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Selected Short Stories by Stephen King and Their Film Adaptations  
Bachelor Thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne:

Podpis: .....

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## Introduction

Since the beginning of time, fear has been an enormous part of our lives. The annihilating feeling of terror is distinctly familiar to everyone and has been intuitively linked to negative connotations in people's minds. The impulse to distance oneself from these odd sensations is entirely reasonable; it is understandable that some people find the feeling of shivers creeping down their spine uncomfortable and prefer to avoid this at all costs. However, Stephen King does not belong to this group.

For more than over 40 years, Stephen Edwin King, also known under his pseudonym Richard Bachman, has been synonymous with the horror genre. Writing and publishing books and short stories, many of which have been adapted into critically acclaimed films and TV series, Stephen King is one of the most famous horror writers of all times. Over the course of his prolific writing career, he has made a significant impact on the development of the horror genre.

Known mainly for his numerous novels, his shorter fiction has received less attention. Few researchers have addressed the field of King's short stories. This thesis aims to analyze three of them, namely: "The Children of the Corn," "The Mangler" and "1408" with focus on the supernatural elements and the author's attempts to evoke fear in the reader, and consequently compare the results with the films they have been adapted to. These first two stories have been written in the 1970s and come from the 1978 short story collection *Night Shift*, King's fifth book and first short story anthology. In 1980, *Night Shift* received the Balrog Award for Best Collection, and in 1979 it was nominated as best collection for the World Fantasy Award and the Locus Award.<sup>1</sup> *1408* was first published as a part of an audiobook *Blood and Smoke* in 1999, collected in 2002 in the short story collection *Everything's Eventual*. While originating from different decades and books, what links the stories together, aside from my own personal interest, is positive reception and commercial success.

The thesis is organized into four sections. The first part of the thesis will focus on Stephen King's life and works with special emphasis on the events that have helped to form the author as we know him today, exploring the circumstances that defined his writing style and formed his affection towards horror and supernatural. In the

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<sup>1</sup> *Awards & Nominations*, Stephen King Official Website, last modified 2018  
<https://www.stephenking.com/awards.html#>

following chapter, the detailed background for the particular genre of horror short story will be provided. After that, the essential part of the thesis, which aims to provide a thorough analysis of the short stories and present adequate interpretation, evaluation and classification, will be presented, as well as common features, themes and symbols. Next, equivalent film adaptations are shortly introduced and examined with regard to the plot and character differences, and how the directors represented the evil, horror and suspense aspects. Finally, reception of the short stories and the adaptations is stated and compared.

Few studies have been published on King's short story adaptations, however there is a number of academic papers that has been drawn heavily from, especially *Stephen King: America's Storyteller* (2003) by Tony Magistrale,<sup>2</sup> *Haunted Heart: the Life and Times of Stephen King* (2009) by Lisa Rogak<sup>3</sup> and a recent study *Screening Stephen King* (2018) by Simon Brown.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Magistrale, *Stephen King: America's Storyteller* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Rogak, *Haunted Heart: the Life and Times of Stephen king* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Simon Brown, *Screening Stephen King: Adaptation and the Horror Genre in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

# 1. Stephen King

## 1.1 Early Childhood

Like many states in the post-war era, Maine was an agricultural, poverty-stricken state with the population of roughly 850 000 people.<sup>5</sup> In the late 1940s, the majority of people struggled enormously to earn a living, including Donald Edwin Pollock, a merchant seaman and vacuum cleaner salesman later going by the name King. In 1947, he and his wife Ruth Pillsbury King were raising their adopted two-year-old David in Portland. On September 21st 1947 in Maine General Hospital, Stephen Edwin King was born.

Three years later, Donald abandoned Ruth and their sons under the pretense of going out to buy a cigarette pack. This proved to be one of the earliest negative influences in Stephen King's life. As Beahm suggests: "The fear began early on in King's life when he was abandoned by his father—a small child's worst nightmare. Parents, after all, are supposed to be a bedrock, a solid platform on which children build their lives."<sup>6</sup> Abandonment continues to be a prominent topic in King's novels.

For the considerable span of time, they moved from one place to another. Under great financial strain, Ruth often worked multiple jobs, while staying with her relatives. As Stephen King stated in his autobiographical novel *On Writing: A memoir of the craft*: "I lived an odd, herky-jerky childhood, raised by a single parent who moved around a lot in my earliest years and who—I am not completely sure of this—may have farmed my brother and me out to one of her sisters for a while because she was economically or emotionally unable to cope with us for a time."<sup>7</sup>

However, despite spending a large part of his childhood in Indiana and Connecticut, Maine remained to be deeply rooted in King's nature, resulting in the majority of settings of his novels taking place in Maine. As Baughan confirms: "When film producers approached him with the desire to adapt *Pet Sematary*, he insisted that it be shot in Maine. After all, the state had given him more than just a place to live; its people and their steadfast way of life were inextricably woven into his books and

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<sup>5</sup> Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman, *Maine: the Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> George W. Beahm, *The Stephen King Companion: Forty Years of Fear from the Master of Horror* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Griffin, 2015), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen King, *On writing: a Memoir of the Craft* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 17.

stories. His trademark way of rooting his supernatural tales in the soil of regular life came straight from the people he observed and interacted with every day.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1958, when King was 11 years old, the King’s family decided to settle in Durham. Achieving average results, King attended Lisbon High School, where he gained notoriety for publishing a parody of a high school newspaper called *The Village Vomit*.<sup>9</sup> Except for that, he spent all his free time reading. He had strong inclination towards mystery stories and horror books, which originated in finding a box full of horror literature in his aunt’s attic. Being such an avid reader and reading works from authors such as H.P. Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson or Ray Bradbury was a turning point for King and it had helped to set a solid literary foundation. Furthermore, it was then when the interest and passion for the horror genre started to develop.<sup>10</sup> Lovecraft would have a lasting effect on King, as he affirms in *Danse Macabre*: “it is his shadow, so long and gaunt, and his eyes, so dark and puritanical, which overlies almost all of the important horror fiction that has come since.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet still, the Kings were exceptionally poor. As Tony Magistrale suggests: “King’s strong blue-collar work ethic and respect for the working class was born in early real life struggles. [. . .] While generous to a fault, the successful adult has always remembered what it was like to grow up without much of a cushion. Instead of turning resentful, however, King learned the value of money and hard work—and these values are often imparted to his practical minded, working-class heroes, such as Stu Redman, Red Redding, John Smith, Dolores Claiborne, and many of the Bachman protagonists.”<sup>12</sup> However, instead of disheartening King’s aspirations, Ruth’s humorous, persistent and resourceful approach to their unfavorable circumstances left a lasting impression on King and polished his sense of storytelling.

## 1.2 Beginning to Write

In 1959, David and Stephen King started a local newsletter called *Dave’s Rag*.<sup>13</sup> King’s contribution consisted of television show reviews and short stories. King’s world revolved around literature. In addition to reading horror magazines and

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<sup>8</sup> Michael G. Baughan, *Stephen King* (New York: Chelsea House, 2009), 83-4.

<sup>9</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Hodder, 2012), 118.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Magistrale, *Stephen King: America’s Storyteller* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 17.



books, he began to take interest in film industry. Except for watching horror films and series such as *The Twilight Zone* in television, he occasionally attended film screenings in Lisbon Falls or Lewiston, almost all solely within the horror genre.<sup>14</sup> King maintained a strong connection with fear, finding particularly interesting the very thin line between good and evil.<sup>15</sup> This topic is central for many of his novels, for instance *The Dead Zone* or *Misery*.

King began submitting his own stories to magazines but collected rejection slips. He found a part-time job, digging graves, which later inspired his short story *I Was a Teenage Grave Robber*. While receiving no payment, independently publishing the story in 1965 was a first notable milestone in his writing career.<sup>16</sup>

In 1966, King started studying English language and creative writing at the University of Maine. He wrote columns in the campus newspaper called *King's Garbage Truck*. In the same year, he received his first check of 35 dollars from *Startling Mystery Stories* for his short story *The Glass Floor*.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3 Family Life

King continued to write steadily, but that didn't improve his financial situation. He took a part time job in the university library, where he met Tabitha Spruce, whom he married, just after graduation, in 1971. Within the time span of first two years, they had two children, Naomi and Joseph.<sup>18</sup>

The family moved into a trailer in Hermon, Maine. Unlucky to find a teaching position, King pumped gas for a minimum wage and worked in a commercial laundry in Bangor. In this period, King dealt with depression and disappointment from replicating his mother's life. In 1971, King landed a job as an English teacher at the Hampden Academy, still financially struggling. He went back to work in an industrial laundry to supplement his income as a teacher. Still writing, he soon developed a clientele for his work in men's magazines such as *Cavalier* or *Gent*. However, the earned money arrived just in time to cover the latest emergency.<sup>19</sup> The author's mounting financial responsibilities created frustration that led him to the local bar or

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<sup>14</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Beahm, *Stephen King*, 73-5.

to the poker table, where he'd spend the night smoking cigarettes and gambling, resulting in alcoholism and, later, drug abuse.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, King was working on, as he himself puts it, "a short novel about a picked-on girl who discovers a telekinetic ability within herself."<sup>21</sup> But King felt like his knowledge about teenage outsiders like the protagonist, Carrietta White, the daughter of a religious fanatic, was insufficient to create a satisfactory character background. Wanting to be true to the character, King initially disposed of the story, but at Tabitha's insistence, he resumed writing the novel, finished it and sent it to the publishing company.<sup>22</sup>

Doubleday would release *Carrie* in April 1974. King and Tabitha moved to an apartment in Bangor, Maine. Doubleday Subsidiary Rights Department was communicating with New American Library, a paperback book publisher, who found the story of Carrietta White appealing as well. In 1973, King received 200 000 dollar advance for a paperback rights for his first novel, *Carrie*.<sup>23</sup> While King's career grew ever more successful, he suffered a great personal loss in December 1973, when his mother, Ruth King, died of lung cancer at the age of 59.

