowerment, demonstrating how long-term isolation and trauma can manifest in horrifying ways. Similarly, Ben Hanscom in *IT* is tormented for his weight but finds solace in the friendship of the Losers' Club, proving that outcasts can find strength in unity.

Another striking example is Arnie Cunningham from *Christine*, a socially awkward teenager whose connection with a possessed car leads to his transformation from bullied loser to vengeful killer. While some outcasts like Ben find redemption, others like Arnie and Carrie fall victim to their circumstances, showing King's themes of fate versus free will.

3.5 The Innocent Turned Evil

King is not afraid to change the traditional image of childhood innocence by presenting children as the very sources of horror. In some cases, these children are corrupted by supernatural influences, while others are simply born evil.

The most terrifying example is Gage Creed after his resurrection in *Pet Sematary*, where he returns as a soulless, murderous being. Likewise, the children in *Children of the Corn* serve as a group of religiously fanatical murderers, demonstrating how even the youngest minds can be manipulated into committing horrible crimes. Henry Bowers, though not supernatural, represents human evil in *IT*, acting as the violent and psychotic bully who torments the Losers' Club.

4 Carrie

Carrie White is the main character of Stephen King's *Carrie*. She is a deeply complex and tragic protagonist whose personality and actions reflect a combination of innate innocence, psychological trauma, and descent into vengeful destruction. Her "evil side" did not emerge from inherent malice but rather as a growing pressure of years of abuse from her mother, neglect, and the unleashing of her powerful telekinetic abilities.

Carrie is portrayed as a shy, socially awkward teenager living with her mother in the small town of Chamberlain, Maine. As for her physical appearance, she is described as a plain, ordinary girl, even mentioned to be slightly overweight, which portrays her as a target for bullies. She is constantly being picked on by her classmates, who see her as a weak and easy victim for their cruel actions. Much of her awkwardness or silliness comes from her oppressive home life, where her whole being is controlled by her almost too religion-focused mother, Margaret. Margaret is abusive, often using religion as a tool to punish Carrie for any sin she thinks her daughter has committed, stimulating a deep sense of shame and insecurity in her.

Telekinetic powers are a defining element of Carrie's character, symbolizing the undiscovered strength and rage hidden beneath her shy and awkward exterior. These abilities are weak in the beginning but grow stronger as she learns to control them. During the novel, Carrie's powers turn from being repressed by her emotions to finally exploding into a catastrophic release.

Carrie's "evil side" is not actually a characteristic but a result of never-ending psychological torture and betrayal. Her darker nature emerges during the prom scene, where a simple yet cruel prank triggers her hunger for revenge.

4.1 Carrie White's Background

Carrie's life can be easily defined by suffering and humiliation. Her classmates bully her practically daily, mocking her lack of social awareness and the strict moral code caused by the actions of her mother. The infamous shower scene, where she is humiliated after her first menstruation, anchors her role as an outcast. Years of suppressed anger and pain begin to build up, planting the seeds for her final outburst. Her telekinetic abilities become a metaphor for this repression—quietly building strength until they burst out.

4.3 Unleashed Powers

When Sue Snell, the only classmate who regrets bullying Carrie, convinces her boyfriend, Tommy Ross, to take Carrie to prom, it seems like a possible chance for redemption and acceptance. For the first time in her life, Carrie feels beautiful and accepted, even daring to believe she could fit in. This fragile sense of self-worth is destroyed when Chris Hargensen, another classmate of Carrie's, creates a cruel prank, showering Carrie with pig's blood on prom night in front of the entire school. This moment finally flips a psychological switch in Carrie. The humiliation, strengthened by her powers, drives her to a breaking point. Her evil side casts an unstoppable force of vengeance against those who have ever hurt her. Carrie's destructive side reaches its full potential when she uses her telekinesis for revenge. Her actions during the prom are horrifying and cruel. She locks her classmates in the gym, turns off all sprinklers, causes electrical fires, and watches as chaos emerges. Her rage is unselective as she punishes everyone in the gym, whether or not they were directly involved in the prank or in her bullying. Carrie's ability to create such large-scale destruction reflects the depth of her anger. Her telekinetic powers are an extension of her mind, making her revenge both personal and disturbingly impersonal.

4.5 Behaviour Switch

After the prom terror, Carrie continues her revenge through the town, destroying property and targeting individuals who have hurt her. Her potential for cruelty in these moments is disturbing. She acts with a calmness, fully embracing the dark power. Even the final confrontation with her mother is marked by a possible sense of poetic justice. After Margaret attempts to kill her, Carrie kills her mother in self-defense, pinning her to the wall with kitchen knives in a grotesque parody of religious death.

Carrie's "evil" side is deeply connected to her humanity, making her a uniquely sympathetic antagonist. Her fall into violence is not driven by a desire to take control or harm for its own sake but by the unbearable burden of her pain and the need to take control over her life. Her actions, undeniably horrifying, are fueled by years of mistreatment and cruelty.

Unlike a typical villain, Carrie's dark side is inseparable from her vulnerability. Her destruction is as much a cry for help as it is a result of rage.

Carrie's evil side is not inherited but rather the product of cruelty and her own undiscovered power. She begins as a misunderstood and mistreated girl but transforms into a killer force of nature, embodying the destructive potential of unleashed rage. Her ultimate downfall consisting of dying alone, rejected, and unredeemed makes her as one of literature's most tragic antiheroes. Carrie is a warning about the devastating consequences of bullying, repression, and the human capacity for vengeance when pushed too far.

5 The Shining

Danny Torrance, a main child character in *The Shining* is a young boy with psychic abilities that make him particularly accustomed to supernatural forces. Here are his key characteristics and how they come into his association with the evil entities in the story.

5.1 Personality Traits of Danny Torrance

Danny was born with a psychic gift called "the shining," which is an entity of some sorts, which allows him to see into the past and future, read minds, and communicate through telepathy. This ability makes him exceptionally perceptive of the dangerous forces at the Overlook Hotel.

As a young child, Danny is the definition of innocence, which contrasts severely with the evil of the Overlook Hotel. This purity makes him a target for the hotel's dark forces, which took it as their main goal to corrupt or consume him.

Despite being only five years old, Danny presents remarkable emotional and intellectual maturity. He understands complex concepts and is able to navigate dangerous situations with courage and talent.

Danny's empathy allows him to sense others' emotions, particularly when it comes to his parents' struggles. He is painfully aware of his father's descent into madness and his mother's fear for all of their lives.

While Danny's gift offers him many unique insights, it also makes him extremely vulnerable to supernatural powers. The Overlook's evil entities benefit from his psychic openness to lure him deeper into danger.

5.2 Danny's Personality Influenced by Evil

If we take into account all his associations with evil entities, there are main 5 to look for.

The Overlook Hotel, a place of evil supernatural energy, recognizes Danny's abilities and attempts to absorb his psychic power. The ghosts and evil forces execute a plan to manipulate his father, Jack, to harm Danny.

Tony is Danny's imaginary friend who serves as a guide and protector, warning him of the dangers incoming. However, Tony also introduces him to scary visions of the Overlook's dark future, blending protection with sinister fair warning.

Danny experiences vivid and terrifying interactions with the Overlook's spirits, including Room 237's ghost and the visions of past tragedies. These entities intend to terrify and harm him, feeding off his psychic energy.

Danny becomes the central figure in the Overlook's struggle for power. His resilience and ability to outsmart the hotel's evil spirit are crucial in resisting its corruption and destruction.

The hotel tries to manipulate Danny through his fears and his father's vulnerability, but Danny's psychic strength, intelligence, and connection with Tony allow him to resist these influences.

Danny's association with the Overlook's evil entities springs from his unique psychic abilities, which both threaten and attract the supernatural entities of the hotel. Despite his young age, Danny's courage and gift play a critical role in confronting and ultimately escaping the Overlook.

