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Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of masculinity as an unsolvable problem, or an open wound, in Stephen King's *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, *Rose Madder*, *Blaze*, and *Doctor Sleep*. It uses theories from social and cultural studies to discuss masculinity in relation to responsibility and evil, examining textual correlations between traditional manhood and immorality. It also explores the assumptions and prejudices behind social and sexual relationships men have with women and other men in King's fiction, focusing on the exclusion of femininity and non-traditional masculinities. Finally, it argues that communication, responsibility, and reparation fail as solutions to problems of masculinity, which tends to remain an open wound in Stephen King's fiction.

Keywords: masculinity, Stephen King, evil, sexuality.

Resumo

Nesta dissertação examina-se a representação da masculinidade como um problema insolúvel, ou como uma ferida aberta, em cinco obras de Stephen King: *The Shining, Pet Sematary, Rose Madder, Blaze* e *Doctor Sleep*. Usam-se teorias de estudos sociais e culturais para discutir a masculinidade em relação à responsabilidade e ao mal, examinando as correlações textuais entre masculinidade tradicional e imoralidade. Exploram-se também suposições e preconceitos por trás das relações sociais e sexuais que homens têm com mulheres e outros homens na ficção de King, focando no processo de exclusão da feminilidade e das masculinidades não tradicionais. Por fim, defende-se que a comunicação, a responsabilidade e a reparação falham como soluções para os problemas da masculinidade, que tende a permanecer uma ferida aberta na ficção de Stephen King.

Palavras-chave: masculinidade, Stephen King, mal, sexualidade.

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Introduction

In the anxieties of Stephen King's fiction, and underlying whatever makes his readers afraid, there are severe wounds. His prime contribution to American fiction is being a curator of generalized instabilities and of what induces personal and social fears both in America and around the globe. His juvenilia capture, even if a bit late, the fears of nuclear disaster that characterize Hollywood in the 1950s, adorning the theme with references from H. P. Lovecraft and other pulp authors, and his novels chronicle the United States in the late twentieth-century from the point of view of popular literature. *Carrie* (1974) explores adolescence and high school experience, *It* (1986) addresses childhood and the nature of fear itself, and *Misery* (1987) represents the dread of many writers and public figures. One of the most pernicious wounds in King's fiction, however, is not in his ostracized adolescents, his infant characters, or his writers—it is in his men.

When I describe manhood as a wound, I refer to how King treats it as a systemic problem. Because of the injuries, the damage, the pain, and the grief that male characters cause both to themselves and to others, masculinity is frequently correlated to immorality and accompanied by negative assumptions. Some novels question these assumptions, exposing the flaws of stereotypical representations of manhood, while other works are less critical, perpetuating these patterns.

Even though manhood is a frequent topic in King's novels, there are significant gaps in the criticism. The analysis related to gender initially focused on characters from his older novels, and only recent critical works encompass the entirety of King's *oeuvre*. Most of them, however, are theses and dissertations covering the evolution of female characters. My thesis fills this gap by examining depictions of manhood in five novels, one for each decade since King's first published novel: *The Shining* (1977), *Pet Sematary* (1983), *Rose Madder* (1995), *Blaze* (2007), and *Doctor Sleep* (2013).

While several critics have written about male characters in *The Shining* and in *Pet Sematary*, making observations that are true to King's writing in general, there is no work centered on the development of men and masculinities in his novels. The closest is Tony Magistrale's chapter "Sex with Consequences: Sexuality and Its Discontents," from *Stephen King: America's Storyteller*, in which discussions about sexuality veer into problems of masculinity. In contrast, three master's theses deal with the development of King's female characters. In *"Sometimes Being a Bitch is All a Woman Has": Stephen King, Gothic Stereotypes, and the Representation of Women* (2012), Kimberly Beal analyses five novels and defends that women in King's fiction are more complex than simple stereotypes. James Guthrie analyzes the progress of female characters throughout seven novels in *Three Decades of Terror: Domestic Violence, Patriarchy, and the Evolution of Female Characters in Stephen King's Fiction* (2009). Finally, in *"The Matrix of All Problems": Stephen King's Marriage of Fundamentalism and the Monstrous-feminine as Social Critique* (2013), Jenny Ackers exposes the relation between fundamentalism and patriarchal values in King's novels. While they served me as a starting point for my research, a great part of my work consisted in reading articles on specific novels and short stories, but with a bird's eye view.