King's accomplishments allowed him to quit his job and began writing full time. His inspirations came from the people he met, incidences in his own life and from the day-to-day life in rural Maine. He sent the manuscript of his next book *'Salem's Lot* to Doubleday. They accepted the book and King received 200 000 dollars.<sup>24</sup>

## 1.4 The Road to Success

King's first two novels had made him almost half a million dollars, phenomenal for a new writer. As Brown suggests, he "became a published novelist in 1974, a time when horror was undergoing a renaissance across literature, film, and television."<sup>25</sup>

There was the prospect of more money from the films as well. The boom of horror in Hollywood was fueled with the success of *Rosemary's Baby*. As King himself

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<sup>20</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> King, *On Writing*, 198.

<sup>22</sup> Beahm, *Stephen King*, 75-84.

<sup>23</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 72-3.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Brown, *Screening Stephen King*, 26.

suggests, there were “three books that kicked off a new horror ‘wave’ in the seventies—*Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Other*. The fact that these three books, all published within five years of each other, enjoyed such wide popularity helped to convince (or reconvince) publishers that horror fiction has a commercial potential much wider than the readership [of horror magazines and paperback books].”<sup>26</sup> Unsurprisingly, Columbia Pictures optioned his first book *Carrie*.

Thinking a change of scene might enhance his prolificacy and having the financial freedom to leave Maine for the first time in his life, the Kings drove to Boulder, Colorado. However, in Boulder, King’s struggle to focus on work remained. He, Tabitha and the children spent a weekend in the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, which was vacant, ready to shut down for the winter season. Predictably, in this environment, King’s imagination thrived. He began to work on the story of a little boy with paranormal powers who is in danger of being overcome by the evil in the haunted Overlook Hotel, and whose life is threatened by his drunken father. Drawing from his own experiences, *The Shining* reflects King’s struggle to cope with no funds and interpersonal stress. The novel shares the current themes King was dealing with at that time, such as alcohol and anger: “I was, after all, the guy who had written *The Shining* without even realizing [. . .] that I was writing about myself.”<sup>27</sup> After finishing the first draft of *The Shining* in Colorado, King and his family once again returned to Maine in 1975.

King’s 2nd book, *Salem’s Lot*, was released around Halloween that year. As Earnshaw points out: “*Salem’s Lot* was a vampire story with an acknowledged debt to Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) by way of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938) and the TV soap *Peyton Place* (1964–1969)”<sup>28</sup>. It sold well to the generic horror fiction readers but late in 1976, with the movie’s release of *Carrie*, an entirely new audience discovered Stephen King. This was a crucial point in King’s career, as this turning point even more boosted and facilitated gaining the popularity. As Magistrale suggests, “sales of the novel were further aided by the first film adaptation of a Stephen King work, Brian De Palma’s 1976 movie that starred Sissy Spacek and Piper Laurie, who were both nominated for Academy Awards. De Palma’s film version of *Carrie*

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<sup>26</sup> King, *Danse Macabre*, 284.

<sup>27</sup> King, *On writing*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Earnshaw, *Tobe Hooper’s ‘Salem’s Lot: Studies in the Horror Film* (Lakewood: Centipede Press, 2014), 31.

managed to capture the slippery blending of horror and humor that is often a crucial—albeit elusive—element in a King text, and characterizes several of the most memorable cinematic adaptations of his work, such as *Stand by Me* and *Misery*.”<sup>29</sup>

The film, made for less than two million dollars, grossed staggering 30 million dollars in the US alone. In 1977, *The Shining* went into press and was an immediate success, selling 50 000 hardcover books and becoming King’s first hardback bestseller.<sup>30</sup> It was also a novel that, as Baughan highlights, “chained him forever to the [horror] genre.”<sup>31</sup>

With the success of *Carrie* and *The Shining* combined, King became a prominent character in Hollywood. Eager to have *Rage*, the first novel he ever wrote, published, he asked Doubleday to publish books that had been rejected before. However, Doubleday didn’t want the public to get weary of his name. Therefore, he released *Rage* under a pseudonym Richard Bachman. To King’s disappointment, *Rage* by Richard Bachman attracted no interest.

The paperback of *The Shining* went on to sell almost two and a half million copies. Stephen King’s first three books were all bestsellers, but with his fourth book, *The Stand*, released in 1978, King produced his masterpiece. *The Stand* is an apocalyptic novel about a superfluid that kills most of the population. The original manuscript was 1200 pages long, but Doubleday refused to release it before King trimmed 400 pages.<sup>32</sup> King proved to be exceedingly profitable for Doubleday. However, the publishing company was not convenient to King. Therefore, in 1978, he quit Doubleday and negotiated a deal with New American Library, including a two and a half million dollar advance for three books.<sup>33</sup>

In 1978, King was the most trending new writer in the United States, his first four books making him a millionaire. Choosing to stay near Maine, they rented a house outside Bangor in Orrington, on a busy road. After a number of animals killed there, one of them being King’s own cat Smucky, and after the King’s youngest child Owen was almost killed on the road, King wrote the novel *Pet Sematary*, the story of a father

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<sup>29</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Beahm, *Stephen King*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 89.

who brings his child back from the dead and must live with the consequences.<sup>34</sup> King once again transformed one of his greatest fears into fiction.

In a cross of dismay and amazement of what he had written, King refrained from publishing the manuscript for three years. Instead, he began working on *The Dead Zone*, a book based on his anxiety about how to deal with his extraordinary talents and the problems they brought him. Arguably, *The Dead Zone* could be perceived as an autobiographical novel. As King became more popular, his fans became more persistent. King found it increasingly difficult to guard his privacy, including commercial advertisers and Hollywood studios.

His books were optioned for films almost as quickly as they were written. In 1979, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was released. The film was a sensation, one of Warner Brothers top grossing films of all time. King thought the movie was visually stunning but Kubrick had ignored an important theme in the book – the disintegration of the family. Kubrick “departs from King’s novel and submitted script”<sup>35</sup> and instead creates his own story.

King, now wielding his considerable clout, demanded that he would select the directors of his stories. He distrusted Hollywood and wanted to seclude himself from the star scene. Needing privacy from his ever persistent fans, he bought a Victorian mansion in Bangor, Maine in 1980.

Between 1980 and 1984 he published 14 novels, including *Night Shift*. He also wrote poetry, plays, original screenplays and short stories. Some of King’s work, like *The Shining*, was now being taught as part of college courses. However, King generally didn’t find favor with literary critics who were of the opinion that he only desires to get financially well off. Moreover, a growing number of school libraries were banning *Rage*, due to shootings that were reportedly inspired by the novel.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, King’s substance abuse worsened over time: “By 1985 I had added drug addiction to my alcohol problem, yet I continued to function, as a good many substance abusers do, on a marginally competent level.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 93-4.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Browning, *Stephen King on the Big Screen* (Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2009), 199.

<sup>36</sup> Alissa Burger, *Teaching Stephen King: Horror, the Supernatural, and New Approaches to Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 76

<sup>37</sup> King, *On Writing*, 96.

By the end of the 1980s, King had published more than 30 works, 16 of which had been adapted, and sold over 100 million books, getting on the rank of one of the most influential men in publishing and in Hollywood. He ran an empire that included movies, books, television series, CDs and audio books. The inspiration for many of these books came from Maine, and King decided to express his gratitude by funding the little league baseball field in Bangor and supporting the local Bangor library. He also bought the local rock station WZON and toured along with other columnists under the name *Rock Bottom Remainers* to raise money for literacy in America. In addition, King, at Tabitha's initiative, underwent drug and alcohol treatment program in 1988, and he has been clean ever since.

The 1990 film *Misery*, a story about an author who is captured by his fanatical fan who holds him hostage, based on his 1987 novel earned 4 Academy Award nominations. Throughout the 1990s, his books continued to be blockbusters and his TV miniseries were hits. With films such as *Dolores Claiborne* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, he was, in literary terms, earning more respect as a serious writer.

## 1.5 The Accident

By 1999, King's overwhelming success included over 300 million copies of his books in world-wide circulation. With their children grown up, he and Tabitha were thinking about buying a home in Florida. Then, in June, King was hit by a car, sustaining severe injuries to his lungs, breaking his leg, ribs and fracturing his hip. For weeks, he was hospitalized undergoing numerous operations. But finally in late 1999 he was well enough to attend the premiere of a new film based on his story *The Green Mile*.<sup>38</sup> In late 1999, King was back at his desk. Since the accident, King continues to be epitome of prolificacy, having published over 20 novels, 5 e-books, 5 short story collections, 1 comic book and 1 play. King continues to write to this day.

In literary terms, the work King has done is astonishing not only in terms of the volume but also the commercial success he achieved as well. Moreover, there is a strong sense that King has chronicled the second half of the century in a way that will remain appealing to the audience 50 or 100 years in the future.

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<sup>38</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 10, 102.

## 2. Horror in Literature and Short Fiction

As challenging as pinpointing the precise beginning of a literary genre can be, I will disregard the possibility of tracing the horror's roots to the traditional folk and mystery tales told at the campfires, indigenous legends, myths about witches and spirits. Naturally, the genre can be found across ages, some arguing that Gothic can be traced even as far as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>39</sup> However, the genre itself starts to consolidate in the post-medieval period, when writers were struggling to cope with the horrors of the dark ages.

Horror and gothic literature have been inextricably linked, now becoming interchangeable terms, labeling relatively new genre that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Regarding the terminology, though Noël Carroll prefers to distinguish between horror, terror and gothic, arguing that "Similarly, by using monsters or other supernatural (or sci-fi) entities as a criterion of horror, one can separate horror stories from Gothic exercises,"<sup>40</sup> I will refer to horror universally and arbitrarily. Alternatively, many incorrectly confuse fantasy, sci-fi and detective story, which are, although similar, different cognates of the genre altogether and need to be distinguished between.

The inaugural published work considered to be the first gothic story was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, "printed under a pseudonym in England in 1764. [The novel] openly advocated a 'blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern, 'the former' all imagination and improbability 'and the latter governed by the 'rules of probability' connected with 'common life.'"<sup>41</sup> However, there is still considerable uncertainty as to which work debuted the gothic genre.