6 Pet Sematary

In Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, the two child characters, Ellie and Gage Creed, are siblings who each play a different role in the story, reflecting the duality of personalities, developmental stages, and symbolic associations. Their differences and their connection to evil are essential to the novel's exploration of grief, innocence, and corruption.

6.1 Ellie Creed

Ellie Creed is the older child, approximately five or six years old. She is observant, emotionally expressive, and likes to use her intuition, which is unusual for her age. Ellie often creates a source of calmness in the Creed family. Ellie often talks about her fears and opinions on the Pet Sematary and later has recurring nightmares about the cemetery. Her main role in the book is to be some sort of a voice of unease and suspicion, sensing the sinister nature of the burial site even before the tragic events can take place.

Ellie herself is not associated with evil. Her character primarily shows innocence and serves as a counterpart to the darker events in the story. Her sensitivity to the supernatural suggests she is more immune to the unnatural forces surrounding the burial ground.

6.2 Gage Creed

Gage Creed is the younger sibling, a toddler (approximately two years old), characterized by his innocence, curiosity, and dependence on his family. Gage's tragic death is the main event for the turn into horror. His accidental death leads Louis Creed, the father, to make the horrible decision to bury him in the Pet Sematary, hoping to bring him back to life. When resurrected, Gage becomes a vessel of evil, losing his innocence entirely.

Gage's resurrection changes his previously pure nature. The burial power resurrects him as a sinister and dangerous entity, physically resembling Gage but possessed by a dark force. In his resurrected state, Gage portrays the corrupting influence of grief and the cemetery's evil, acting violently and without any conscience.

6.3 Different Approach to Siblings

Ellie is older, therefore more emotionally and cognitively developed, while Gage is an innocent and pure child. Ellie is a voice of reason and warning, while Gage becomes a

symbol of the consequences of ignoring said warnings. Ellie remains unaffected by the cemetery's power and represents innocence preserved. Gage, through his resurrection, becomes a symbol of corrupted innocence, showing how grief can blind people to natural limits and lead to disaster.

Ellie symbolizes foresight and the natural progression of life and death. Gage's transformation after resurrection symbolizes the perversion of natural laws and the cost of trying to cheat death.

Ultimately, the children's contrasting roles highlight King's themes of loss, the dangers of denial, and the easy influence of dark supernatural forces.

7 IT

When we take a look at Stephen King's IT, the children of the Losers' Club are distinct characters, every single one with unique traits, fears, and struggles that shape them as individuals which helps them collectively battle against the evil clown known as Pennywise. Their differences are used to highlight how different personalities and strengths can unite to overcome evil. What I would like to highlight in this specific part of my thesis is also the contrasts between their youthful selves with their adult counterparts, the long-lasting impact of trauma, friendship, and courage.

7.1 Bill Denbrough

Bill Denbrough, also known as „Big Bill“ is the leader of the Losers' Club. He is described as intelligent, brave, and determined, he is the one who inspires his friends to confront IT or Pennywise. Bill suffers with stuttering, which can be interpreted as a reflection of his inner struggles and vulnerability. When his younger brother Georgie dies and Bill discovers that his death was caused by IT, it further fuels his determination to destroy this entity.

When Bill grows up, he finds his true love and becomes a successful writer, but struggles with suppressed memories of his childhood, which he tries to get rid of by writing them into his books. His leadership qualities remain inside him but struggles with feelings of guilt over Georgie's death and unresolved fears still haunt him.

Bill's determination to defeat IT comes from a personal vendetta, as IT killed Georgie. He represents the triumph of courage and love over fear.

As a child, Bill is fearless in looking for justice for Georgie. As an adult, he has some hesitations to reconnect with his past but ultimately rediscovers his bravery.

7.2 Beverly Marsh

Beverly Marsh is compassionate, strong-willed, and courageous. Her character traits are also shaped by the abuse from her father and bullying from her classmates but in the end she forms deep emotional connections with the Loser's Club. Beverly suffers from fear of blood, which could be taken as a symbol for her struggle with growing up and her abusive home life.

As she grows older Beverly becomes a successful fashion designer. She gets married but ends up in an abusive relationship, which becomes very similar to her parent's relationship as well as her relationship with her father which resonates with the trauma from her father. Returning to Derry allows her to reclaim her strength and confront her past as well as form a romantic relationship with her childhood admirer Ben.

All of Beverly's battles with IT mirror her real-life struggles with male violence and control. Her fear of blood ties directly to the pervasive threat of abuse.

As a child, Beverly is both vulnerable and defiant. As an adult returned to Derry, she regains her confidence and self-worth by overcoming her fears.

7.3 Richie Tozier

Richie „the Trashmouth“ Tozier is supposed to be the comic relief of the group. He is specific thanks to using humor as a defense mechanism. However his quick wit and loud personality hide insecurities about his self-worth.

Richie becomes a successful radio DJ, still keeping his humor but often feeling a sense of emptiness. His return to Derry uncovers more of his courage and loyalty to his friends. In older Richie his good and braver side is more explored yet he is still able to retain his joker persona.

Richie's fear of clowns becomes crucial in the book as IT takes on the form of a clown. This fear represents his struggle with social expectations and personal identity as well as fear of rejection.

Richie's childlike personality matures into a deeper understanding of his value within the group and his acceptance of himself.

7.4 Eddie Kaspbrak

Eddie Kaspbrak is anxious and heavily dependent on his overprotective mother, who feeds his hypochondria. Eddie truly believes that all of his allergies are real and therefore is very protective over himself. Despite this, he shows surprising bravery when it comes to his friends even standing up to his mother.

Older Eddie becomes a successful businessman but remains a hypochondriac and marries a younger version of his mother. His return to Derry brings out the courage he showed as a child and his determination to destroy it becomes truly inspiring for the whole group as well as a final union of the group after sacrifice.

The main way IT manipulates Eddie is through his health fears, symbolizing his struggle with dependence and fragility.

Eddie as a child starts his journey to break free from his mother's control. As an adult, he rediscovers his bravery and self-worth, ultimately sacrificing himself for the group.

7.5 Ben Hanscom

Ben Hanscom is shy, intelligent, and creative, often bullied for being a larger kid. He turns his pain into his love for architecture and his strong loyalty to his friends and his romantic feelings for Beverly.

Ben transforms into a fit and successful architect but remains emotionally closed off. His love for Beverly helps him gain back his childhood courage to fight evil.

IT mainly focuses on Ben's insecurities about his weight and self-worth. His fear of rejection fuels his internal struggle as a young child as well as an adult.

Ben's physical transformation is the main point of his transformation which mirrors his emotional growth, as he overcomes his childhood insecurities to become a confident and brave adult.

7.6 Mike Hanlon

Mike Hanlon is curious, intelligent, and deeply tied to Derry's history. As the only dark-skinned member of the group, he faces racial prejudice typical for the 70s' which isolates him from other kids but also strengthens him as a person.

Mike is the only one of the group who stays in Derry as the town librarian and serves as the group's anchor, researching IT and calling the Losers back when IT returns after 27 years. His dedication to defeating IT becomes his life's purpose.

IT feeds on Mike's isolation and fear of exclusion and never fitting in, reflecting Derry's systemic racism and his personal struggles with belonging.

As a child, Mike is curious and eager to belong. As an adult, he is burdened by the knowledge of IT and the responsibility to fight it as well as more mentally drained by staying in the town than the others who left.

7.7 Stanley Uris

Stanley Uris is logical, methodical, and skeptical, often trying to rationalize the existence of IT. His desire for order conflicts with the chaotic and supernatural.

Stan becomes a successful accountant, retaining his need for control and order. However, he cannot face the trauma of IT and decides to take his own life rather than return to Derry which ends up uniting the whole of Loser's Club.

Stan's fear of disorder and his inability to reconcile the supernatural with his logical worldview is the main focus of IT.

His rationality, which always helps him with coping as a child, becomes his end as an adult, as he cannot overcome his terror of IT and it turns to be his breaking point.

