

# A Study of Adolescent's Revolt in American Society with Special Reference to King's Novel: 'Pet Sematary'

## Abstract

Stephen King places his protagonists in situations where they encounter the reality of evil, and from this encounter they must make choices which will influence the remainder of their lives. We can compare him with Poe, Melville, Hawthorne and Flannery O'Connor. The theme of Stephen King's work is how his characters react to the loss of innocence King says that death is a natural process and no one can defeat it and we must work to overcome our fears of death. He says that the death of a loved one is the greatest pains and we all live with this pain. In his novel *Pet Sematary* a thought is evoked when Louis Creed, a young doctor, who with his family are protagonists, learns that, however, fantastic it might seem, it is possible in a mysterious and ancient cemetery to revive the dead. He has the opportunity to do so when the family's pet cat is killed. However, the cat, returned, is not quite the same as it had been. "There was something fundamentally different; fundamentally wrong about him."<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** *Pet Sematary*, Frankenstein myth, Superstition, Religion.

## Introduction

*Pet Sematary* is a supernatural horror tale set in King's beloved Maine, involving yet another version of King's prototypical all-American family. *Pet Sematary* shows King's awareness of the over-familiarity of certain subject matter, specifically vampires, haunted houses, and wild talents.<sup>2</sup> King told to his readers that it was "too terrifying" to publish *Pet Sematary* and here would be a masterwork of supernatural horror. *Pet Sematary* (1983) is the most timeless of King's novels, perhaps because it is so personal. There is no relief from the horrors, as death follows death, and ultimately death is a secret that must be kept from the living. The book is essentially about death as it appears to the living, and it conveys the most universal of themes. It is indeed a personal novel, and much has been made of the fact that it was inspired by King's facing for the first time the possibility of the death of his own child. The novel is about death just as much as Stoker's *Dracula* or Sheridan Le Fanu's Swedenborgian Gothic mystery *Uncle Silas*.<sup>3</sup> As Douglas E. Winter has suggested, the ultimate horror that a human must face is the death of his own child.<sup>4</sup>

Through his *Pet Sematary*, King wants to show us how to deal with death by Jud's quiet acceptance of his wife's death and, more specifically, what not to do through Louis's behaviour. Hawthorne chose to write about Massachusetts and many for the same reasons we can say King is a regionalist. In *Pet Sematary* Stephen King captures the native speech patterns, the elements of life in a cold climate, and the specificity of place that set his reader firmly in a rural Maine world. We can compare the characters of Hawthorne and King. They are presented as sensible counterpoints to the encroaching madness of the central protagonists. Hawthorne's characters are parallels to the Jud Crandall's role in *Pet Sematary*. King is a popular clinical psychiatrist for his young readers. He says teenagers must face their problems in a fictional, non-threatening setting. Anything which we can't defined, measured or understood, presents a serious, perhaps insurmountable, problem. There is a fear of unknown which cannot be explain, observed, tested and defined. Superstition and religion are belief system. Both can be termed the 'irrational rational'.

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Horror fiction is also a belief system. Most of the writer never tell about his creative ideas and methods they don't want to tell from where they get their ideas but Stephen King has broken this tradition; in his *Danse Macabre* he has sketched for his readers the machinery of his fiction. In 'Foreword' to the *Night Shift* collection, King suggests that there is an analogy between people who read horror fiction or view horror films and people who slow down their cars for a better look when they spot a terrible highway accident in the distance. King tells us:

The fact is—and most of us know this in our hearts—that very few of us can forego an uneasy peek at the wreckage bracketed by police cars and road flares on the turnpike at night...No need to belabor the obvious; life is full of horrors small and large, but because the small ones are the ones we can comprehend, they are the ones that smack home with all the force of mortality.<sup>5</sup>

King says the content of the horror story, is both attracted and repelled the reader and he says, the focus of the horror story is narrowed to the immediate personal experience. King says, the horror lies not so much with the monsters but with a faulty perception of the monsters, seeing them as something that they are not, something harmless or innocent. King wants us to 'feel' for his,, characteristics:

You have got to love the people (characters). See, that's the real paradox. There has to be love involved, because the more you love— kids like Tad Trenton in *Cujo* or Danny Torrance in *The Shining*—then that allows horror to be possible. There is no horror without feeling. If you have that, then horror is possible, because horror is contrasting emotion to our understanding of all the things that are good and normal. Without a concept of normality, there is no horror.<sup>6</sup>

According to Schuman, King has four major strengths— "a surprisingly effective prose style"; "an ability to create characters at once unique and universal"; "a strong and clear ethical stance"; "an ability to imagine and represent plots which is absolutely brilliant." He says King's work is, "an imaginary toad in a real garden." Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* deals with the mysteries of the after-life. King's novel is the mirror of the troubled atmosphere of contemporary America. He evokes the realities of corrupt government, technology run rampant, and an uncertain domestic life as by monsters and ghosts and other mythical products of the human imagination. King's novels and stories that depict teenage life are profoundly critical of the parental expectation, conservative values, and peer pressures which teenagers must face. King's teen protagonists come into awareness engaging the contradictions between the logical realm of routine activity and the darker regions of violent, destructive impulses. They

are often outsiders who turn to violence as a response to exclusionary social environments which deny them acceptance, or who resort to destructive attitudes that they believe will advance them upward.<sup>7</sup>