My initial intention was to analyze the depiction of male characters to determine if they embody similar or diverse masculinities, thereby understanding King's portrayal of manhood and its literary consequences. My hypothesis was that, as some critics notice in King's women characters, men had changed in King's stories throughout the decades. More specifically, I conjectured that men were depicted as clichés in novels published in the 1970s and 1980s, but, from the 1990s on, King would have depicted manhood less stereotypically. My readings, however, indicated that, while King tried to provide masculinities a new light in his novels, no attempt was truly successful. The problems remain active; the wound has not been closed.

While King is known for his recurrent characters, such as teachers, writers, and alcoholics, his works throughout the decades have introduced a number of variations of his preferred types. *The Shining* puts readers face to face with a man who exemplifies most masculine wounds in King's fiction. Jack Torrance is a teacher, a writer, and an alcoholic, and all of these aspects connect to his fragile manhood. *Pet Sematary*'s Louis Creed has none of these traits, but, like Jack, he is a dedicated father whose failure to mediate manhood destroys the family core. Norman Daniels, in *Rose Madder*, is not a father and only shows dedication toward abusive behavior, but his aggression echoes Jack and Louis, who forcefully reaffirm their maleness in an attempt at structuring their identity. A similar aggression is found on the titular character in *Blaze*, whose muscular body is almost monstrous. His crimes, however, are less an affirmation of power and more the result of his child-like manner of overcoming harshness. Finally, Jack's son, Dan Torrance, manages to control the frustration and the anger that characterize his predecessors via openness and communication, but the reader of *Doctor Sleep* is left to wonder the limits of those strategies. Such is the nature of masculinity, a vague concept that feels obvious, but tends to evade objective scrutiny. And such is the structure of King's male characters, whose recurrent flaws reveal the sustainability of their wounds.

But how exactly is masculinity portrayed as a wound, or a problem? First, through the connection of manhood to evil. Second, through the attribution of moral values to sexuality, which distorts the representation of social and sexual relationships. These two forms of characterization result in masculinity being almost always depicted in negative terms in King's fiction, following a formula that reduces manhood to its negative connotations.

King's novels associate traditional masculinity to immorality, aggression, and unbalance. The greedy rich men from *The Shining*, the abusers in *Rose Madder* and *Blaze*, as well as the self-doubting protagonist in *Pet Sematary* are all examples that I explore throughout my thesis. The social scheme of *The Shining*, for instance, welcomes men who fit the roles of

wage earners, leaders, and masters, associating success to outdated values and distorting the concept of masculinity with such restriction. The wound of masculinity is clear in the protagonist's failure to mediate his own maleness and external influences. While this ought to be read as social criticism on King's part, other works, such as *Rose Madder*, which reduces men to aggressive killers or saccharine lovers, present flaws of characterization.

The open wound is also in King's construction of non-traditional men. Magistrale recognizes a pattern in King's male characters: when it comes to sexuality, they are built following the absurd logic that homosexuality equals pedophilia, non-standard sexual practices equal evil purposes, and that safety is found only in traditional, conventional, and heterosexual relationships (*America's Storyteller* 85). When it comes to sex, King's novels carry a primitive morality, resulting in homophobic, oversimplified representations of manhood.