7.8 The Loser's Club

The novel shows us how childhood experiences shape us as adults. The Losers' childhood bravery contrasts with the fear and denial they experience as adults. As they return to Derry they are forced to confront their buried trauma.

IT represents their deepest fears, exploiting personal vulnerabilities and social pressures. The only way the Losers are able to overcome IT is by facing their fears and uniting as a group.

The bond they share as children is a source of strength. As adults, their fading memories highlight the cost of growing up and the enduring power of friendship.

Each character's journey is an important part of the novel's broad scale of themes of fear, courage, and the strength of the human spirit.

8 The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon

Stephen King's *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, Trisha McFarland, the main and almost only real character, is a nine-year-old girl who gets lost in the woods after wandering off during a family hike. Her character and experiences are crucial to the novel's themes of survival, fear, and the blurred line between reality and imagination.

8.1 Trisha McFarland

Trisha shows inspiring courage and independence for her age. Despite being terrified and inexperienced in wilderness, she uses her limited knowledge and instincts to survive, find food and water and to keep moving.

Trisha's imagination is probably the key coping mechanism. She envisions herself interacting with Tom Gordon, her favorite baseball player, whom she idolizes for his calm demeanor under pressure. This imaginary friendship helps her maintain hope and keep her cool.

Though brave, Trisha is still a child, easily affected by moments of despair, fear, and missing her family. Her emotional depth makes her struggle relatable.

Her determination to survive and find her way out of the woods is unbelievable, even as she faces physical exhaustion, hunger, and threats from the wilderness she is still willing and able to keep going.

8.2 Trisha's Encounter with "Evil"

Trisha's journey through the woods is followed by an ongoing struggle with external and internal representations of "evil." This theme is explored in multiple ways.

The main supernatural element in the novel is the "God of the Lost," a mysterious and evil presence that stalks Trisha throughout her journey through the woods. This entity is a symbol of the primal, predatory forces of nature and the obvious fear of being utterly alone and vulnerable.

Basically all of the "evil" Trisha faces is psychological, coming from her own fears, doubts, and hallucinations as she struggles more and more with dehydration and disorientation. The wilderness emphasizes her inner demons, making her doubt her survival and feel targeted by evil forces.

The most important part of the story involves Trisha fighting a bear, which she considers to be the embodiment of the "God of the Lost." Her fear of the bear symbolizes her confrontation with death and her own primal instincts. In this moment, her courage is intensified as she stands up to the bear, an act of rebellion against the "evil" that has pursued her.

Tom Gordon, Trisha's imaginary friend, represents hope, faith, and the ability to stay calm under pressure. His symbolic presence is the opposite to the "God of the Lost," suggesting that good and evil are not just external but also internal choices in the face of adversity.

Trisha's association with "evil" in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* is not about her being connected to some entity and more about her confrontation with fear, despair, and the indifferent cruelty of nature. The novel ultimately portrays her as a symbol of strength and the human spirit's capacity to endure in the face of overwhelming odds. It is also the only book on this list that does not have a real evil entity.

9 Firestarter

Charlie McGee is the protagonist of Stephen King's *Firestarter*. A young girl with extraordinary pyrokinetic abilities, which consists of her creating and controlling fire with her mind. Her powers are the result of a government experimenting on her parents before her birth. These characteristics and her narrative carry a mix of awe, fear, and moral ambiguity, but she is not naturally evil.

9.1 Charlie McGee's Pyrotechnic Powers

Charlie's powers manifest as an uncontrollable ability to set objects (or people) on fire through intense focus or emotion. Her powers grow stronger with time, which leads to catastrophic consequences when she loses control.

Despite her destructive abilities, Charlie is overall a kind-hearted and innocent child. She struggles to understand and control her powers, which makes her more sympathetic rather than evil.

Charlie often feels guilty for the damage she causes, especially when her powers unintentionally hurt others. She is deeply bonded with her father, Andy, and many of her actions involve trying to protect him.

Charlie is constantly chased by the sinister government agency called *The Shop*, which seeks to steal and use her abilities for military purposes. This constant threat creates fear and mistrust in her, making her use her powers as a survival mechanism.

As Charlie grows older, her powers border on almost apocalyptic scale. This huge potential creates fear in those around her and raises questions about whether anyone, even a child, should possess such power.

9.2 Charlie's Evil

While Charlie is not evil herself, her abilities and the destruction they cause lead others to associate her with fear and danger, which are often linked to the definition of evil.

Charlie's powers are capable of incredible destruction, and when unleashed in intense moments of anger or desperation, they can seem terrifyingly uncontrollable. This

corresponds with the type of power as a potential source of evil when not altered by morality or control.

The fear others feel toward Charlie has originated from the unpredictability and destructive potential of her abilities. People tend to associate the unknown or uncontrollable with evil.

The Shop represents an evil institution that wants to turn Charlie into a weapon. Her association with these forces could lead some to look at her as a potential tool of destruction rather than a human being.

Fire is often a symbol of judgment, destruction, and divine wrath in many cultures, which might imply the perception of Charlie as a figure associated with apocalyptic images or moral awakening.

9.3 Charlie's Personality

Charlie McGee is a very complex character who represents the duality of innocence and destructive potential. Her association with evil is less about her nature and more about social fears of power that define control, the exploitation of that power by corrupt forces, and the horrifying consequences of human experimentation. She is, ultimately, a tragic figure caught in a moral and existential struggle.

10 Relationships between Children and Their Parents in Stephen King's Books

Stephen King is a master of exploring the, often deeply disturbing, relationships between children and their parents. Many of his most famous works, including *It*, *Firestarter*, *Carrie*, *Pet Sematary*, *The Shining*, and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, revolve around children whose relationships with their parents shape them in often horrifying ways. In these stories, parents take on many different roles. Some are cruel, abusive, or neglectful, while others are protective and loving but ultimately powerless to save their children from the darkness that surrounds them. In King's world, the scariest monsters aren't always supernatural. Sometimes they're the people children depend on the most.

10.1 IT

In *It*, the members of the Losers' Club all come from troubled homes where their parents, rather than being sources of safety and comfort, are either abusive, neglectful, or completely disconnected from their children's suffering.

10.1.1 Beverly and Alvin Marsh

One of the most disturbing relationships in the novel is that of Beverly Marsh and her parents, particularly her father Alvin Marsh. Beverly's relationship with her mother is relatively underdeveloped, but there is implied dynamic of neglect and passive complicity. Her father, on the other hand, is a dominant force in her life, shaping her fears and behaviors through his actions.

Alvin Marsh is an extremely controlling and abusive figure in Beverly's life. His form of abuse is both physical and, in many interpretations, heavily implied to be sexual. He exhibits an obsessive need to control Beverly, particularly concerning her emerging femininity. Throughout the novel, his aggression manifests in beatings and invasive questioning about her interactions with boys, which suggests deep possessiveness and possibly inappropriate desires.

Beverly lives in constant fear of her father, which significantly impacts her self-esteem and relationships. He uses intimidation and violence to maintain dominance, making her feel a sense of powerlessness. His actions force the idea that she is not in control of her own body or destiny, a theme that follows her into adulthood, where she enters an abusive relationship with her husband, Tom Rogan, a direct parallel to her father.

While Alvin Marsh is a very violent presence, Beverly's mother is largely absent, both physically and emotionally. The novel hints that Beverly's mother is aware of the abuse but does nothing to stop it. This neglect further isolates Beverly, forcing her to fight for herself against her father's rage. The lack of maternal protection deepens her trauma, as she has no safe space or parental figure to turn to.

Beverly's mother's absence also contributes to the theme of generational trauma. It is implied that she too may have been a victim of Alvin Marsh's control and violence, leading to her passive acceptance of his treatment of their daughter. This pattern of abuse

is reflected in Beverly's later life choices, as she unconsciously seeks out relationships that mirror her dysfunctional upbringing.