King's earliest writings presented tortured adolescent and violence running amuck within the sterile, or duly environment of schools. '*Cain Rose Up*' (1968) dramatize a college students tense moments before he randomly shoots passers-by from his dormitory window; *Here They Be Tygers*' (1968) describes a young boy witnessing his tyrannical third grade teacher being discovered by a tiger, an unlikely occupant of the boys' bathroom; and *Sword in the Darkness*, an early unpublished novel, "is a lengthy tale of a race riot at an urban high school."<sup>8</sup> King's fiction which are related to adolescence bring before us details of a hostile social environment and value system and it is also parallels to his concerns with institutional irresponsibility for instance *The Dead Zone* (1979) and *Firestarter* (1980), or in his technological nightmares like *The Stand* (1978) and *The Mist* (1980).

*Rage* (1977) is the first novel which was published pseudonymously as Richard Bachman. In this novel King expressed teenage outrage. King's adolescent characters are Charlie Decker, Carrie White, Arnie Cunningham, Harold Lauder and Jodd Bowden. These characters are sexually ambiguous, alienated, uniquely gifted and destructive. Stephen King's '*Salem's Lot*' is a tale of mysterious horror. In '*Salem's Lot*' King erects a new hermeneutic of the gothic novel. King destroys the American pastoral in '*Salem's Lot*'. Like Norman Rockwell, he depicts small town America with its symbols of home, school and church; he presents the comforts of friendly companionship and family security. Stephen King has been writing since an early age. In his childhood whenever he saw movies he wrote stories based on movies and sold them to his friend. In his novel, *Pet Sematary* (1983), King reveals in the tabloid and the sensational, using at one point in the novel the supposed authenticity of the shroud of Turin as an argument against scientific rationalism and its debunking of the possibility of miracles similarly, to emphasize his preference of the sensational over the purely realistic, King tells his readers in the introduction to *Skeleton Crew* (1985) that *The Thorn Birds*' his favourite part was when the wicked old lady rotted and sprouted maggots in about sixteen hours. What is often lost in the gale of fright supernatural menace, and cynical social commentary is a certain sense or textual logic, integrity and purpose. *Pet Sematary* (1983) is a good instance of the dilemmas that King's postmodern Gothic Poses. In that novel, King gives us a cast of characters, whose actions and eventual fate are truly horrifying, but they are placed in a logically inconsistent fictional universe, a universe so supernaturally oppressive that they have no choice in the matter. Zizek's description is lacking in two regards. First, the fantasy, as it is rooted in the popular imagination and the archaic religious mind, is based on the fear of dead. The more significant aspect of this. common fantasy is that it expresses a

pre-scientific or superstitious fear that death is not final, and death can somehow be overturned that can be both dead and alive at the same time. The importance of this fear is that it flies in the face of what we know from our own experiences and from what we know medically and scientifically. King says that, when he can not achieve a higher effect, he will aim at revulsion:

...I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud.<sup>9</sup>

Stephen King works very hard, he says the description is not that which tell the reader exactly about the locale but it goes beyond to convey its mood and its meaning. We can take the example of *Pet Sematary*. *Pet Sematary's* Hero, Louis Creed, a physician and a newcomer to Maine, is taken, with his family in tow, to this spot by a native Mainer, on a pleasant weekend day outing:

They topped the second hill, and then the path sloped through a head-high swatch of bushes and tangled underbrush. It narrowed and then, just ahead, Louis saw Ellie and Jud go under an arch made of old weatherstained boards. Written on these in faded black paint, only just legible, were the words PET SEMATARY.<sup>10</sup>

Stephen King's stories frequently involved an unremarkable protagonist middle-class families, children and often writers being submerged into increasingly horrifying circumstances. He also produces more typical literary work, including the novellas *The Body* and *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* as well as *The Green Mile*.

Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* has resisted easy categorization. Horror is achieved at the expense of logic but with the loss of logic, the novel's ability to address real problems in a real America is compromised. What we must eventually fear in King's fiction is not the real world of oppressive parents and governments but the imaginary but if this is the case, King's work loses its critical edge, its power to engage American Society. Thus, King's greatest problem is a side effect of his greatest asset, his post-modernism his privileging of folk, archaic and popular tradition over that of scientific rationalism but it is precisely this superstitious fear that King privileges in his critique of the American family and society in *Pet Sematary*. The fear he evokes is not escapist it is evoked in earnest. It is obvious from King's comments in Winter's work and his own *Danse Macabre* that he takes his novel, its social commentary and its supernatural ambience seriously. In *Danse Macabre* King himself speaks of the terror raised by Jacobs' story, which he regards as among the finest of its kind:

It's what the mind sees that makes these stories such quintessential tales of terror. It is the unpleasant speculation called to mind when the knocking on the door begins in [The Monkey's Paw] and the

grief-stricken old woman rushes to answer it. Nothing is there but the wind when she finally throws the door open...but what, the mind wonders, might have been there if her husband had been a little slower on the draw with that mind wish?<sup>11</sup>

We can compare King with Mary Shelley, both are domestic by Nature both were raised by only one parent. In *Danse Macabre* King refers to Mary Shelley's work as "caught in a kind of cultural echo chamber."<sup>12</sup> Stephen King is a particularly devoted family man, whenever he was asked the worst thing he could ever imagine, replied it would be to find one of his children dead.<sup>13</sup> In King's novels children are the hero of *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Firestarter* and *The Talisman*. But even children can be changed, or so at least *Pet Sematary* suggests. Perhaps because of that suggestion King left this manuscript unfinished for years, saying of it later, "I had written something that was so horrible that I didn't want to deal with it on a redraft..."<sup>14</sup>

Winter refers to King's use of the supernatural as rational supernaturalism in which the order and facade of every day life is overturned that is King and his admirers tends to take his supernatural creations seriously, as more than literary creations as in nineteenth century ghost stories. The object of the supernatural attack in King's fiction, especially in *Pet Sematary* is the modern family and its hapless, members. An essential element of this deconstruction is King's privileging of adolescent discourse over that of adults and rationalism. The enemy of such adolescents, of course is that symbol of American Modernism, the middle-class family. It is the family that makes of adolescence such a gruesome age. According to King, it is the sorry state of relationships within the family that makes the adolescent vulnerable to the enticements of the supernatural especially in *Christine* (1983). It is the fragile illusory nature of the nuclear family that gets Louis Creed in trouble in *Pet Sematary* but one could easily point out that King's own *Rage* (1977) in this instance is misplaced. The American family is not designed to prepare its young for battles with the supernatural. The American family is judge to be inadequate because it does not prepare its members to deal with the imaginary so we have to wonder it, logically the attack of the supernatural has anything to do with the health or structure of the American Family. We should think what role a critique of the American family actually plays in the postmodern gothic novel. The American family is not the source of the evil that threatens people and it is not ultimately the family itself that attracts evil. The ultimate complaint of adolescents is that they are misunderstood by adults, but King's monsters and supernatural beings seem to understand them well enough that they are akin to monsters in their own right giving awkward credence to what adults have feared all along, that their children are monsters that they might want to eat their parents, as they do in both *Salem's Lot* (1975) and *Pet Sematary*.

In *Pet Sematary*, Dr. Louis Creed, is a physician newly arrived in Maine. He loves his wife and his children and content with his profession. Nonetheless there are some problems. Whenever his family become too loud, too irritating and hard to put up with Louis dreams of escape. Then he fantasizes about abandoning his burdens and driving south, "all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as a medic, under a new name."<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Louis Creed, the protagonist of *Pet Sematary* (1983) can be compare with the darkest characters in Hawthorne. Creed is similar to the impassioned, but misguided idealists who populate Hawthorne's stories; he resembles Aylmer, Rappaccini, Chillingworth, Goodman Brown and Hollingsworth who also fail to recognize the inviolable distinction separating human idealism from the limitations of reality. Like these characters in Hawthorne, Creed violates standards for personal moral conduct and brings about his own destruction.<sup>16</sup> Hawthorne's fictions protagonists for instance in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux' and in *The Man of Adamant* are parallel to Jud Crandall's role in *Pet Sematary*. The basic concept of King's novel *Pet Sematary* is that we must work to overcome our fears of death and dying is a natural process which no one can defeat.

Stephen King was very good friend of Peter Straub and they were more productive in the history of supernatural and horror fiction. As Peter Straub puts it, "Meeting of writers are always like the coming together of princes who rule over small, but highly independent countries, and a wrong word, a breath of rudeness can lead to undeclared warfare."<sup>17</sup> Sometimes King's own approach is much more complex and varied than the public conception of his writing. King states:

My own philosophy as a sometime writer of horror fiction is to recognize these distinctions because they are sometimes useful, but to avoid any preference for one over the other on the grounds that one effect is somehow better than another...I recognize terror as the finest emotion..., and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrorize him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I go for the gross-out. I'm not proud.<sup>18</sup>

According to Samuel Schuman *Pet Sematary* is, as its core, a version of the Frankenstein myth, the moral of which is that it is always immoral and very dangerous to tinker with the natural order of birth and death. In *Pet Sematary* when Creed's family's pet cat is hit by a car, Jud Crandall introduces creed to the Micmac Burial Ground. It is a burying ground, dead bodies which are buried in this ground return to the world of living—but not exactly as they left. They

buried the cat in that ground and next day, the cat comes back. Creed's young son was hit and killed by a speeding truck and he also carries his body to the magical burial place. The boy also returns but he was dead too long, and his child-body seems possessed by a maniacal and diabolic spirit.

#### Conclusion

Creed loves his son so much and he indulge in sin because of love; he did not make the living into the dead; but he tries to make the dead to live again. *Pet Sematary* is a long novel and in this novel King shows us the resurrection of death and adolescent's revolt.

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