As to origin, it is not coincidental that the majority of horror stories originates in areas where darkness reigns for the considerable time of the year. The British Islands and Ireland, full of mist, moors and windy hills, are closely intertwined with the origin of horror story and have a rich background regarding gothic genre. Hence, it predominantly prevails in the Anglo-Saxon literature. From there it spread to the Europe and made its way consequently to America. The term "gothic" comprises a handful of subgenres such as historical or the natural gothic. However, the supernatural

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<sup>39</sup> Mary E. Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 69.

<sup>40</sup> Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

gothic was of the utmost importance for the development of what is known today as a horror genre.<sup>42</sup>

Walpole was closely followed by Mary Shelley and her principal 1818 work *Frankenstein*. Generally, the gothic draws from romanticism and Victorian literature's ghost stories, the picturesque, discusses the topics of the unnatural and abnormal, moral concerns and challenge, ambiguous nature of evil. Numerous sources suggest that Freud's "the Uncanny" is a quintessential feature in horror.<sup>43</sup> The Uncanny is fear and anxiety of the unknown, unfamiliar, rearranged and deviated so that it does not bear resemblance to neither human nor something else, neither dead nor alive, for instance above-mentioned Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide* (1886).

The typical setting comprises of abandoned castles, desolate mansions, mysterious forests, graveyards and subterranean crypts. The most recent additions are also cabins in the woods or mental asylums, which seem to be substantial in today's popular horror culture, especially in the films, providing space for maneuvering with terrifying elements such as ghosts, spirits or the topic of madness.

However, Carroll argues that "[horror] was eclipsed in importance in the culture of the English speaking world largely by the emergence of the realist novel. From the 1820s to the 1840s, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine kept the gothic fires burning by publishing short fictions by William Mudford, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and James Hogg. [. . .] In America, Edgar Allan Poe followed the lead."<sup>44</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe was a principal figure, a patriarch of horror, a pioneering author in the short story. Among today's popular culture, he is generally considered to be the founding father of the horror, along with H.P. Lovecraft, who was skilled in writing horror short story as well, for instance "The Colour Out of Space", though he gravitated towards cosmic themes, therefore science fiction. Poe's contemporaries Melville, Hawthorne and Doyle are known for writing horror stories as well, though again, Doyle moved in the direction of detective story.

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<sup>42</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Tony Fonseca, "The Doppelgänger" in *Icons of Horror and the Supernatural : an Encyclopedia of our Worst Nightmares*, ed. S.T. Joshi (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 191.

Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, 174.

Cherry Brigid, *Horror* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 102.

<sup>44</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, 5.



The genre continued to periodically decline and then again reassert itself, emphasized by *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde (1890) or Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The gothic is also characterized by intricate plays with human psyche. An example of this is namely "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892) or *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James (1898).<sup>45</sup>

However, it was Joseph Sheridan LeFanu that played an important role in the development of the genre. Born in Dublin, he took part in producing Dublin Evening Mail, where he contributed with his short stories. LeFanu is considered to be one of the leading ghost story writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1900s, the horror remained active through his stories such as "Wicked Captain Walshawe, of Wauling," but also through writers such as Rudyard Kipling or Guy de Maupassant.<sup>46</sup>

Twentieth-century Gothic saw an influx of horror short story such as Ramsey Campbell's "The Faces at Pine Dunes" (1980), T.E.D. Klein's "Black Man with a Horn" (1980), Thomas Ligotti's "The Frolic" (1982) or Clive Barker's "The Forbidden" (1985).<sup>47</sup>

Rod Sterling's *The Twilight Zone*, American TV show of various genres, including fantasy, science fiction and horror, inspired writers such as Richard Matheson, and played crucial role in the short-story tradition from which they sprang. The ideal medium for publication of horror short stories, have been, due to their length, magazines of various scopes – horror, sci-fi, fantasy or adult magazines. The most noteworthy horror magazine, solely focusing on this genre, is *Weird Tales*, founded in 1923. To Czech and Slovak reading public, Tomáš Korbař made horror accessible with his 1967 anthology *Tichá Hříza*, collecting stories such as Daphne du Maurier's "Birds" (1952), Henry Kuttner's "Call Him Demon" (1946), Ray Bradbury's "The Crowd" (1943), Robert Bloch's "The Coat" (1963) or Shirley Jackson's "The Summer People" (1950).<sup>48</sup>

With the emergence of computers in 1990s and consequently the appearance of the internet and chain emails, the nature of sharing rebounded. As of 2018, the popular culture marked a resurgence of horror in what are today commonly-named "creepypastas": "short, shareable user-generated ghost stories that can focus on anything from the especially gruesome, like murder and suicide, to the creepy and otherworldly, like aliens and zombies."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Jiří Hanák, *Pokoj č. 13: hororové povídky* (Prague: XYZ, 2010), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Ivan Adamovič, *Hlas krve: nejlepší britské a americké horory* (Prague: Najáda, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> Tomáš Korbař, *Tichá hříza : hororové povídky* (Prague: Mladá Fronta, 1967).

<sup>49</sup>Jessica Roy, "Behind Creepypasta, the Internet Community That Allegedly Spread a Killer Meme." *Time*, June 3, 2014.

### 3. Analysis of Selected Short Stories by Stephen King

#### 3.1 Children of the Corn

“Children of the Corn” first appeared in the men’s magazine *Penthouse* in March 1977. The majority of generic horror audience has agreed upon its potential and deemed the short story one of the best from the whole anthology.<sup>50</sup> William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*, which King read in his teenage years, served as an inspiration to this story.<sup>51</sup>

##### 3.1.1 Plot

The story is set in 1976, Nebraska. It opens with in medias res scene of Burt Robeson and his wife Vicky driving a car through the cornfields in a hot noon. Being amidst the argument, they run over a little boy, whose throat, they later discover, was cut prior to the accident. As they get out of the car and hysterical Vicky leans over the dead body, Burt follows a strange splash of blood on the cornhusks and finds a suitcase. Putting the body in the trunk, they drive to the nearest town, Gatlin. Entering the town, Vicky notices it’s vacant, and proposes to drive away, but to no avail.

The story continues with their exploration of a deserted lunchroom, where they discover a calendar with an incorrect date - 1964. Driving to the church, Burt leaves Vicky in the car.

In the church, Burt discovers a grotesque portrait of Christ with green hair made of corn and a pipe organ filled with cornhusks. As the situation gradually becomes more and more bizarre, Burt suppresses the instinct to leave, not wanting to admit Vicky was right. He finds Bible with parts torn out except for the Old Testament left intact. As Burt finds a book of records with the children’s birthdates and adopted biblical names, a moment of realization follows - in 1964, all the children in Gatlin under 19 murdered their parents, following the pagan religion of an entity called He Who Walks Behind the Rows.

The climax takes place when Burt hears the car’s horn, escapes the church and finds armed children appearing and attacking the car with Vicky inside. As Burt battles them, sustaining an arm injury but killing the attacker, the children get hold of Vicky.

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<sup>50</sup> Don Herron, “Stephen King: The Good, the Bad, and the Academic” in *Stephen King*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007), 38.

<sup>51</sup> Rocky Wood, *Stephen King: a Literary Companion* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2011), 45-8.

Burt flees out of Gatlin and runs into the cornfield. After a few hours, he discovers Vicky, the church minister and police chief, all crucified, “mounted on a crossbar like a hideous trophy.”<sup>52</sup> Burt hears He Who Walks Behind the Rows coming. Next, a brief description of two crucified bodies on the clearing follows, meaning Burt and Vicky.

In the epilogue, one of the children, Isaac – the seer proclaims the Lord is displeased with the sacrifice, having to complete the act himself, like years ago, when the police officer and church minister escaped. Next, the scene of two above-age children, Malachai and Joseph, walking into the corn at night is depicted. The story ends with a pregnant girl, Ruth, saying goodbye to them, pondering the righteousness of the religion.

### 3.1.2 *Supernatural Elements*

Regarding the basic literary aspects of the story, the author adheres to classic past tense and third person view, which holds true for all three short stories discussed. Being the 16<sup>th</sup> short story in the anthology, the length of 34 A5 pages allows the story to unfold itself relatively slowly. This casual, gradual plot development is characteristic for King’s narration style. He gravitates toward building the suspense and background with vast descriptions in the beginning and lets the story gradually accelerate until pungent climax is reached. This can be seen in, for instance, King’s 1991 novel *Needful Things* with its volume of 690 pages.

In “Children of the Corn,” King departed from his favorite setting of Maine and set the story in countryside of Nebraska, covering fictional town of Gatlin and its surroundings. The author also mentions Gatlin in his novel *It*.<sup>53</sup> The motif of the couple’s trip was vaguely stated in the first page, mentioning that they are going to visit Vicky’s brother and his wife. King depicted it as a very remote, isolated area. The setting of this story plays an important role, for it is closely linked with the main antagonist.

The characters, as well as the state of Burt and Vicky’s relationship, are described through dialogue. The author molds the characters via the manner in which they interact with each other. For instance, Burt is revealed to have violent tendencies

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen King, “Children of the Corn,” in *Night Shift* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), 350.

<sup>53</sup> Wood, *Stephen King*, 83.

toward Vicky, which only worsen over time. This portrayal of violence is parallel to the violence they are exposed to from the children and, conclusively, from the supernatural entity. Therefore, the struggle is of intrapersonal as well as of interpersonal type. With regard to characterization, another important feature emerges. Burt poses as a dynamic character, undergoing major change during the story. After the horrors he experiences in Gatlin, e.g. abduction of his wife and murder of a boy, various peculiarities in his behavior start to emerge.