The trauma Beverly experiences at the hands of her father shapes her identity and decision-making well into adulthood. One of the most significant ways this manifests is in her marriage to Tom Rogan, who is physically abusive and controlling, much like her father. This repetition of trauma highlights a common psychological pattern where survivors of childhood abuse find themselves drawn to familiar dynamics, even when they are harmful.

However, Beverly's story is also one of resilience. Her friendships with the Losers' Club provide her with a sense of belonging and strength, allowing her to confront her fears. Her return to Derry as an adult symbolizes her journey to reclaim autonomy and break free from the cycle of abuse. In standing up to Pennywise and later escaping her abusive marriage, Beverly begins to dismantle the damage inflicted upon her by her parents, proving that while trauma shapes individuals, it does not have to define them.

10.1.2 Eddie and Sonia Kaspbrak

Among the many well-developed characters, Eddie Kaspbrak stands out due to his complicated and often toxic relationship with his mother, Sonia Kaspbrak, and the absent role of his father. Through an exploration of Eddie's parental influences, we can better understand his personality, his fears, and ultimately, his journey toward self-liberation.

Eddie's relationship with his mother is one of excessive control and emotional manipulation. Sonia Kaspbrak is characterized by her overprotectiveness, which extends beyond normal parental concern into psychological abuse. She makes Eddie believe he is weak and sick. This form of abuse serves to keep Eddie dependent on her, instilling in him a profound sense of fear and insecurity.

Sonia's control over Eddie shows in several ways, from limiting his independence to dictating his social interactions. She actively discourages him from forming bonds with his friends, believing that the outside world is too dangerous. This emotional manipulation modifies Eddie's perception of reality, making him feel powerless and reinforcing his dependence on her. Through these actions, King paints Sonia as an overbearing and toxic parental figure whose influence stunts Eddie's emotional growth.

Eddie's father, unlike his mother, is a mostly absent figure, having died when Eddie was very young. His absence leaves a void that allows Sonia to take total control over Eddie's upbringing. The lack of a paternal role model denies Eddie the opportunity to develop a sense of masculinity or independence, leaving him vulnerable to his mother's authority.

Without a father figure, Eddie struggles with self-assertion and confidence. His timid and anxious nature can be traced back to the one-sided parental relationship he has with his mother. While other members of the Losers' Club, such as Bill and Ben, have father figures who provide them with guidance (even if imperfectly), Eddie is left to navigate the challenges of childhood with only his mother's suffocating presence. This absence of a counterbalance to Sonia's control makes it even harder for Eddie to break free from her influence.

As an adult, Eddie's relationship with his mother continues to affect him. He marries a woman, Myra, who mirrors Sonia in her controlling and overbearing nature. This suggests that Eddie, having been conditioned to equate control with care, subconsciously seeks out the same dynamic in his adult relationships. His inability to recognize or break free from this pattern speaks to the deep psychological scars left by his upbringing.

However, Eddie's character in IT does allow for moments of growth and self-awareness. When he returns to Derry, he begins to see through the lies and manipulations that shaped his childhood. Confronting Pennywise serves as a symbolic confrontation of his fears, including those instilled in him by his mother. His eventual bravery in the face of the monster represents his ability to reclaim his own identity, even though it comes at the cost of his life.

10.1.3 Bill, Zach and Sharon Denbrough

Bill Denbrough, the leader of the Losers' Club, has a very strained relationship with his parents, Zach and Sharon Denbrough. This relationship, largely shaped by the tragic death of Bill's younger brother, Georgie, serves as a powerful exploration of grief, guilt, and emotional neglect. Bill's dynamic with his parents is marked by emotional distance, unspoken pain, and eventual recognition of their inability to provide him with the comfort he desperately needs.

The tragic death of Georgie Denbrough is the starting point for the destruction of Bill's relationship with his parents. At the beginning of the novel, the Denbrough family is portrayed as a relatively typical household, but everything changes when Georgie is killed by Pennywise while playing outside in the rain. The loss devastates Zach and Sharon, leaving them emotionally unavailable to Bill, who is also fighting with his own grief. Rather than turning to each other for support, the Denbrough family becomes fragmented, with Zach and Sharon withdrawing into their sorrow and Bill being left to navigate his pain alone.

Bill's parents, particularly his father, appear to blame him, at least subconsciously, for Georgie's death. Georgie had been playing outside with a paper boat that Bill made for him, making Bill feel indirectly responsible for his brother's fate. Although his parents never outright accuse him, their behavior suggests that they associate him with the loss. The love and warmth that once characterized their family life are replaced by an oppressive silence. The lack of open communication regarding Georgie's death creates a chasm between Bill and his parents, reinforcing his feelings of isolation.

One of the most striking aspects of Bill's relationship with his parents is their emotional detachment following Georgie's death. Throughout the novel, Bill repeatedly experiences their cold indifference, particularly from his mother. Sharon Denbrough, once a loving and affectionate mother, becomes withdrawn and distant. She rarely speaks to Bill, and when she does, her words lack warmth or affection. Her grief seems to consume her to the point where she is unable to acknowledge Bill's suffering, creating a sense of loneliness in her son.

Zach Denbrough, on the other hand, exhibits his detachment in different ways. In one particularly significant scene, Bill attempts to use his father's typewriter, only for Zach to lash out at him angrily. The interaction is a rare moment of open confrontation, showcasing Zach's suppressed anger and sorrow. Rather than expressing his emotions constructively, Zach channels his pain into outbursts that push Bill further away. His inability to communicate effectively with his son creates an emotional barrier that has developed between them.

Deprived of parental support, Bill turns to his friends in the Losers' Club for emotional support. This group of misfits, all of whom are struggling with their own forms of pain

and neglect, provides Bill with the sense of belonging that he no longer receives at home. With the Losers, Bill can openly express his grief, anger, and determination to defeat Pennywise. The things he cannot do in the presence of his parents.

His obsession with defeating Pennywise is, in many ways, an attempt to find closure for Georgie's death, something his parents are unable to help him achieve. By confronting the monster responsible for Georgie's demise, Bill seeks to reclaim control over a situation that left him feeling helpless and unworthy of his parents' love. His relentless pursuit of Pennywise is not just about stopping the creature—it is also about proving to himself that he is not responsible for his brother's fate.

10.1.4 – Ben and Arlene Hanscom

Ben Hanscom is raised by his single mother, Arlene Hanscom, after the death of his father. His mother works tirelessly to support the two of them, which results in a relationship that, while caring, lacks warmth and open affection.

Arlene loves Ben, but her love is often expressed through worry and concern rather than emotional connection. She is overprotective, largely due to the loss of her husband in the Korean War. This fear translates into strictness, particularly regarding Ben's eating habits. Rather than fostering self-confidence, her concern about his weight inadvertently exacerbates his insecurities. She provides for him physically, ensuring he has a home and food, but her emotional support is limited, leaving Ben to navigate his emotions largely on his own.

Ben's father died before he ever had the chance to form memories of him. The absence of a father figure significantly affects Ben, leaving a void in his life. Without a paternal presence, he lacks the guidance and confidence that a father might have instilled in him. In contrast to other members of the Losers' Club, like Bill Denbrough and Eddie Kaspbrak, who at least have father figures—however flawed—Ben grows up without any male role model in his home life.

Despite this absence, Ben idealizes his father, envisioning him as a heroic figure. This longing is evident in his daydreams, where he imagines what it would have been like to have his father around. However, these dreams only deepen his sense of isolation, as they remind him of what he is missing.

Ben's home life is one of solitude. His mother, though present, is often emotionally unavailable, and his father is permanently absent. As a result, Ben spends much of his childhood alone, turning to books and academic pursuits for comfort. His loneliness makes him an easy target for bullies like Henry Bowers, as he lacks the confidence or support to defend himself effectively.