Masculinity is in perpetual disharmony in King's fiction, since solving its problems involves non-traditional approaches, and those are presented as already tainted. Magistrale recognizes that behind traditional stereotypes lies the conservativeness of what contemporary horror fiction inherited from the Gothic (76). The presentation of some forms of sexuality as deviant works like a contrast, highlighting the positive qualities of the "normal" man—this, of course, in a paradigm of normality that is faulty at best. Kate Sullivan argues that, in King's works, "the establishment of male-male intimacy" and the recognition of multiple forms of masculinity may be the first step toward the solution of problems such as male alienation. In her analysis of "The Body," however, she indicates that male intimacy is distorted by the narrative. Men engage in homosocial relationships that value non-traditional aspects of masculinity (e.g., nurture, communication), but always under the fear of being misread as homosexuals. If other forms of masculinity are recognized, then, it seems that they are merely there to work as a foil, never as the center of a narrative. The same often applies to feminine figures, who are seen as an interference to male bonding. Masculinities

are constructed to prevent any solution to its problems: its numerous shapes are depicted as essentially in clash, while traditional masculinity is also in clash with femininity.

King himself recognizes the traditionalism of his genre. In "Why We Crave Horror Movies," he defends that "the horror movie is innately conservative, even reactionary" and that it reassures us of our normality (461). It is not farfetched to extend this statement to some literary forms of horror. The obvious question here concerns the subject: "In 'our normality,' who does this 'our' refer to?" If we consider Magistrale's and Sullivan's analyses, King's words only make sense if this "our" refers to a heterosexual, sexually conservative, traditionally masculine "we". It is hard to imagine anyone outside this category finding their normality reassured if they are depicted as evil.

For the sake of this thesis, I understand both that King's novels come from one author's eyes and that they establish a dialog with literary, social, and cultural tendencies. For instance, King positions himself in relation to Gothic literature as a tendency rather than a genre fixed in time. The Gothic, in turn, carries certain social views in respect to sexuality and politics of genre. On the one hand, those views are progressive, as they address taboo subjects; on the other hand, they are negatively conservative, since they depict non-traditional sexuality as punishable. These views have become part of literature, films and series, music, paintings, and video games. In his works, King openly acknowledges how this horror culture, from monster movies to some rock-and-roll songs, influences his writing. Since these literary, social, and cultural tendencies are intertwined, we can observe in them tendencies related to sexuality, masculinity, and genre. All of those are present in King's work, which, because of its popularity, is not only influenced by these tendencies, but influence them in response. I discuss these tendencies in the following chapters, starting with a broad view of my literary corpus and advancing toward specific considerations.

Chapter 1: King's Male Characters and the Theories of Masculinity

The first segment of chapter one comprises essential concepts of the field of masculinity studies and contextualizes them into a discussion about literature. Focusing on the misconceptions regarding maleness, it establishes the terms and assumptions necessary for the discussion carried out in the following chapters. While masculinity studies is a relatively new academic area, its theoretical considerations about the plurality of manhood form the backbone of my thesis. No considerations regarding literature could be made without it.

The next five segments of this chapter (one for each novel) provide an overview of themes and of the representation of men and masculinity in the corpus as a preparation for the specific notions in the following chapters. The aim here is not necessarily to introduce the concepts I develop later, but rather to give a broad perspective. The arguments I develop in the last two chapters require not only the specific evidence I provide as support, but also a generalized notion of how manhood is depicted in the five main novels in my corpus. In short, chapter one is what we must know to discuss masculinity in Stephen King's fiction.

Theories of Masculinity

I approach the subject of maleness by clarifying what it is not. While it is impossible to begin reading a thesis on masculinity and male characters without preconceived ideas, we must first consider how diverse both masculinities and the fields that study them are. In the introductory sections of her influential *Masculinities* (1995), Raewyn Connell notes, "Gender terms are contested because the right to account for gender is claimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge" (3). While personal, psychological, and therapeutic approaches, for instance, may focus on the individual experience and suffering of certain groups of men, political views may share the object of analysis and become theories concerning wounds in social minorities. The concepts of masculinity and femininity, as Connell observes, are "elusive and difficult to define" (3), and so are the multitude of viewpoints on

those subjects. My concern is to discuss manhood only as it is presented in horror literature; thus, I enumerate some considerations to adjust possible misconceptions.