He rested a moment longer, and was suddenly aware that he felt *good*, physically better than he had in years . . . excepting the throb of his arm. He felt well exercised, and suddenly grappling with a clearcut (no matter how insane) problem after two years of trying to cope with the incubotic gremlins that were sucking his marriage dry. It wasn't right that he should feel this way, he told himself. He was in deadly peril of his life, and his wife had been carried off. She might be dead now. He tried to summon up Vicky's face and dispel some of the odd good feeling by doing so, but her face wouldn't come. What came was the red-haired boy with the knife in his throat.<sup>54</sup>

The cruelty he had been exposed to have rendered him numb and dull. Hence, his state of mind could be described as forthcoming lunacy. Later in the story, the author places an emphasis on this by restating how good Burt still feels, denying to acknowledge the mounting guilt for feeling such an inexplicable and irrational joy, perhaps from the bloodshed he had caused. This is symbolic of King's recurring topic of the blurry boundary between good and evil. Via creating and unraveling complex characters with both appealing and violent tendencies, King portrays credible and authentic characters of depth.

"Children of the Corn" takes place over the span of twelve hours. Being set in 1976, the aspect of time is a major part of the plot development as shortly after arriving at Gatlin, they discover an unforeseen revelation:

His eyes traveled over the age-yellowed cards thumbtacked up behind the counter: CHEESEBURG 35¢ [. . .] How long since he had seen lunchroom prices like that? Vicky had the answer. "Look at this," she said shrilly. She was pointing at the calendar on the wall. "They've been at that bean supper for twelve years, I guess." She uttered a

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<sup>54</sup> King, "Children of the Corn," 347.

grinding laugh. He walked over. The picture showed two boys swimming in a pond while a cute little dog carried off their clothes. Below the picture was the legend: COMPLIMENTS OF GATLIN LUMBER & HARDWARE *You Breakum, We Fixum*. The month on view was August 1964.<sup>55</sup>

Via the use of the outdated calendar, King presents an unexpected change of the outcome in the plot and significantly alters the course of the story. Hence, this event functioned as an initial indication of aberration, deviation from the normal and usual. In addition, the time period was reflected in the lack of communication devices, which was symbolic of further strengthening the isolation from the rest of the world.

It is indisputable that the central supernatural aspect of the story is the character, or the entity, called He Who Walks Behind the Rows. However, it is not known if it's a singular physical person or an energy that only manifests itself physically but does not exist as it is. It is never clearly stated in the text, nor do we find any description of this apparition. Upon reading the story for the first time, I observed that it has the aspects of some kind of elemental force. This subject is extensively explored in Angela Tenga's book *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* with specific reference to "Children of the Corn".

Tenga claims that narrations that include ominous plants or their variations and modifications hold a crucial position and are deeply rooted in the genre of horror. She argues that the ambiguity of the link between humankind and vegetation can be seen as far as in Arthurian chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* from the fourteenth century. Along with the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*, "Children of the Corn" features strong force that calls for sacrifice.<sup>56</sup>

Sacrificial practices have been known to be closely related to religion and spirituality. She goes on to point out that "despite religious validation of human hegemony, the echo of Gawain's anxiety in later works suggests a persistent doubt, a fear that perhaps humankind does not, after all, enjoy divine preference—that ritual and sacrifice do not avail, for humans remain at the mercy of a vegetal world that will ultimately dismantle their illusory boundary between nature and culture."<sup>57</sup> This would

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<sup>55</sup> King, "Children of the Corn," 334.

<sup>56</sup> Keetley Dawn and Angela Tenga, *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55.

<sup>57</sup> Dawn and Tenga, *Plant Horror*, 56.

not be King's first narrative to tamper with religion and Christianity. Due to his Methodist upbringing, King's novels such as *The Stand* or *The Green Mile* reflect a solid understanding of theology as well.

It is noticeable that He Who Walks Behind the Rows could not bear the label of a demon nor a ghost. Perhaps the most fitting classification would be that of a monster. Drawing from Freud's uncanny, the author skillfully works with the element of the most primal of our instinct, the fear of the unknown. As Alissa Burger highlights, "the monster occupies a liminal position between the knowable and the unknowable, both portraying and policing those boundaries that should not be transgressed."<sup>58</sup> This topic is explored in Burger's chapter "The Thing Without a Name" which directly corresponds with the entity that the children, for the lack of a better name, nicknamed He Who Walks Behind the Rows.

The other supernatural elements or elements that strive to evoke fear in the narrative are less prominent. One could argue that vile armed children full of bloodthirst fulfill this very role, however, they are mere worshippers or a vessel the entity uses to wreak chaos and death, not the supernatural element itself.

## **3.2 The Mangler**

"The Mangler" was first issued in the December 1972 publication of *Cavalier* magazine, until it restored its prominence in *Night Shift*.

### *3.2.1 Plot*

Officer Hunton examines the scene of the accident at Mr. Gartley's Blue Ribbon Laundry where Mrs. Adelle Frawley dies in a speed ironer that, among the circle of the employees, goes by the nickname the mangler. However, the authorities find nothing wrong with the machine. Next, the author reveals a complementary backstory two years ago about a dog suffocating in an old icebox in a backyard. After taking it to the dump, a boy goes missing and is consequently found dead along with 6 dead birds inside.

The week after Frawley's death, the mangler burns six women, one of which ends in hospital. Hunton visits her and she tells him what happened. She suggests that the accidents have started no earlier than after a young girl, Mr. Gartley's niece, Sherry

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<sup>58</sup> Burger, *Teaching Stephen King*, 44.

Ouelette cut her hand on the mangler. Hunton mentions it to his friend, a college professor Jackson, and they gain suspicion that the machine might be possessed. Jackson conducts a research and discovers that the first thing that would be required as a sacrilege is a blood of a virgin among various other common denominators.

In the meantime, the foreman of the laundry, George Stanner loses his hand in the mangler during greasing. The mangler turns in spite of pressing the off button and pulling fuses. Another worker saves Stanner by severing his arm with an axe. A short visit of Sherry follows, further confirming Hunton and Jackson's presumption that "A devil had taken over the inanimate steel and cogs and gears of the mangler and had turned it into something with its own life."<sup>59</sup> They reach the conclusion that they are dealing with South American voodoo and decide to perform exorcism. Using the keys they obtained from the state inspector Roger Martin, entering the laundry, they discover that the mangler is already on. As they attempt to perform the rite of exorcism, the machine goes haywire, both of them realizing that Jackson incorrectly assessed the case of possession. The mangler consequently pulls itself out of the concrete. As the morphing shape of the machine advances towards them, Jackson perishes and Hunton runs to Martin's house. The narrative abruptly comes to an end as Hunton, Martin and his wife hear strange fuming noises approaching.

### 3.2.2 *Supernatural Elements*

Despite the story spanning over just 23 pages, Spignesi suggests that there is "a fully realized plot, and an internal logic that adheres to the traditional rules for demonic possession and the banishing thereof."<sup>60</sup>

"The Mangler" was heavily inspired by the time King spent working at Bangor's New Franklin Laundry, where one of his coworkers lost his upper limbs in an accident when a piece of his clothing got stuck in the machine. Due to this misfortune, his hands were replaced with hooks, and due to King's abiding interest in the weird, odd and peculiar, he decided to transform the theme into horror literature.<sup>61</sup>

The main topic of the story, which is formerly inanimate technology abruptly coming to life and becoming threatening, can be seen in a number of his writings such

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen King, "The Mangler," in *Night Shift* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1978), 122.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen J. Spignesi, *The Essential Stephen King: a Ranking of the Greatest Novels, Short Stories, Movies, and Other Creations of the World's Most Popular Writer* (Franklin Lakes: New Page Books, 2001), 260

<sup>61</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 65.

as “Code Name: Mousetrap” (1965) or another *Night Shift* short story “Trucks” (1978) as well.<sup>62</sup> It is undeniable, however, that the topic functions as a central supernatural element as well. The author takes hold of the anxiety that stems from the technological explosion in the second half of the twentieth century. Military hardware progress as well as scientific “have rendered our culture vulnerable to almost total destruction (as in [. . .] King’s *Firestarter* [1980] and *The Stand* [1978]) or have helped us conceive of superhuman beings unable to be destroyed (the cyborgs and animate machines).”<sup>63</sup> This concept has been especially relevant in recent years of technological advancement, spawning many novels and films, from Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950) to Levin’s *The Stepford Wives* (1972). The technological and scientific contrasts with the natural and agricultural in the “Children of the Corn.”

The industrial setting of the story is parallel to the gothic environments that can be observed in early American Romanticists, such as the workplace in Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener.” Speaking of literary influences, as Strangell points out, while King by no means imitates Lovecraft, he has preserved two central features of his predecessor’s influence. This includes harboring suspicion against the advancement of science and cosmic matters as well. Nevertheless, King strives for divergence from Lovecraft’s literary style and, contrarily, draws from Melville, Hawthorne and Twain. Thus, King’s anxiety towards the progress of science is reflected in this story, where the mangler serves as a symbolic representation of the technological advancement.<sup>64</sup>

Carroll argues that fusion is one of the most established constructions for the formation of horror elements, presenting mummies, ghosts, vampires and zombies as an example.<sup>65</sup> Arguably, the possessed machine in the story applies to this term, due to the fact that the demon or supernatural entity doesn’t manifest itself as a completely separated element, perhaps from a different realm or dimension, but instead chooses a mechanical object to possess. Therefore, serving as only a partial intruder, there is a fusion into something that is not easily definable, nor alive, nor dead, coalescing the traits separately distinguishable into an ambiguous matter. The author himself makes a simile in favor of my argument as follows: “The rite of exorcism is horribly dangerous. It’s like controlled nuclear fission, in a way. [. . .] The demon is caught in

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<sup>62</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 50.

<sup>63</sup> Hogle, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 288.

<sup>64</sup> Heidi Strengell, *Dissecting Stephen King*, 55-56, 106.

<sup>65</sup> Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 43.



that piece of machinery.”<sup>66</sup> The term fission suggests the concept of unity and simultaneously the concept of two or more separate parts being distinct and discernable.