This isolation, however, also fosters his resilience. Unlike some of the other Losers who struggle more with dependency on their parents, Ben learns early on to be self-sufficient. His ability to work through problems on his own contributes to his later success as an architect. His isolation also allows him to appreciate the friendships he forms with the Losers' Club more deeply, as they become the family he never truly had.

10.1.5 Richie Tozier and His Parents

Richie Tozier, one of the core members of the Losers' Club in Stephen King's *IT*, is characterized by his humor, relentless energy, and his loudmouth nature. However, beneath his comedic bravado lies a deep sense of neglect and emotional disconnection, particularly in relation to his parents. Unlike some of the other members of the Losers' Club, who suffer from overt abuse or trauma, Richie's struggles are rooted in emotional distance and dismissiveness from his family. His relationship with his parents—especially compared to those of his peers—reveals a profound lack of support that contributes to his larger-than-life personality and his reliance on humor as a defense mechanism.

Throughout *IT*, Richie's parents are portrayed as largely indifferent to him. Unlike Bill Denbrough, who is deeply affected by the loss of his younger brother Georgie, or Beverly Marsh, who endures physical and emotional abuse from her father, Richie's primary issue is one of neglect. His parents do not seem to take his interests, personality, or concerns seriously. This emotional distance is evident in their minimal presence in Richie's life and in their lack of engagement with his personal struggles.

One of the most telling aspects of Richie's home life is that his humor and voice impressions—elements that define his personality—are often dismissed rather than encouraged. His parents, especially his mother, frequently scold him for being too loud, too obnoxious, or too much of a troublemaker. Rather than seeing his humor as a gift or

a unique part of his identity, they treat it as an annoyance, which further alienates Richie and pushes him to find validation among his friends instead.

Richie's parents' lack of emotional investment in him significantly shapes his need for attention. In the absence of parental affirmation, Richie compensates by becoming the loudest voice in any room. His exaggerated antics, impressions, and jokes serve not only as a form of entertainment for his friends but also as a way for him to assert his presence in a world where he often feels overlooked.

Moreover, Richie's reliance on humor functions as a coping mechanism. While he does not face the same level of abuse as Beverly or Eddie, the emotional neglect he experiences fosters a deep-seated insecurity. He deflects from serious conversations and masks any personal pain with jokes because, to him, vulnerability is not an option. This defense mechanism becomes particularly evident in moments of tension, such as when the Losers' Club faces Pennywise. Rather than expressing fear openly, Richie often responds with sarcasm and comedic exaggerations, using humor as a shield against the darkness around him.

Because of his distant relationship with his parents, Richie finds a true family in the Losers' Club. Bill, Beverly, Eddie, Stan, Mike, and Ben serve as his emotional support system in a way that his parents never do. They appreciate his humor, validate his personality, and—most importantly—take him seriously when it matters most. Unlike his parents, who dismiss his fears and concerns, the Losers acknowledge his struggles and accept him as he is.

This contrast highlights why Richie remains so loyal to his friends. His relationship with them is built on mutual trust and understanding—qualities that are absent from his interactions with his parents. This lack of parental support makes his bond with the Losers' Club even more significant, as it provides him with a sense of belonging and emotional security.

10.1.6 – Mike, Will and Nell Hanlon

One of the most nuanced familial relationships in the book is that of Mike Hanlon and his parents, Will and Nell Hanlon. As the only Black member of the group, Mike's home life differs significantly from that of his friends, not only due to racial tensions in Derry but

also because of the deep-rooted trauma and wisdom passed down from his parents. This paper explores the complex relationship between Mike and his parents, focusing on themes of protection, trauma, and the transmission of historical knowledge.

Mike's father, Will Hanlon, is a strong but deeply traumatized man. As a World War II veteran and a Black man in a predominantly white town, Will has faced extreme racism and violence, shaping his worldview and parenting style. He imparts the harsh realities of life to Mike, often in a blunt and unfiltered manner. Will's stories about racial violence and the fire at The Black Spot—a club for Black soldiers that was burned down by the Legion of White Decency—serve as both warnings and historical lessons. His intention is to prepare Mike for a world that may not be kind to him, making his parenting style more rigid and serious than that of other parents in Derry. Despite his stern demeanor, Will deeply loves Mike and wants to ensure his survival in a society that often seeks to diminish or erase Black voices.

Mike's mother, Nell Hanlon, serves as a more traditionally nurturing figure, counterbalancing Will's harsh lessons with warmth and comfort. However, she is not oblivious to the dangers her son faces. Like Will, she understands that Mike must be aware of the world's cruelty, but she strives to protect his innocence as long as possible. Nell's role is crucial in providing Mike with emotional security, allowing him to maintain a sense of hope and resilience despite the dark realities he faces. Her influence helps him remain compassionate and deeply connected to his sense of justice, traits that later define his role as the town historian.

The relationship between Mike and his parents is deeply rooted in the transmission of historical trauma. Unlike the other members of the Losers' Club, whose parents are largely neglectful or abusive, Mike's parents are actively engaged in his upbringing, albeit in different ways. Will and Nell do not have the luxury of shielding Mike from the horrors of Derry because their lived experiences have taught them that knowledge and vigilance are necessary for survival. Will teaches Mike about the town's dark history, ensuring that he understands the cyclical nature of violence and the importance of remembering the past.

This differs sharply from the way the other Losers experience parental guidance. For instance, Bill Denbrough's parents retreat into grief following Georgie's death, Beverly

Marsh suffers from her father's abuse, and Eddie Kaspbrak is suffocated by his mother's overprotectiveness. Mike, however, has parents who actively guide him, making his upbringing one of the most stable among the group, despite the constant presence of racial hostility.

A key aspect of Mike's character is his role as the keeper of Derry's history. This responsibility stems directly from his father, who ensures that Mike understands the importance of remembering and recording the past. Will's stories about The Black Spot and other instances of racial violence in Derry are meant to educate and prepare Mike, but they also instill in him a deep appreciation for history. This ultimately leads to Mike staying behind in Derry as an adult, serving as the town librarian and chronicling its dark secrets. In many ways, his father's teachings not only shape his survival skills but also his purpose.

10.1.7 – Stanley, Patricia and Donald Uris

Stanley Uris is the son of a Jewish family living in Derry, Maine. His father, Donald Uris, is a strict and often cold individual, whereas his mother, Mrs. Uris, appears more passive and less emotionally engaged in Stanley's life. The family dynamic is one marked by a lack of warmth, emotional connection, and nurturing, which stands in stark contrast to the more supportive and affectionate relationships that some of the other Losers experience. Stanley's parents, especially his father, have high expectations for him, placing him in a position where he feels compelled to meet the standard of success set before him, but without the emotional backing to do so.

Donald Uris's relationship with Stanley is predominantly based on criticism and the high hopes he places on his son. Donald's high expectations are often unspoken but implicitly understood. Stanley feels the pressure to succeed in the way his father desires, but the emotional distance between them leads to feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Donald's disapproval is a central feature of Stanley's early life, leaving him with a deep-seated fear of failure that manifests itself in his later struggles.

Stanley's mother, while less domineering than his father, still provides little emotional comfort or support. Mrs. Uris does not intervene in the strained relationship between Stanley and his father, and she seems to lack the ability to engage with Stanley on a deeper

emotional level. This lack of nurturing from both parents leaves Stanley emotionally adrift, unable to form strong, trusting relationships outside of his immediate family.

The Uris family's emotional neglect directly contributes to Stanley's development of avoidance behaviors, particularly his tendency to suppress his feelings and fears. Throughout the novel, Stanley's emotional withdrawal is one of his defining traits. He avoids confrontation and often chooses not to deal with his emotions directly, opting instead for detachment. This behavior can be traced back to his upbringing, where he was conditioned to avoid emotional engagement in favor of maintaining a façade of success and composure.