I use "masculinity studies" as a term to refer to the field in general, including social, anthropological, cultural, and literary studies of manhood. Another term is "men's studies," which is often interchangeable with the term I use but may also present distinctions. In "Masculinity Studies and Literature," Alex Hobbs differentiates "masculinity studies" as a term that refers to literary criticism and "men's studies" to refer to the social studies counterpart (383). At any rate, masculinity studies, men's studies, and their different branches are considerably similar when generalized, while proving to be remarkably diverse at close range. In approximate terms, they are areas that study male humans and the concept of masculinity. More specifically, however, they rely on diverse political assumptions and theoretical postulates. Despite being a relatively new field, it already walks on steady feet and has its progression attested by lists of serious theoretical books on masculinity. Considering how diverse but well-established masculinity studies are, I do not intend to delve too deep into theory for its own sake, nor would the extent of my chapters allow me, so, despite my use of theories from the social sciences, I always cite from these areas having literature in mind. Before applying masculinity studies to literature, however, I must strengthen the concepts by establishing the assumptions on which I rely throughout this thesis.

First, masculinity is neither entirely biological nor entirely performative, but, in some measure, is both. Strict biological explanations find little support in academic settings, let alone in the humanities, so perhaps it is easy, for the readers of a thesis on U.S. literature to understand why the male body is not a consistent parameter for measuring a socio-cultural concept. Nevertheless, we must recognize that this is a common view in certain settings: we need only to think of some Hollywood blockbusters or some health magazines designed for a male audience. Connell alerts us against views that assume the existence of a "true masculinity" that has the male body as a point of reference. While those views are more common

in mass culture than in the sciences, the male body still carries some significance in academic terms as an object of studies of gender. Generally, for the biological sciences "the body is a natural machine which produces gender difference" (45), while the humanities and social sciences view it as "a more or less neutral surface or landscape on which a social symbolism is imprinted" (46). Connell criticizes both views, suggesting a third alternative that mixes both approaches. She, however, recognizes that this third way is equally problematic, since it relies on two flawed views. Even the search for paradigms with which to analyze manhood seems sometimes like an open wound.

Connell further criticizes a recurrent metaphor: the body as a machine. She argues that this metaphor may restrict our views on bodies and especially on the relation among body, gender, and masculinity/femininity. She reminds us that, "When a metaphor becomes established it pre-empts discussion and shapes the way evidence is read," which means that social components of identity may be seen as corporeal or even mechanical. She cites an article by Julianne Imperato-McGinley and others, in which the authors conclude, "[P]hysi-ological mechanisms could override social conditioning" (Connell 48), while the evidence in question suggests a *social* correction of a *social* error.[1] If we consider the body a machine, anyone who does not fit preconceived mechanical and bodily perfection becomes not a dif-ference to be welcomed, but a problem to be fixed, a dysfunctional aberration, a clock miss-ing a cog.

The alternative view is a semiotic approach to the body, which, in a post-structuralist view of gender, regards bodies not as biological structures or machines with fixed parts, but rather as entities molded by social imprinting. The drawback of this view, to Connell, is that

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[1] The article is a study of people assigned as female at birth whose testosterone level rose at puberty, causing reassignment of their gender roles or identities to male. The authors of the article recognize this as biology superseding a social context, while Connell interprets the data differently. Noting how strong the gender division was in the society in question in the Dominican Republic, she reads the evidence as an indicator of a gradual social correction (reassignment) of a social error (miss-assignment of gender at birth).