The quote also aims to illustrate the author’s skillful use of similes. A suggestive figure of speech, seeking to evoke fear in the reader by describing concepts of great familiarity, bringing closer strange notions that perhaps a person with insufficient imagination might picture only with great difficulty. King’s use of similes is plentiful and recurring in this particular narrative. Archetypal for this figure of speech, King’s similes can be observed predominantly in the descriptions of the machine, to which the writer dedicates considerable space, as illustrated in the following quotation.

It formed a long, rectangular box in shape, thirty feet by six. At the feeder end, a moving canvas belt moved under the safety bar, up at a slight angle, and then down. The belt carried the damp-dried, wrinkled sheets in continuous cycle over and under sixteen huge revolving cylinders that made up the main body of the machine. Over eight and under eight, pressed between them like thin ham between layers of superheated bread.<sup>67</sup>

Another central aspect of the story is the suspense or the ontological uncertainty whether there is a supernatural sense to the story or whether the events are purely accidental. Including the characters’ questioning of the reality and pondering the surreal, King creates an impression of uneasiness which further contributes to the awakening of the reader’s anxiety and fear.

The final noteworthy aspect entails the fact that the object of possession is not a human, the typical target that occurs in gothic literature or modern horror cinematography. A number of similar notions occurs in the literature up to 1970s, namely poltergeist, haunted house or a mansion, however, the narrative of “The Mangler” demonstrates King’s ability to create novel concepts relatively unexplored at that time. Therefore, the author manages to transcend the boundaries of the ordinary and unusual.

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<sup>66</sup> King, “The Mangler,” 123.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

### 3.3 1408

Being the most recent selected story that came to existence only 19 years ago, “1408” was never intended to be finished. As King states in the foreword to the short story, he began working on it with the intention to demonstrate the evolution of the story from first draft to second in the appendix of his non-fiction book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. However, as King goes on, he found the story enticing and captivating, which resulted in its completion and inclusion in the audiobook *Blood and Smoke* in 1999 and consequently publishing in the short story collection *Everything’s Eventual: 14 Dark Tales* in 2002. Perhaps making an allusion to Poe’s short story, King suggests that “As well as the ever-popular premature burial, every writer of shock/suspense tales should write at least one story about the Ghostly Room At The Inn.”<sup>68</sup>

#### 3.3.1 Plot

The story opens with an accomplished writer Mike Enslin entering the Dolphin Hotel and approaching the owner Mr. Olin, who leads him into his office. Olin tries to dissuade Mike from staying in the room 1408 that is supposedly haunted, telling him stories of the room’s grim past, including numerous tenants committing suicide or going blind.

The second section starts with Mike encountering complications even before entering the room – the door being slightly tilted to the right. Taking second look, Mike discovers they are straight, then tilted to left again. Upon entering, the protagonist starts to feel taken aback, attributing blame to Olin for disconcerting him with his yarning. Moreover, Mike ponders exiting the room, but rejects the idea, not wanting Olin to triumph over him. Described from the view of a listener to the recorder, the story next follows Mike’s gradual descent into madness. First, Mike explores the room, encountering various supernatural elements, noticing surreal changes, experiencing the objects appearing and disappearing at their will. Mike tries to flee, but the door won’t open. Trying to call for help, a strange hollow voice echoes from the earpiece saying that they killed Mike’s friends and family. Subsequently, the room begins to melt. As everything cascades into cataclysm, and as “something”

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen King, “1408” in *Everything’s Eventual* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 365.

approaches, he sets fire to his shirt and manages to open the door “as if [the room] had no use for burning man”.<sup>69</sup>

The third part comprises of Rufus Dearborn, a tenant of the adjacent room, saving Mike by pouring a bucket of ice on him. As he turns his attention towards the room that blazes with odd, yellow-orange light, he is tempted to enter, oddly reminiscent of his Australian trip. Mike exclaims it’s haunted, finally admitting that Olin was right. The door shuts violently and Rufus pulls the fire alarm.

The epilogue deals with the aftermath of the incident - Mike sustaining second degree burns. His agent hears the tape and puts it in the safe where other Mike’s tapes are, and denies Olin’s request to hear it. Despite not remembering anything that happened in the room, Mike swears to give up writing and removes all telephones from his house. He continues having nightmares as his health deteriorates.

### 3.3.2 *Supernatural Elements*

King firstly builds the suspense via the dialogue between Mike and Olin, revealing that all rooms in the hotel use electric cards excepting the 1408, for the electricity in that room does not work, making even clocks stop or run backwards. Cell phones and other gadgets malfunction as well, and as Olin highlights, turning them on and off is not guaranteed to affect them. This feature is analogous to “The Mangler,” where the lack of control over technology in the narrative is parallel with the anxiety of technology becoming ungovernable in real life.

Next, Olin reveals that the room was not occupied for more than 20 years. The maids responsible for cleaning the room have been known to experience numerous outbursts of crying or laughing, faints, even going temporarily blind. However, the twins called Veronique and Celeste were almost unaffected by the room’s peculiar influence for the short time needed to clean the room, allegedly because of their remarkably strong bond. Yet, since Celeste left, she marked a decline of her physical and mental health, developing Alzheimer’s until she died of a heart attack. Furthermore, Olin claims to select pairs of maids that get on well with each other. This notion of developing and maintaining affection is understood to be, at least in this narrative, as something almost holy. It continues to be a prominent topic in the story, as in the end, the author reveals that Mike sustained burns all over his body except the

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<sup>69</sup> King, “1408,” 398.

area where the breast-pocket with the recorder was. This was perhaps because of the bond that tied him to the recorder: “The minicorder had been a present from his ex-wife [. . .] Over the years and the “case expeditions,” the Sony minicorder had become his friend.”<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the protagonist jokingly mentions his “lucky Hawaiian shirt” multiple times throughout the story, saying that it will prevent harm to him from the spirits. Metaphorically, the shirt saves him from potential death by serving as an interface between madness and reality. Love is, therefore, portrayed as an indestructible force, which is a classical archetype in popular literature and cinematography, serving as a suspense relief for the audience.

The hotel manager goes on to enumerate instances of strokes, heart attacks, epileptic seizures, diabetes, cerebral hemorrhage. The room has notably rich history with suicides – jumping out of the window, overdosing with pills, hanging and slitting one’s wrists, terminating in 12 suicides in 68 years in total in addition to 30 natural deaths. The conclusion here is therefore two-fold: first, the room is revealed to have a massive impact on the individual that enters, especially health. Second, such eloquent development of the room’s background plays a crucial role in summoning a sense of unease and abnormality in the reader. Furthermore, the author implements superstition and traditional belief into the story, mentioning that the hotel, like many others, misses the floor number 13, precisely the number the numerals of the room 1408 add up to. Though acknowledging the deformity of the room, the hotel management has made its best efforts to keep 1408 secret. This serves as a testimony of its authenticity, for usually strongly promoted areas of paranormal activity tend to be hoaxes.

In literary terms, along with the Poe allusion, King also makes references to H.P. Lovecraft, Charles Dickens and Marcel Proust, further confirming his firm literary foundations.

The identification of the main supernatural element in “1408” is utmost problematic. The first answer that offers itself is a classic element in the gothic literature – the ghost. Yet, in the first part of the story, Olin reveals that “there are no ghosts in room 1408 and never have been. There’s *something* in there—I’ve felt it myself—but it’s not a spirit presence. [. . .] Whatever there is in that room, it’s not shy. [. . .] It’s perhaps like entering a room filled with poison gas.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> King, “1408,” 384-5.

<sup>71</sup> King, “1408,” 374-9.

Ruling out the possibility of a spirit in the concept of a haunted residence is novel, as well as King's choice of the environment. The formula of the haunted house is traditional and well-established in gothic literature, for, as Dale Bailey argues in *American nightmares: the haunted house formula in American popular fiction*, it is quintessential for the creation of gloomy atmosphere. He argues that the haunted house serves as a symbol "of the clash between American ideals and realities, the three or four key themes in American life to which the house, and especially the haunted house, naturally lends itself as a vehicle for commentary," and that by remodeling the gothic castle into a house, authors like Poe with *Fall of the House of Usher* and Hawthorne with *House of the Seven Gables* "planted the seeds which, in the hothouse environment of contemporary paperback fiction, blossomed into the haunted house formula," visible also in King's fiction.<sup>72</sup> This seems to be a reliable approach, for Burger too concludes: "the haunting is often about far more than just ghosts or restless spirits, instead reflecting the conflict within or between the characters themselves, as well as larger cultural themes."<sup>73</sup>

King didn't follow the tradition of resituating the traditional haunted castle or abbey into a house, but into a mere room. The hotel room's questionable and uncertain history adds to its mysteriousness. Via choosing a hotel room, the author renders the room disengaging and impersonal. Magistrale draws a noteworthy parallel between "1408" and *The Shining*, pointing out that both narratives feature hotel rooms where evil resides.<sup>74</sup>

In the epilogue of the story, King summarizes the amount of time Mike spent in the room - 70 minutes, from which he narrated 11 into his voice recorder. The final notable feature is the recurrent, often sensory description of the recorder's "red eye" which resembles Fitzgerald's iconic novel *The Great Gatsby* and its reappearing symbol of green light. However, there seems to be a significance to the yellow-orange color, as it reappears numerous times throughout the short story. From the yellow-orange painting of the fruit, through the glow of the coverlet and gleam coming from the doorway, to Rufus' reminiscence of the specific yellow-orange light he experienced during the sunset in Australia. It is safe to assume, that the narrative deals

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<sup>72</sup> Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: the Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999,) 6-7.

<sup>73</sup> Burger, *Teaching Stephen King*, 60

<sup>74</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 117.

with a haunted room devoid of the element of ghost, for there is no evidence of spectral or full bodied apparition in the text. Plus, the narrator explicitly marked the absence of the ghost. Mike's stream of consciousness includes: "This wasn't like being haunted, or what he imagined being haunted would be like; this was like being stoned on bad, cheap dope. [. . .] [the room] had nothing in common with any haunting or paranormal event he had ever read about. There was something alien here."<sup>75</sup> My conclusion is, therefore, that the story deals with closely unspecified, perhaps otherworldly force that affects the person that enters the room, making him descend into maelstrom of confusion, disorientation and anxiousness. The obscure boundary between rationality and insanity is quintessential characteristic King uses to instill terror.