Stanley's fear of failure, instilled by his father, is compounded by his inability to connect with his parents on an emotional level. This fear manifests in his later life as an adult, where he avoids facing difficult truths and suppresses his deeper emotions, including his fears of IT. Stanley's reluctance to engage with his fears is also reflected in his role within the Losers' Club. While the other members of the group confront their own personal fears head-on, Stanley is often reluctant to face his own, and his fear of failure and disappointment holds him back from fully engaging with the battle against IT.

However, Stanley's avoidance is not entirely passive. It is also a coping mechanism he learned as a result of his strained relationship with his parents. The emotional repression instilled by his parents becomes a tool for Stanley to protect himself from further emotional pain, even if it ultimately prevents him from fully embracing his potential as part of the Losers' Club.

In IT, the Losers' greatest challenge is not just battling a malevolent entity but also confronting the personal fears that IT manifests in them. For Stanley, IT takes the form of his greatest fear: the fear of failure and the fear of disappointing his parents. These fears are a direct reflection of his upbringing, where his parents placed an overwhelming amount of pressure on him without providing emotional support. Stanley's fear of failure is so deeply ingrained in his psyche that it even influences his interactions with the other members of the Losers' Club.

When IT confronts Stanley in the form of his deepest fear, it reflects not just the terror of a monstrous entity, but also the anxiety and frustration that have been built up over years of living under the weight of his father's expectations. Stanley's reluctance to face IT is

a direct result of his long history of avoiding difficult emotions and situations. In the end, his struggle with IT is symbolic of his internal battle between confronting his fears and continuing to hide from them.

Despite his tendency to avoid confrontation, Stanley plays an important role within the Losers' Club. His emotional withdrawal does not render him useless or unimportant; instead, it shows that each member of the group has something unique to contribute, even if that contribution is not always based on direct confrontation. Stanley's ability to remain calm in the face of danger, even when he is unable to fully embrace his fears, provides a steadying influence on the group during their battle against IT. His role is one of emotional containment, a characteristic that comes from his need to maintain control and composure despite his inner turmoil.

Stanley's relationship with his parents, in particular his father, contributes to his ability to control his emotions in difficult situations, though it also prevents him from fully engaging with his fears and emotions. His avoidance, while a protective measure, ultimately limits his growth and his ability to truly face the darkness within himself and the world around him.

10.2 Carrie – The Horror of a Mother's Fanaticism

Carrie White's relationship with her mother, Margaret White, is one of the most terrifying depictions of parental abuse in horror literature. Margaret is not just controlling—she is a religious fanatic who views her daughter as a vessel for sin. Margaret's abuse of Carrie is both physical and psychological. She punishes her for normal biological processes, such as menstruation, and forces her into prayer closets for hours, making her feel shame for even existing. Carrie, despite her abilities, is powerless against her mother—at least, for most of the novel. Margaret's hold over her is absolute, built through years of control and fear. When Carrie finally fights back, it is an explosive, cathartic moment—but it comes too late. The years of trauma have already shaped Carrie's destiny, and her telekinetic outburst leads to the destruction of not just her mother, but herself. Carrie's tragedy is that she was never given a chance. She could have been a normal girl, but Margaret's fanaticism ensured that she would always be an outcast.

10.3 The Shining – The Terrifying Reality of an Abusive, Addicted Father

Danny Torrance's relationship with his father, Jack, is fraught with fear and instability. Jack loves Danny, but he is also a violent alcoholic, and his past abuse of Danny leaves the boy constantly on edge. Wendy, Danny's mother, tries to be protective, but she is ultimately powerless, much like many of King's female characters in abusive family dynamics. Danny's psychic abilities make him hyper-aware of his father's descent into madness, making the Overlook Hotel's corruption of Jack even more terrifying. In the end, Jack's love for Danny surfaces briefly, but it is too late. The damage has already been done.

10.4 Pet Sematary – A Father's Love Taken to a Monstrous Extreme

Louis Creed's relationship with his children, particularly his son Gage, is one of deep love—but also one of obsession. Louis is a caring father, but when Gage dies in a tragic accident, his love turns into something dark and unnatural. His grief is so unbearable that he turns to the cursed burial ground, hoping to undo what cannot be undone. Gage, when resurrected, is not the same—he becomes something monstrous. The horror of Pet Sematary is not just about the supernatural, but about how a parent's inability to accept death can lead to ultimate destruction. Ellie, his daughter, is largely overshadowed, highlighting how his grief over Gage consumes him completely, making him blind to his living child's needs.

10.5 The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon – A Child's Search for Parental Comfort

Trisha McFarland's parents are not abusive, but they are distracted by their divorce, leaving her feeling invisible. When Trisha gets lost in the woods, her parents are not there to protect her, forcing her to rely on her own instincts. Her imagined protector, baseball player Tom Gordon, represents the parental comfort she lacks in real life. Trisha's story is about survival, both physically and emotionally. She learns to rely on herself when her parents cannot.

10.6 Firestarter

In *Firestarter*, Charlie McGee's relationship with her father, Andy, is one of the most profound depictions of parental love in King's work. Unlike the neglectful or abusive parents in *It*, Andy is a devoted father who will do anything to protect Charlie from the dangers that lurk around her. Charlie's mother, Vicky, was also loving but was murdered by The Shop, the secret government agency hunting them. Her death leaves Andy as Charlie's sole guardian, and his protective instincts become the driving force of the novel. Andy's relationship with Charlie is built on trust and sacrifice. He knows the immense danger she poses with her pyrokinetic abilities, but rather than fearing her, he teaches her control and emotional resilience. The world sees Charlie as a weapon, but Andy never stops seeing her as his daughter. However, Andy's own abilities, the result of past government experiments, have damaged him physically, making him weak and vulnerable over time. This adds an extra layer of tragedy—he loves Charlie, but he cannot protect her forever. Unlike many other King stories, where parents fail their children, *Firestarter* presents a father who does everything right, but in the end, the forces against him are too great. It is an exploration of how love alone is sometimes not enough to save a child from the cruelty of the world.

11 Relationship Between Child and Evil in Stephen King's Books

Stephen King's horror is never just about monsters. His evil forces are not mindless creatures lurking in the dark, but intimate, calculating, and deeply personal entities that understand their victims in ways no human ever could. They prey on the fragile vulnerabilities of children, twisting their fears, feeding off their pain, and, in many cases, exploiting the wounds left by broken parental relationships.

Evil in King's stories does not simply attack—it knows. It whispers, seduces, corrupts, and manipulates, often turning those closest to the child into tools of their own destruction.

In this analysis, we will explore the deeply complex and terrifying relationships between children and the evil forces that haunt them in *It*, *Firestarter*, *Carrie*, *Pet Sematary*, *The Shining*, and *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*.

11.1. It

Pennywise the Dancing Clown is one of the most horrifying and sadistic villains in Stephen King's entire body of work. But Pennywise, or more accurately It, is not merely a monster—it is a psychological predator, a shape-shifting force that feeds on fear and suffering, using its victims' worst nightmares as tools of destruction. And It reserves a special kind of cruelty for children.

Unlike a simple killer, Pennywise does not merely hunt down its prey. It studies them. It gets inside their heads. It picks at their deepest insecurities, exposing wounds that they may not even realize they have. The Losers' Club, a group of children already weakened by abusive, neglectful, or absent parents, are prime targets. And Pennywise plays them like instruments of their own fear.

11.1.1 Beverly Marsh

Beverly Marsh's greatest enemy should be Pennywise, but long before she ever sees the clown, she is already living in terror. Her father, Alvin Marsh, looms over her existence like a dark cloud, controlling every aspect of her life with a possessiveness that goes beyond simple parental authority. His "love" for Beverly is twisted, laced with inappropriate touches and veiled threats. Pennywise understands this.

When Beverly enters her bathroom and finds the sink gushing with blood, it is more than just a horror show—it is her fear made manifest. Blood, symbolic of her impending womanhood, is something that already terrifies her due to her father's unhealthy obsession with her purity. And yet, the most insidious aspect of Pennywise's trick is not the blood itself, but the fact that no one else can see it.