"[w]ith so much emphasis on the signifier, the signified tends to vanish" (50). One example is the act of sex. Connell quotes Carole Vance's observations on how, "to the extent that social construction theory grants that sexual acts, identities and even desire are mediated by cultural and historical factors, the object of the study—sexuality—becomes evanescent and threatens to disappear" (Vance 164). An understanding of gender as a mere performance does not acknowledge the physically changing nature of the people behind the stage. People are hardly a vessel for their attributes, but rather something massively more complex.

Like the proponents of biological explanations who rely on the metaphor of bodies as machines, performative views of gender often utilize metaphorical reasoning that may influence our understanding of this theory and the arguments behind it. The central metaphor is the human being as an actor. As John Beynon writes in *Masculinities and Culture* (2002), "[t]he role model depicts men and women not as free agents but like actors following prescribed roles" and, "[t]o take the theatrical metaphor further, masculinity is a performance, a set of stage directions, a 'script' that men learn to perform" (58). It is hard to see if Beynon agrees with this approach or is merely reporting it, but the metaphor can be scrutinized. Are people, like actors, aware that they are supposedly playing roles? Or do we go through life without complete notion of the extent of our "scripts"? Like actors, can we stop playing these roles? If we cannot, we return to essentialist views of gender and masculinity as a propriety attached to some people: the role is unescapable and indispensable part of the self. Conversely, if we are able to stop playing these roles, it means there is a structural entity beneath masculinity, like a real person behind a mask of manhood, who can remove the mask and part ways with it, or modify the script somehow and carry on with the play. If this structural entity is natural to some people, we again fall into essentialism. If it is not, then we are to dig *ad nauseam* into entities behind masks. While post-structuralist approaches to gender are far too complex to be reduced to a metaphor, my point remains relevant, as, like Connel indicates, metaphors may influence our rationale.

Connell's main hesitation regarding the post-structuralism is that some of its proponents ignore possible connections between gender (including masculinity, femininity, sexuality) and the body. She observes that "[b]odily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are" (53). In accounts of sexual relations, for instance, we encounter a descriptive language that links a social acts to changes in the body, be those momentary or durable. Connell uses life-history interviews as evidence, describing how corporeal feedback during sexual relations and "the *physical* feeling of climax" (53) connect to "symbolic sequences," which are associated to a "*social* transition" that is, in turn, expressed via body-related language. Manual labor is a similar example. To Connell, it is impossible to ignore how that "bodily sense of masculinity" (55) brings severe consequences to some gender relations. The emphasis on the body of manual workers, for instance, highlights a masculinity that can exclude women from the work force and exhaust men's bodies over an extended period. There are also consequences regarding different working classes: while the above is true for blue-collar workers, white-collar male workers execute the type of sedentary desk work that used to be relegated to women. Along with the change of gender in this type of labor, then, comes a form of masculinity that features its own values. To Connell, the proper perspective to analyze masculinities recognizes that the body is unavoidable, even if we are not to reduce all explanations to it. "The body . . . is inescapable in the construction of masculinity" (56), but it is not, however, neither the sole source of manhood nor a perfectly established substance. Like masculinities and gender, bodies change and are changed by social and political processes, individually and collectively.

If both biological and social views are partially defective, a middle ground will hardly be the solution, but ignoring both is also an undesirable alternative. Those perspectives are not puzzle pieces that complement each other and form a larger picture, as each does not possess the aspects to fix the flaws of the other. Connell summarizes the matter when she observes, "If biological determinism is wrong, and social determinism is wrong, then it is

unlikely that a combination of the two will be right" (52). Both theories can contribute to literary analysis, however, as they are not entirely unfounded. Gender, masculinity, femininity, and their practices are both socio-cultural and physical. Even the biological approach, then, proves useful in literary studies as a reminder of how symbolic meaning is carried by *tangible* entities. Through characterization and bodily description, characters may represent entire arrangements of maleness. This is quite obvious for anyone slightly acquainted with literature, but the contribution from the social sciences here is the reminder that those arrangements dialog to (conforming or challenging) specific and documented social modes of seeing masculinity.