### 3.4 Common Features

Aside aforementioned supernatural elements, each of the three short stories features a topic of religion or spirituality. Firstly, it is most prominent in "Children of the Corn," taking into consideration that the children created an autocratic cult, worshipping He Who Walked Behind the Rows and assimilating Christianity via making crucifixes of corncobs and serving sermons. Secondly, in "The Mangler," King touches upon Christianity while speaking about exorcism: "Holy water and a smidgen of the Holy Eucharist ought to do it. And we can read some of the Leviticus to it. Strictly Christian white magic."<sup>76</sup> Finally, in "1408", the author refers to the antithetical to religion, by repeating the numeral six three times in a row, alluding to the concept in the Bible, denoting the antichrist.

Except "1408," the short stories also share a recurring theme of the shadow. The author mentions multiple times shadows either as the dark areas in the environment created naturally by blocking the sun or the shadow as a supernatural presence approaching. Via frequent use of this term, King helps to establish the notion of darkness in the reader's mind.

Lastly, the satire and humor are present in the short stories as well. The humor in these works could hardly be described as cheerful, for it aims to serve as a mere platform for conveying the hysteria of the characters. However, the humor carries a certain cynical quality and can certainly function as a source of amusement.

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<sup>75</sup> King, "1408," 390-6.

<sup>76</sup> King, "The Mangler," 125.

## 4. Horror Films

### 4.1 Origin and Development

Jankovich's *Horror, the Film Reader* traces the emergence of the horror genre in film to fantasy cinema, accrediting Georges Méliès for its formation. The French director, as opposed to his associates that aimed to be authentic, sought to portray the unreal and the dreamlike, creating imaginative scenarios as in *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). Being essential for the following major point of the evolution of the horror genre in film, German expressionism highlights "anti-realist aesthetic", as portrayed in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).<sup>77</sup> As Spadoni suggests in *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*, Hollywood started to recognize horror film as a genre shortly before the major shift from silent to sound cinema. It was the early 1930s that saw the beginning of the horror film with inaugural monochromatic works such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*.<sup>78</sup>

Jankovich then argues, that though they are "often used to prove the link between horror and the relatively respectable tradition of Gothic literature, they were, at least initially, produced, mediated and consumed as the film versions of contemporary theatrical hits."<sup>79</sup> However, partial drawing from the German expressionism resulted in the creation of the iconic Frankenstein's monster or count Dracula. The 1940s marked the Lewton's and Tourneur's production of films such as *Cat People* (1942) or *I walked with a Zombie* (1943), featuring the clash between "modern rational America and a traditional and superstitious old world," meaning that "the horror no longer takes place in some exotic never-never land but erupts within the normal and everyday".<sup>80</sup>

The 1950s saw an influx of films featuring topics of space, alien monsters and invasions with films such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951) or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956),<sup>81</sup> to which King himself makes an allusion in *Danse Macabre*, claiming it to be "one of the film of the last thirty years to find a pressure point with

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<sup>77</sup> Mark Jankovich, *Horror, the Film Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Spadoni, *Uncanny Bodies: the Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>79</sup> Jankovich, *Horror, the Film Reader*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 4.

great accuracy.”<sup>82</sup> While agreeing with Jankovich on the wave of films featuring outer space theme, Tudor claims in *Monsters and mad scientists: a cultural history of the horror movie* that the supernatural films were on decline. He argues that “this period is the most ‘secular’ in horror-movie history, and the characteristic style of many of these movies is the most flatly naturalistic to be encountered in the genre,” further dividing the films into “supernatural” such as *Dracula* (1958) and “secular,” for instance *The Fly* (1958).<sup>83</sup>

Next, Tudor continues to argue that the post-1960 horror films can be perceived to be “expressing a profound insecurity about ourselves, and accordingly the monsters of the period are increasingly represented as part of an everyday contemporary landscape.”<sup>84</sup> The Gothic elements were reexamined in Gene Fowler Jr.’s *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), transforming a young boy into ruthless monster,<sup>85</sup> which also influenced young Stephen King and inspired his short story “I Was a Teenage Graverobber.” The release of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in 1960 was groundbreaking for the formation of the horror genre, becoming iconic and synonymous with the horror film, especially its shower scene. Following notable films include Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Tobe Hooper’s *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), Brian DePalma’s *Carrie* (1976), John Carpenter’s pioneering work in the slasher subgenre *Halloween* (1978) and finally Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979).<sup>86</sup>

Similarly to literature, cinema too experienced its ups and downs in popularity. 1990s horror saw the emergence of films such as *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), pivotal horror film *Scream* (1996), exemplary film of found footage type *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and television shows *The X Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.<sup>87</sup> The post-2000 horror films became increasingly reliant on visual effects, the majority of them following a reliable composition that the previous horror films established. However, horror film is still perceived as a highly popular niche genre, especially with *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) or *The Conjuring* (2013).

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<sup>82</sup> King, *Danse Macabre*, 11-12.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: a Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford, Cambridge: B. Blackwell, 1989), 39.

<sup>84</sup> Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, 48.

<sup>85</sup> Jankovich, *Horror, the Film Reader*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



## 4.2 Problems of Adapting Short Stories into Film

Despite having relatively insignificant impact on adaptation studies or the film itself, as Thomas Leitch highlights in his book *Film Adaptation and Its Discontent*, “Adaptation theory, the systematic study of films based on literary sources, is one of the oldest areas in film studies.”<sup>88</sup> There are numerous studies regarding the topic of adapting novels and literary works of greater length into films, such as Brian McFarlane’s *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* or Wendell Aycock and Michael Schoenecke’s *Film and Literature: A comparative approach to Adaptation*. However, despite having great potential and often offering more than fertile soil, little to no empirical research has been done on adapting short stories.<sup>89</sup>

Yet, numerous feature-length films have had their roots in short stories or novellas such as Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, Jonathan Nolan’s “Memento Mori” spawning the Christopher Nolan adaptation *Memento* (2000), Arthur C. Clarke’s “The Sentinel” (1951) adapted by Kubrick into *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and finally, Stephen King’s *Rita Hayworth and The Shawshank Redemption* adapted by Frank Darabont into cult film *The Shawshank Redemption*.<sup>90</sup>

However, Harrison presents a few cautionary examples, such as numerous mediocre adaptations originating from Hemingway’s stories. Applying her reasoning of so many unsuccessful adaptations, she goes on to argue that notable great short stories incorporate a certain indefinable quality that is extremely difficult to capture and transform into film.<sup>91</sup>

The short story is liable to change to some extent, however the filmmakers should avoid completely replacing the original. This issue can be completely avoided by using the phrase “inspired by”. The essential component in adapting the short story seems to be identical with the novel adaptation: selecting the key events and factors and preserving the original topic and atmosphere.

The most prominent and obvious problem is that directors and screenwriters might experience difficulty with the volume of the original literary material, or, to

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: from Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007) 1.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> “Adapting Short Stories for Film: Screenplay Do’s and Don’ts,” New York Film Academy, last modified September 22, 2015, <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/adapting-short-stories-for-film-screenplay-dos-and-donts/>.

<sup>91</sup> Stephanie Harrison, *Adaptations: from Short Story to Big Screen: 35 Great Stories That Have Inspired Great Films* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), xv.

better put it, lack thereof. While in the adaptation of a novel, the content needs to be compressed, the problem with short fiction is adverse. Screenwriters are given freedom and space regarding how the remainder of screen time will be filled and processed. George Bluestone claims that “changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium.”<sup>92</sup>

When authors meet with positive reception of the short story, a percentage of them tends to expand their stories into novels, or publish chapters as short stories. As Harrison argues: “films adapted from excellent but lesser-known tales have often been better received. Here, the short story has a distinct advantage over the novel: few short stories are embedded in the public’s consciousness in the way that popular novels are.”<sup>93</sup> However, tales that reverberate with the reader are likely to be reexamined in different form. Yet, another problem potentially lies in the fact that a great number of the audience might not be familiar with the literary original. Therefore, the audio-visual medium needs to fulfill different measures, for different conditions apply.

Adapting short story is a complex and challenging task that holds many pitfalls for the producers. However, if carried out correctly, both parties seem to profit: the story is enabled to unfold and expand, while the screenwriter feels no need for compression and does not feel constrained. As King himself suggests: “if you have a short story you can always expand it, whereas if you are working with a novel, you are always thinking of taking stuff out.”<sup>94</sup>

### **4.3 The Children of the Corn**

The adaptation of King’s *Children of the Corn* was made in 1984 by Fritz Kiersch, starring Linda Hamilton as Vicky and Peter Horton as Burt. Apart from this adaptation, the literary original spawned 8 other sequels, creating a cult mini-series.<sup>95</sup> With its total of 92 minutes of runtime, it was the first feature-length film produced from a short story written by Stephen King.<sup>96</sup> Rogak points out that the argument for producing the sequels includes an ambiguous formulation of the contract, where the producers, additionally to the story itself, retain the rights to the brand and the title in

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<sup>92</sup> George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 5.

<sup>93</sup> Harrison, *Adaptations*, xvi.

<sup>94</sup> Jeff Conner, *Stephen King Goes to Hollywood: a Lavishly Illustrated Guide to All the Films Based on Stephen King’s Fiction* (New York: New American Library, 1987), xiv.

<sup>95</sup> Beahm, *The Stephen King Companion*, 133.