This is where Pennywise is at its most cruel. It does not need to kill Beverly to break her. It only needs to reinforce what her father has already taught her—that she is alone in her suffering, that no one will believe her, and that the world will allow the worst things to happen to her in silence.

11.1.2 Eddie Kaspbrak

Eddie Kaspbrak is not physically weak, but his mother has made him believe he is. From birth, she has controlled him through sickness, convincing him that he is fragile, delicate, and in constant need of medical intervention. His world is one of inhalers, medications, and rules. Pennywise sees this and takes advantage.

When It comes for Eddie, it does not appear as a fanged beast or a nightmarish vision—it appears as a leper, diseased and rotting, its body covered in sores that ooze with infection. This is not random. This is a manifestation of Eddie’s greatest fear—contamination, sickness, the loss of control over his own body. Pennywise does not just try to kill Eddie; It makes him question his own strength, to wonder if maybe his mother was right all along.

The horror of Eddie’s relationship with Pennywise is that even when he fights back, he is still bound by the psychological chains his mother has placed on him. Even as he grows, a part of him will always believe he is weak. And Pennywise will always be there to remind him.

11.1.3 Bill Denbrough

Of all the members of the Losers’ Club, none are haunted as deeply as Bill Denbrough. His little brother, Georgie, was murdered by Pennywise, and though he knows this intellectually, emotionally he cannot shake the feeling that he is responsible.

Pennywise exploits this mercilessly.

Throughout the novel, It taunts Bill, whispering in Georgie’s voice, mimicking his laugh, reenacting his final moments. Pennywise does not need to chase Bill—his own guilt does the work for It. Every time Bill hears his brother’s voice in the shadows, every time he sees that small yellow raincoat flickering just out of reach, he is reminded of his failure. And Pennywise feeds off of that pain.

The most terrifying aspect of Bill’s relationship with Pennywise is that, deep down, Pennywise does not create his guilt—it simply amplifies what was already there.

11.1.4 Ben Hanscom

Ben is one of the most vulnerable members of the Losers' Club, and Pennywise exploits his insecurities and fears to its advantage. As a young boy, Ben is overweight and is often bullied by his classmates. Pennywise senses these weaknesses and uses them to manipulate Ben, preying on his sense of isolation and loneliness.

One of the most significant interactions between Ben and Pennywise occurs when Ben is in the library, and Pennywise tempts him with a vision of a beautiful woman—a representation of his longing for affection and acceptance. Pennywise shifts its form into a "phantasm" of a woman, trying to make Ben feel special, but it is ultimately a trap. Pennywise wants to manipulate Ben's emotions and create a false sense of safety, all while leading him into a place where it can feed on his fear.

Pennywise's manipulation of Ben is deeper than just his physical appearance. It targets Ben's emotional vulnerabilities, trying to convince him that his loneliness and isolation are permanent. However, Ben's connection with the other Losers, especially Beverly Marsh, allows him to resist Pennywise's psychological manipulation. Ben is able to push through the fear Pennywise creates, ultimately helping to defeat the creature.

11.1.5 Richie Tozier

Richie, known for his quick wit, humor, and ability to mask his own insecurities with jokes, has a unique relationship with Pennywise. Despite Richie's outward bravado and jokes, he is deeply affected by the clown's terror. Pennywise recognizes that Richie's humor and confidence are just a front, hiding his fears and vulnerabilities. Pennywise capitalizes on Richie's fear by using his own insecurities against him.

One of the most terrifying encounters between Richie and Pennywise happens in the sewers when Richie faces the monstrous entity. Richie's greatest fear is not being seen for who he truly is, and Pennywise takes the form of the monstrous creatures from Richie's past, including the terrifying image of a leper, designed to remind him of a grotesque, twisted version of himself. This manifestation forces Richie to confront his deep-set fears about being an outcast, and the clown's form plays on his own self-doubt.

Although Richie is frightened, his ability to deflect fear with humor and wit becomes a key tool in his ability to resist Pennywise's mental manipulations. The Losers' Club, especially their bond with each other, helps Richie find the courage to face Pennywise's fears head-on.

11.1.6 Mike Hanlon

Mike Hanlon's relationship with Pennywise is particularly unique because of Mike's role as the historian of the group. Unlike the others, Mike stays behind in Derry to research the origins of Pennywise, piecing together the truth about the entity while the other Losers leave town and grow up. Throughout this time, Mike experiences a great deal of isolation, as his memories of the events of childhood are difficult to reconcile with the more normal life he has as an adult.

Pennywise, understanding that Mike is the one most dedicated to uncovering the truth about its existence, actively works to break him. Throughout the novel, Pennywise tries to get inside Mike's head, making him feel the weight of isolation. It creates terrifying visions and lures him into various dangerous situations, often in an attempt to drive him mad. The entity even uses its ability to manipulate time and reality to make Mike feel trapped in the town of Derry.

Despite these horrific encounters, Mike's determination to defeat Pennywise is fueled by his understanding of the creature's origins, the mythology of the town, and the bonds he shares with the other Losers. His role as the one who gathers the group back together is critical to their ultimate success in confronting Pennywise. Mike's fight with Pennywise is less about individual fear and more about resisting the weight of history and memory, as Pennywise represents the cyclical nature of evil that resurfaces in Derry every 27 years.

11.1.7 Stanley Uris

Stanley Uris, who is often seen as the most pragmatic and rational member of the Losers' Club, has a particularly tragic and heartbreaking relationship with Pennywise. While he is extremely intelligent, his reaction to fear is one of extreme avoidance. Stanley's fear of confronting things he cannot control or rationalize is exactly what Pennywise exploits.

Stanley's encounter with Pennywise is deeply psychological. Throughout the novel, Pennywise plays on Stanley's deepest fear: the loss of control and the idea that the universe is inherently chaotic. This fear is shown when Pennywise shapes itself into a spider, representing the ultimate incomprehensible and uncontrollable force. Pennywise uses this to terrorize Stanley, who is so terrified by the lack of control that he becomes paralyzed.

In the final battle in the sewers, Stanley's fear overpowers him. Despite his great intelligence, he is unable to overcome the psychological terror Pennywise instills in him. Stanley's decision to take his own life before returning to Derry as an adult is tragic, as he can't face the reality of the monster and the fight that must be fought. In the movie adaptations, Stanley is still affected deeply by the memories of his encounter with Pennywise, and in some versions, his death serves as a grim reminder of the strength Pennywise holds over the Losers.

11.2 Firestarter

Charlie McGee is not being hunted by a supernatural entity, but by something just as terrifying—The Shop, a secret government agency that wants to use her pyrokinetic abilities as a weapon. But while The Shop is the main force of evil in *Firestarter*, it is John Rainbird who embodies its most terrifying aspect—the corruption of trust. John Rainbird – The Predator in Disguise. Rainbird is a different kind of monster. Unlike Pennywise or the Wendigo, he does not attack head-on. He is patient. He understands that fear is powerful, but love is even more dangerous. When Charlie is captured, Rainbird does not treat her like an enemy. Instead, he befriends her. He becomes a father figure, a source of comfort in a cold, sterile prison. He listens to her. He teaches her. He makes her feel safe. And all of it is a lie. Rainbird is a killer, a government assassin who has no interest in Charlie beyond the destruction she can unleash. He wants to see her break. He wants to witness the full force of her power, not out of scientific curiosity, but because he is obsessed with death. He is fascinated by the idea of watching a child transform into an unstoppable force of destruction, and he will do whatever it takes to make that happen. Rainbird's evil is not in what he does, but in what he pretends to be. He offers Charlie something she desperately craves—love, understanding, a parental presence. And when the time is right, he plans to rip it all away.