My second and shorter consideration is that studying manhood does not equal working toward specific politics of manhood. Masculinity studies is a field, not mode of thinking. We can take a number of stances when studying masculinities, and Beynon lists some: "from feminist, gay scholarship and, more latterly, queer theory through to psychoanalytical, Marxist, structuralist, semiotic and symbolic interactionist" (55). This thesis is more akin to articles that study ethnicity or social classes in King's work, as it has a focal point (maleness) that is then complemented with social-political stances and theory.

Third, if there is no inherent political content in masculinity studies, it stands to reason that they are not necessarily opposed to gender equality. In some conversations during my writing period, I was asked questions that presuppose an opposition between masculinity studies and gender equality, but, while the subject of manhood is home for reactionary ideas, I have found zero serious academic articles or theories that oppose egalitarianism. Beynon observes, "Masculinity has long been studied within social sciences, but indirectly" and adds,

> The fact that sociology started to take masculinity seriously was largely a result of the feminist critique. Many early studies of male youth culture, for example, implied a high degree of homogeneity whereas, in fact, there has always been considerable diversity within young masculinity. (54)

This is obvious for those acquainted with the area, but a point that is nevertheless necessary to address, considering the relative newness of the field and the recurrent resistance to it.

This resistance, in part, concerns the validity of a field that studies identity politics focusing on a group that is not a social minority. Hobbs provides a brief but effective counterargument when she notes that masculinity studies have value because "identity politics are practised by all, not just by the marginalized" (384). Those identity politics, therefore, because of the active nature by which they are established or because of their consequences, are worth studying, be it by social scientists or literary critics. Hobbs also cites Victor Seidler, who notes, "As men we can feel trapped into living out ideals that are not of our own making. It can be as if we have betrayed an inner knowledge of ourselves, in order to prove when we were still young boys that we could be 'man enough'" (qtd. in Hobbs 384). As we will see later, this stance is criticized for turning political matters into personal dissatisfaction, but, even if that is so, it makes little sense to consider that no group of men has ever been in a position of disenfranchisement. Even if that were the case, there is no inherent causation between studying non-marginalized groups and reinforcing social marginalization, nor does it mean that the spotlight is going to shift from feminism to masculinity studies, as academic research is not a zero-sum game and those two areas are not even opposed.

Fourth, while my considerations are plausible, they do not mean that contemporary opinions regarding manhood never involve reactionary assumptions and radical political opinions. A few groups come to mind, such as the Mythopoetic Men's Movement[2] and some online communities. In generalized terms, they share a personal or therapeutic view on masculinity, which deals with repairing individual wrongs. As we would expect from a diverse assortment of people, this individual reparation varies from therapeutic retreats, Jungian

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[2] Peaking during the 1980s and 1990s, the movement, based on Jungian archetypes, advocated for a therapeutic approach (involving retreats and workshops) to connect emotionally wounded men to a masculine essence that was allegedly lost because of, among other reasons, the Vietnam War and feminism (Bret Carroll, 302-03).

psychology, and an inclination toward a macho type of masculinity to outrageous ideas such as the legalization of rape involving female victims, the acceptance of pedophiliac crimes, and a general view on women as manipulative when "withholding" sex from men. I refer to precise examples when discussing how these views applies to literature in chapter two, so here it suffices to explain that, while many recent forms of masculinity are structured around healthy mindsets and acceptance, the criticism toward this general category is justified, as its members, even in contemporary times, take stances that range from sound but controversial to criminally obscene.