<sup>96</sup> Wood, *Stephen King*, 48.

general. Rogak then makes a generalization that although the first adaptations are consistently faithful to the author's work, sequels that follow are not.<sup>97</sup>

Focusing more on the character development, the original draft of the screenplay was written by Stephen King himself. Nevertheless, George Goldsmith, the screenplay writer, was optioned for the rewrite. While he acknowledged that King's opening setting, consisting of the protagonists driving and having an argument, functions as an interesting dialogue, his stance remained dismissive of King's narrative style. Although he recognized King's effort to set the stage "with tension, claustrophobia, a remote setting, all good elements for a horror story," he argues that "it was not cinematic at all," claiming that such lengthy introduction wouldn't be successful with the audience.<sup>98</sup>

Subsequently, Goldsmith describes the invention of the characters of Sarah and Job, claiming that it gave him "an opportunity to visually and cinematically tell King's story." George therefore opted to follow more traditional narrative organization, claiming that "horror and fiction are internalized, just like [King's] script. Cinema is external: visual, auditory, a more sensory experience." Goldsmith closes the topic by complimenting Kiersch, stating that it was "no small feat for a relatively inexperienced director working on a shoe-string budget" and by arguing that "The Children of the Corn" is an allegory for the revolution in Iran and that the main protagonists represent the American public,<sup>99</sup> contrasting with Magistrale's assertion about "Children of the Corn," making an allusion to Vietnam.<sup>100</sup>

The film is relatively authentic to King's short story, with portrayals of rustling corn and accentuating the topic of religion by setting the opening scene in the church. The initial scenes, examining the background of the children and showing the eradication of the adults in Gatlin, are intercepted with the scenes of Vicky and Burt's seemingly harmonious relationship, none of which can be found in the original. The tension is created when the narrative is intersected with the point of view of the evil children. Similar technique can be observed in Craven's *Scream*.

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<sup>97</sup> Rogak, *Haunted Heart*, 174.

<sup>98</sup> Francesco Borseti, *It Came from the 80s!: Interviews with 124 Cult Filmmakers* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 24.

<sup>99</sup> Borseti, *It Came from the 80s*, 24-25.

<sup>100</sup> Tony Magistrale, "Inherited Haunts : Stephen King's terrible children" in *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University, Popular Press, 1988), 78-9.

Additionally to the characters of little Job and his sister—a seer experiencing He Who Walks Behind the Row’s visions—Sarah, the gas seller and his death caused by the children are added to the story as well. The adaptation starts to diverge from the short story as soon as Burt and Vicky arrive at Gatlin, constantly splitting and reuniting, experiencing numerous additional peripeteias. While preserving the original topic, there are minor deviations such as Burt not sustaining the arm injury by a fanatic boy whom he kills afterwards, but a girl who then flees. The principal deviations include possession and consequent death of the children’s leader, Isaac (John Franklin). Increased prominence is given to Malachai (Courtney Gains), an insignificant character in the short story, as well. The adaptation finally abandons the short story narrative altogether by not only letting the main protagonists survive, but also letting them adopt Job and Sarah as they drive away from Gatlin.

The central supernatural element, He Who Walks Behind the Rows, is portrayed via special effects, computer generated imagery and various types of animation, such as unnaturally sped up storm clouds or eerie mounds of soil. However, he is never shown directly.

At the beginning of the film, the opening credits’ yellow color agrees with the prevalent theme of corn in the film. An uneasy atmosphere is strengthened by the soundtrack by Jonathan Elias consisting of chanting child choir.<sup>101</sup> The multiple use of an element commonly known as “jump scare”, defined by Muiri as “a moment of surprise or terror that seemingly comes out of nowhere but is actually a synthesis of specific sights and sounds”<sup>102</sup> is in accordance with the typical characteristics of the genre. During the film, the term “outlander” is repeatedly uttered, emphasizing the isolation of the town from the rest of the world. Several references are insinuated, namely to *The Shining*, as in 55<sup>th</sup> minute there is a scene of an axe protruding from the door while a terrified woman screams. In conclusion, the film accurately portrays the story’s sinister religious atmosphere, adhering to the author’s original narrative. However, nowadays the film can be perceived as retro and the underdeveloped special effects are prominent. The film focuses more on the children cult than the relationship and dynamics of the protagonists, which contrasts with the short story.

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<sup>101</sup> Stan Link, “The Monster and the Music Box : Children and the Soundtrack of Horror” in *Music in the Horror Film : Listening to Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 52.

<sup>102</sup> John K. Muir, *Horror Films FAQ : All That’s Left to Know About Slashers, Vampires, Zombies, Aliens, and More* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2013), 4.

#### 4.4 The Mangler

Filmed in 1995, the adaptation of eponymous King's short story was directed and co-wrote by Tobe Hooper, an acclaimed horror director known mainly for his most significant film *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). The director had previous experience with adapting King's work, having produced immensely successful *'Salem's Lot* adaptation in 1978. Comparing him to Wes Craven or John Carpenter, Muir argues that "Hooper is among the most skilled of all genre directors toiling in Hollywood, able to tap into audience fears and adrenaline rhythms with seemingly boundless energy, directorial ingenuity and even a richly ironic sense of humor."<sup>103</sup>

In terms of social and political background, *The Mangler* was released directly after signing the North American Free Trade Agreement, which had significant impact on the worker's rights movement. This was almost ideal situation to explore the anxiety and disillusionment of the American public and criticize the lack of worker's rights. The adaptation fulfilled the function, as it serves as a criticism of sweatshop conditions. Moreover, Muir claims that "the ideas underlining Stephen King's original story, and indeed, the movie's screenplay are important ones in terms of 1990s history. Like King's similarly-themed *Graveyard Shift* (1990), *The Mangler* looks at the human "cost" of the bottom line—profit."<sup>104</sup> Yet, despite playing nationwide in a great number of theaters, the film underperformed, grossing approximately two-million dollars. Undergoing changes of forty drafts, *The Mangler* was filmed in South Africa—where the cost of the production of the film is lower—due to being shot as a low-budget adaptation. Finally, Muir concludes that "at least two horror films of the nineties, *Dolly Dearest* (1992) and *The Mangler* (1995), gazed, at least tangentially, at the changes in the workplace wrought by globalization."<sup>105</sup>

The film stars Frank Theodore Levine as the main character of local police officer John Hunton. The antagonist, the Blue Ribbon Laundry owner Bill Gartley, is played by Robert Englund, an actor well-established in the horror genre mainly due to playing Freddy Krueger in horror classic *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). Similarly to *Children of the Corn*, *The Mangler* starts with relatively reliable portrayal of King's

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<sup>103</sup> John K. Muir, *Eaten Alive at a Chainsaw Massacre: The Films of Tobe Hooper* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 1.

<sup>104</sup> John K. Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 394.

<sup>105</sup> Muir, *Horror Films of the 1990s*, 8.

literary original, directly citing replicas. However, Hooper changes the plot to great extent, making the machine possess people in the town. When one sacrifices a part of their body, they become possessed by the demon in the mangler, as seen in Gartley's replica: "there's a little bit of me in that machine, and a little bit of it in me." Similarly, his phrase "We all have to make sacrifices" continues to be a recurrent phrase throughout the film, emphasizing the transference of the evil element.

In King's narrative, little space has been dedicated to the description or development of the character of the foreman George Stanner or Gartley. As a matter of fact, Gartley was only briefly mentioned in the exposition of the story. However, all of these characters played crucial roles in the film. Similarly to *Children of the Corn*, filling the space with extensive exploration of the characters' past, Hooper also invents three new characters: Gartley's lover Lin Sue, J.J.J. Photographer and Hunton's brother-in-law, psychic Mark, who serves as a link that explains the supernatural aspects, explored in the short story by the narrator. All three characters mentioned majorly contribute to the development of the plot.

The constant use of vulgar language seems to be in accordance with King's characteristic style of writing. Via using swear words, King is aiming to appease the reader and create a sense of obscenity. Emotionally charged profanity and the horror genre essentially focus on the same objective: forming shock or disgust.

Finally turning to the visual aspect of the adaptation and the portrayal of the environment, Hooper heavily relies on the use of graphic content, violence and gore. The constant outbursts of steam add to the ominous atmosphere of industrial nightmare.

## 4.5 1408

*1408* is one of the latest addition to King short story adaptations. It was directed by Swedish director Mikael Håfström and released in 2007, starring John Cusack as Mike Enslin and Samuel L. Jackson as Mr. Olin. The script was written by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski. Due to the feedback of the test audience, the adaptation has multiple endings, varying according to the country.<sup>106</sup>

As opposed to *The Children of the Corn* and *The Mangler*, *1408* does not take place in rural, remoted area, but in the busy center of New York and California.

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<sup>106</sup> Brown, *Screening Stephen King*, 119.

However, the room itself serves as an isolating device, further strengthened by the unusual elements in the film, which include Mike looking at hotel map where 1408 is the only room in the hotel, or when he, full of despair, tries to climb to the adjacent room through the window ledge but discovers that there are no other windows.

The film opens with a scene of Mike driving in a car, while a sermon is being delivered in the car radio, vaguely reminiscent of *The Children of the Corn* scene, where Burt and Vicky hear young preacher on the car radio. As opposed to short story's protagonist being successful, Mike is, similarly to the protagonist in *Misery*, a disillusioned, failing, skeptical author struggling to find inspiration and make a living. After arriving at the hotel and speaking to Olin, Mike enters the room and begins to encounter bizarre events, starting with lopsided pictures, which are reminiscent of *Pet Sematary*, reaching the film's climax with surreal scenes when the spectator is not able to distinguish between reality and illusion anymore.<sup>107</sup> As the film approaches the end, the film attains a dream-like quality, emphasizing Mike's immense mental distress, which is further strengthened by unusual camera angles and distorted proportions.<sup>108</sup>

Like in *Christine* and *Sleepwalkers*, music plays an important role in the film, as numerous times the radio in the room starts to play by itself, providing "an ironic intertextual subtext in King adaptations."<sup>109</sup> Moreover, impressive sound effects, such as the pacing heartbeat or abrupt end of the music, significantly add to the uneasy atmosphere.

While watching the adaptation, the spectator obtains a grotesque, claustrophobic, hallucination-like impression, enhanced by scenes such as when Mike waves at the person in the window of the opposite building, trying to get help, only to discover that the strange shadow is mirroring his movements. Taking a lamp from the table to cast light on himself and therefore the shadowy figure, a fast-paced cut of an evil woman with a hook follows. Notably, from all three adaptations discussed, *1408* is the most reliant on jump scares.