11.3 Carrie

Carrie White's torment doesn't come from a single entity, but from a world that has conditioned her to believe she is nothing. The forces that shape her destruction are both internal and external, and her relationship with her own power is complex. *Carrie and Her Own Powers*: Carrie's telekinesis is not a gift—it is a slow-burning curse, tied to her emotions. It is both an extension of her rage and a desperate attempt to regain control. For years, she has been powerless, but as her abilities grow, so does her sense of agency. Unfortunately, that power is fueled by pain and humiliation, and when she finally unleashes it, it is uncontrollable. *The Evil of Margaret White*: If Carrie's powers are the smoldering fire within her, her mother is the one who keeps throwing gasoline on the flames. Margaret White, a religious zealot, does not just punish Carrie—she convinces her that she deserves punishment. She warps Carrie's perception of herself so completely that when the world finally turns on her, she does not question whether she should destroy it. Her final confrontation with her mother is both terrifying and tragic—Carrie kills her, but in doing so, she destroys the last part of herself that was seeking love. Carrie's evil is different from Pennywise or the Overlook—it is the result of years of mistreatment, a force that she never asked for but can no longer contain.

11.4 Pet Sematary

In *Pet Sematary*, the Wendigo is never fully seen, but its influence is felt in every shadow. It is an ancient, malevolent force that seeps into the minds of grieving parents, whispering promises that should never be fulfilled. *Louis Creed and the Wendigo's Whisper*: The Wendigo does not force Louis to bury his son in the cursed ground—it simply plants the idea in his mind. The true horror of *Pet Sematary* is that Louis chooses to listen. He knows it is wrong, but the Wendigo preys on his love and grief, turning it into his downfall. *Gage's Resurrection*: When Gage returns, he is no longer his father's son. The Wendigo has twisted him into something grotesque, something that mocks the love Louis once had. The ultimate horror is not just Gage's death, but the realization that Louis brought him back—not to save him, but to satisfy his own inability to let go. The Wendigo's evil is the most subtle—it does not need to attack. It simply waits, knowing that human weakness will do its work for it.

11.5 The Shining

The Overlook Hotel is not just haunted—it is alive, and it wants Danny Torrance. The Hotel's Seduction of Jack: The Overlook understands that the easiest way to get to Danny is through his father. Jack Torrance, already vulnerable due to his alcoholism and violent tendencies, is slowly turned against his own son. The hotel knows exactly how to manipulate him, playing on his insecurities, his failures, and his rage. Jack's transformation into a monster is not a possession—it is a slow, inevitable corruption. Danny's Resistance: Unlike other King protagonists, Danny knows what is happening. His psychic abilities allow him to see the hotel's true nature, but he is still just a child. He watches as his father becomes something terrifying, and the ultimate horror is not the hotel itself, but the realization that his own father is trying to kill him. The Overlook's evil is patient, insidious, and deeply personal. It does not just want Danny's soul—it wants to destroy the love between father and son, turning a place of safety into a death trap.

11.6 The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon

In *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, the evil entity is represented by The God of the Lost as Trisha named it. From the beginning of the novel, Trisha is aware that she is fighting against not just the physical dangers of the wilderness, but also a supernatural force that has marked her. Her battle against this force is as much psychological as it is physical.

The God of the Lost represents the all-consuming terror of being lost and alone. The longer Trisha is in the woods, the more the creature becomes an inescapable reality. It seems to exist to break her will, feeding off her fear like a predator stalking its wounded prey. However, Trisha, despite her young age, refuses to give in to this fear completely. Her survival instincts and her deep admiration for Tom Gordon—whom she imagines as a guardian figure in her mind—become her primary defenses.

Throughout her journey, Trisha hallucinates, seeing Tom Gordon as a guiding presence. She imagines herself as a pitcher on the mound, using her mental fortitude the same way Gordon does in high-pressure baseball games. She turns her fight against the entity into a kind of mental "game," seeing herself as the underdog who must outlast the opponent.

This coping mechanism helps her resist the despair and fear that the entity tries to instill in her.

Near the end of the novel, Trisha finally comes face-to-face with the entity, which now takes a more physical form—a monstrous bear. However, it is implied that this is not just an ordinary bear but something more—a vessel for the God of the Lost, or a final test meant to break her completely.

Despite being weak and exhausted, Trisha stands her ground. She does something extraordinary for a child in such a dire situation: she "strikes out" the monster in her mind, mimicking the way Tom Gordon closes out a baseball game. She physically fights back, throwing her Walkman at the creature as if it were a baseball. In this symbolic moment, she rejects fear, proving that she has not been conquered by the wilderness or the entity that lurks within it.

Just as the bear is about to attack, Trisha is rescued by hunters. This moment reinforces the idea that her endurance and resilience saved her—she managed to survive long enough to escape the grasp of the God of the Lost.

12 Conclusion

This thesis focuses mainly on Stephen King's novels and their alignment with traditional American gothic literature and how child characters act and react in his horror setting, how they differ from each other and what personality traits they possess.

The theoretical part focuses on American Gothic literature grew out of European Gothic traditions, but adapted to the unique culture and anxieties of America and how Stephen King took those traditional traits and put them into modern writing.

Traditional Gothic fiction, with its dark castles, supernatural forces, and themes of madness and fear, often focused on social and moral decay. American Gothic, however, shifted the focus to isolation, the hidden darkness in everyday life, and the idea that evil can exist within ordinary people and places.

Stephen King's novels keep many of the same features—haunted houses, terrifying creatures, and deep psychological fear—but they are often set in familiar, contemporary environments. What makes King's horror unique is how he often explains the supernatural, grounding it in psychological or scientific ideas. While the traditional Gothic often kept the supernatural mysterious, King makes it feel more real by exploring how it affects people's minds, emotions, and relationships.

The main difference between traditional Gothic and King's horror is how they treat fear. In classic Gothic stories, fear often comes from mysterious or unavoidable forces, like curses or ghosts. In King's work, fear is more personal, coming from the inside of people themselves, whether through trauma, evil desires, or mental instability. This shift reflects the modern world's fears—how personal struggles and societal pressures can turn into something truly terrifying.

In the practical part the focus is mainly on how Stephen King portrays children in his novels. King's child characters are diverse, but they all face some form of horror, whether it's supernatural or psychological. These children often show bravery and resilience, but they also reveal their vulnerability in the face of evil. Their relationships with their parents and the evil forces around them shape who they become.

In *It*, the children of the Losers' Club face the evil of Pennywise, but they also struggle with personal fears linked to their parents. Beverly, for example, deals with an abusive father, which shows how trauma at home can be just as scary as the supernatural threats they face.

In *Pet Sematary*, Gage Creed's tragic death and resurrection shows how fear and grief can lead to bad decisions. His parents' desperation to bring him back from the dead ends in horror, illustrating the dangers of trying to defy nature.

Firestarter's Charlie McGee is a powerful child, with abilities that scare others. Her strong bond with her father is central to her story, but she also faces the fear of being controlled by others because of her powers. Unlike other children, Charlie's struggles are not just with evil forces, but with her own power and control over it.

Danny Torrance in *The Shining* has psychic abilities that let him see the evil in the Overlook Hotel. His relationship with his abusive father, Jack, makes him especially vulnerable to the hotel's horrors. His mother, Wendy, tries to protect him, but ultimately she can't stop the evil around them.

In *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, Trisha McFarland doesn't face supernatural evil, but the real terror of being lost in the woods. Her imagination and belief in a baseball player, Tom Gordon, help her survive, showing how children can use hope and belief to get through tough situations.

Finally, Carrie tells the story of a girl whose abusive, religious mother causes her to develop destructive powers. Carrie's story is different because, instead of fighting evil, she becomes the source of terror herself. Her relationship with her mother leads to her tragic downfall.

Overall, King's child characters are all shaped by their parents and their battles with both personal and external evil. They represent different aspects of childhood, from fear and innocence to strength and power, but they all highlight the struggle to survive in a world filled with both human and supernatural horrors.

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