The adaptation's character additions include Mike's ex-wife Lily, his editor Sam or Mike's disabled father. Mike's back-story, which is revealed by episodic scenes when the room transforms into various environments such as oncology in the hospital,

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<sup>107</sup> Browning, *Stephen King on the Big Screen*, 93.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 220.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 218-19.

includes emotionally charged, torturing memories of his dying daughter Katie. The adaptation features an abundance of Mike's past that he must confront throughout the stay at *1408*. Moreover, the film possesses profound psychological and existential quality. As Magistrale suggests, Mike's career places greater focus on debunking and dismissing compelling evidence of the ghosts' existence than on finding them, his books reflecting Mike's lack of belief, cynicism and latent depression. An imposing image of an ominous doorway that Mike encounters near the end of the film symbolizes the threshold between his former self and a vision of pursuing a new, balanced life with Lily.<sup>110</sup> Further confirming the analysis, Brown concludes that "The film is a dark portrait of a traumatized man confronting his past sins in a hotel room."<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.6 Reception of Short Stories vs. Reception of Films

Even though the screenwriter of the "Children of the Corn" believed it was a hit,<sup>112</sup> the film was fiercely denounced by majority of the critics, Magistrale labeling it as a "regrettable effort"<sup>113</sup> or Wood regarding its quality as inferior. However, he stated that the short story belongs to King's most recognized and renowned tales.<sup>114</sup> Brown concludes that though the film yielded some profit, it "did not achieve the kind of breakout performance of the ever-increasing success of the corresponding books."<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, the adaptation of *The Mangler* was sharply criticized as well. Though in literary terms, the King's early story was, according to Spignesi, well made and still demonstrates the ability to stay relevant and popular,<sup>116</sup> the film is generally held in low regard. Wood describes it as an "awful disaster"<sup>117</sup> and Baughan argues that *The Mangler* "ranks as one of the worst Stephen King productions ever."<sup>118</sup>

Faring much better, the "1408" adaptation ranks among the top twenty-five highest-grossing horror films produced in the United States between 1998 and 2007.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 118.

<sup>111</sup> Brown, *Screening Stephen King*, 119.

<sup>112</sup> Borseti, *It Came from the 80s*, 24.

<sup>113</sup> Magistrale, *Stephen King*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Wood, *Stephen King*, 18, 47.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, *Screening Stephen King*, 46 .

<sup>116</sup> Spignesi, *The Essential Stephen King*, 260.

<sup>117</sup> Wood, *Stephen King*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Baughan, *Stephen King*, 92.

<sup>119</sup> Blair Davis and Kial Natale, "American Horror, Cinema, Gore, and the Box Office, 1998-2007" in *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millenium*, ed. Steffen Hantke (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 46.



Both the story in written form, marked as “incredibly scary,”<sup>120</sup> and the adaptation have earned considerable recognition among the wide public as well as critics.

Stephen King, expressing his opinion on the abovementioned adaptations in *Stephen King Goes to Movies*, believes John Cusack performed extraordinarily in *1408*, and that the film perfectly mirrored the short story’s atmosphere. Contrarily, though admitting the prowess of Hooper, King recognizes the unused potential in *The Mangler* and deems the film forgettable. Finally, while appreciating the cast and the general tone of the film, the author ridicules the number of sequels *Children of the Corn* has spawned and admits the film’s failure.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Wood, *Stephen King*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen King, *Stephen King Goes to the Movies* (New York: Pocket Books, 2009), 1-2, 58, 581.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to provide a thorough literary analysis of three short stories by Stephen King and the feature-length films they were adapted to, namely “Children of the Corn,” “The Mangler” and “1408.”

The first chapter, subdivided into five parts, examined the author’s life, works and background. Particular attention was paid to literary influences, the relationship of the author towards the horror genre and the production of film adaptations from his works. The chapter establishes that the author’s childhood, religious upbringing, poor financial situation, family life and drug abuse had profound influence on his works. These themes remain recurrent in his novels and short stories.

The second chapter aimed to provide a comprehensive background to the horror genre in literature with special focus on the development of horror short story. Despite the previous work has been limited, inconsistent and remains relatively fragmentary, this chapter unifies the significant milestones and provides historical overview of the genre. Though horror is not widely considered to be the most important category in literary taxonomy, it has been shown that the genre, undergoing a great amount of progress from the inaugural gothic work from 1764, *The Castle of Otranto*, to contemporary popular horror fiction, is a well-founded and inextricable part of the literary field attracting considerable interest among critics as well as general public.

The third chapter, which represents the central part of the thesis, provides a detailed analysis of short stories with emphasis on classic horror tropes and supernatural elements. Each short story was addressed individually, being shortly introduced and further divided into two parts, namely plot and supernatural elements. In “Children of the Corn,” the author exerts religious pressure, using evil children that formed a cult in a remote area and the elemental force stemming from nature. “The Mangler,” responding to booming industrialism, features the theme of possession of an inanimate laundry machine. The bizarre, strange occurrences and their effect on the protagonist’s psyche is vital in “1408.” It has been also shown that all of the author’s scary stories are based on the exploitation of the notion of Freud’s “the Uncanny,” with which intrinsic fear is evoked. It has been demonstrated that the writer uses a unique blend of gothic elements, as well. The chapter terminates with stating common

features of the short stories, namely religion, theme of the shadow and humor. Though appearing in varying degrees, all of them are covered in each short story.

The main concern of the fourth and final chapter was to, while taking comparative approach, examine the production, classic horror elements and mainly juxtapose the adaptations with the short stories. For better understanding of the adaptations themselves, the chapter begins by examining origin and development of the horror genre in cinematography. Similarly to the second chapter, an inclusive overview is given. Next, problems of transforming short fiction into feature-length film were discussed. There is a considerable amount of literature dealing with the topic of novel to film adaptation, however, little to no research has been done on adapting short stories. The results have shown that while basic concepts remain typically preserved, great expansion is needed. That is usually being dealt with via the creation and addition of new characters that were not previously featured in the written original and via an extensive exploration of the characters' back-story. These results confirm previous evidence. Next, the individual adaptations are discussed and analyzed, proving that though horror film is often regarded as an object of scorn, the genre provides social and political commentary, addressing fears and anxieties of the society. Finally, critical reception of the stories and the adaptations is compared, including the author's opinion.

In general, it can be stated that Stephen King is not recognized only as a mainstream and popular author, but also as an accomplished horror icon able to skillfully elicit strong emotions, essential for the genre, and to transcend the literary boundaries, his works being transformed into numerous adaptations. However, this thesis also demonstrated that producing a film under King's auspices does not guarantee success equal to his works.

## Resumé

Záměrem této práce je poskytnout literární rozbor tří povídek Stephena Kinga, které byly zfilmovány, jmenovitě „Děti kukuřice“, „Šroták“ a „1408.“ První kapitola zkoumá autorův život, tvorbu a zázemí. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována literárním vlivům, vztahu autora k hororovému žánru a produkci filmových adaptací jeho děl. Druhá kapitola má za cíl poskytnout ucelený přehled hororového žánru v literatuře se zaměřením na vývoj hororové povídky. Přestože předchozí tvorba byla omezená, nesouvislá a zůstává poměrně dílčí, tato kapitola sjednocuje významné milníky a nabízí historický přehled tohoto žánru. Přestože horor není obecně považován za nejvýznamnější literární kategorii, ukázalo se, že tento žánr, podstoupiv značný rozvoj od počátečního gotického díla *Otranský zámek* k současné populární hororové fikci, je neodmyslitelnou součástí oblasti literatury, přitahující značný zájem kritiků i široké veřejnosti.

Třetí kapitola, představující hlavní část této práce, poskytuje podrobný rozbor povídek s důrazem na klasické hororové a nadpřirozené prvky. Každý příběh je adresován samostatně, krátce uveden a posléze rozdělen na dvě části, jmenovitě děj a nadpřirozené prvky. V „Děti kukuřice“ autor uplatňuje náboženský nátlak a živelní síly. „Šroták“ uvádí motiv posednutí neživého stroje. Bizarní výjevy a jejich účinek na psychiku hlavního hrdiny jsou zásadní v „1408.“ Také se ukazuje, že všechny autorovy děsivé příběhy využívají směs gotických prvků a jsou založeny na využití Freudova ponětí „The Uncanny.“ Tato kapitola je zakončena výčtem společných znaků povídek.

Hlavním záměrem čtvrté a poslední kapitoly je prozkoumat produkci, klasické hororové prvky a srovnat adaptace s povídkami. Kapitola začíná přehledem hororového žánru v kinematografii a problémy transformace krátké fikce ve film. Zatímco základní koncepty zůstávají obvykle zachovány, je vyžadováno značné rozšíření. Jednotlivé adaptace jsou diskutovány a rozebírány, dokazující že žánr poskytuje společenský a politický komentář, který se zabývá strachy a úzkostmi společnosti. Závěrem je srovnáváno kritické přijetí příběhů a adaptací.

Obecně lze říci, že Stephen King není známý pouze jako běžný populární autor, ale také jako úspěšná hororová ikona schopná vyvolat silné emoce, a překročit hranice literatury adaptacemi svých děl. Avšak tato práce rovněž ukazuje, že produkce filmu pod záštitou Kinga nezaručuje úspěch srovnatelný s jeho dílem.

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## **Anotace**

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Práce se zabývá analýzou tří povídek Stephena Kinga se zaměřením na nadpřirozeno. Práce rovněž zkoumá filmové adaptace autorových děl a srovnává je s literárními předlohami. Také pojednává o autorově životě a díle s ohledem na literární vliv. V neposlední řadě dokládá historický přehled hororového žánru v literatuře a filmové tvorbě.

## **Annotation**

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This thesis is concerned with the analysis of three selected short stories of Stephen King with special focus on supernatural elements. Moreover, the thesis examines the adaptations of the author's works and juxtaposes them with the literary original. The thesis also introduces the author's life and work with special regard to literary influences. The historical overview of the horror genre in literature and in cinematography is provided as well.