Fifth, masculinities are tied to culture and therefore are not one, but many. This is reflected in my use of the term in the plural, following the lead of the main scholars of the field. One of the basic assumptions is that, as Beynon writes, "Masculinity is always interpolated by cultural, historical and geographical location" (1). This results in variety. Beynon points out, however, that some scholars see the pluralization of masculine as a fallacious alternative. John MacInnes defends that "just as there is no such thing as masculinity, neither are there any such things as masculinities" (qtd in Beynon 3). For the purposes of conducting a literary study, I tend to side with Beynon when, despite acknowledging the value behind MacInnes's remarks, he considers masculinity a multiple subject that is partly performance but also partly concrete, or "both experienced and enacted" (3). This combines well with Connell's approach as they highlight the contributions of both biology and sociology as areas that study human behavior.

It makes little sense to discuss masculinity, then, without defining exactly which masculinity is being addressed. Whenever I use the terms "manhood," "masculinity," and "maleness" and those are not contextually tied to a specific group (e.g., English Victorian masculinity), they must be understood as a singular noun referring to a plural entity. Some scholars use the term "masculinity" without qualifier to mean traditional or stereotypical masculinity.

I try to avoid this usage because it seems to exclude from the label "masculinity" types of manhood that are not accepted as the primary way of behaving like a man.

Applying qualifiers to the word "masculinity" must be done with caution in the context of academic studies. Even using the terms "stereotypical masculinity" or "traditional masculinity" may be regarded as a problem, as they are too generic. Anthony McMahon argues that, since masculinity is evasive in terms of description and conceptualization, we may fall into the trap of reducing it to a list of traits (e.g., endurance, strength, hard work) that, in some discourses, are seen as superior to their alleged feminine equivalent (e.g., care, communication, openness). Even when we go beyond these stereotypical traits, however, we must be attentive not to commit simple reduction, as "American masculinity" or "post-Second-World-War masculinity" or "Victorian masculinity" can be as broad as the unqualified term. Beynon reminds us that "any easy generalizations like 'working class', middle class', 'gay' or 'black' masculinities are greatly misleading because within each of these broad categories there is considerable variation in both experience and presentation" (2). We may frame each of these masculinities more specifically via questions: American masculinity when? Victorian masculinity as seen by whom?

While it is impossible to clarify the term to perfection, there must a point where it is reasonable to stop lest we specify *ad infinitum*. Hobbs recalls a key concept developed by Connell: "hegemonic masculinity,"[3] which describes, in regards to relations of power and politics, the "currently most honored way of being a man, [requiring] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and . . . ideologically legitimat[ing] the global subordination of women to men" (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). The concept is useful for this thesis for at least three reasons. First, it implies the existence of other masculinities, because, if

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[3] Probably first used in 1982 in *Ockers & Disco-maniacs: A Discussion of Sex, Gender and Secondary Schooling*, by Connell and others. She has since developed the concept, revising it with Messerschmidt in 2005.

there is a hegemonic masculinity, there must be others. Second, this positioning does not invalidate subordinate masculinities, but merely places them in relation to a hegemony, and all of them in relation to a cultural setting. Third, the concept works as a transition from simple criticism of the behavior of certain men to the understanding that behind problematic behavior lie assumptions of what it is to be a proper man. Connell and Messerschmidt clarify that "[h]egemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (832). Under hegemonic masculinities lie countless other forms of manhood, which ideally are equally valid, but in fact are socially considered less proper.

Seidler makes some reservations about using Connell's concept and her research in general, since her theoretical stance is often focused on power-relations only. He sees Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinities (which has shaped the entire field) as restrictive in its sole focus on power relations. He writes,

> As Connell frames the relationship between 'hegemonic' and 'subordinate' masculinities exclusively in terms of power, so [she] allows for an abstraction from cultural and historical specificities as well as from the complexities of emotional lives and intimate relations. Rather, we tacitly work with a definition of masculinity defined exclusively as a relationship of power. This makes it easy to assume that masculinity needs to be deconstructed as the problem rather than revisioned as part of the solution. (21)

For this reason, even though I agree with Hobbs's remarks that "traditional masculinity" is too broad a term, I tend to use it, as its dictionary meaning is clear: it is a form of masculinity that has been accepted throughout generations as part of established customs. When power relations are central to the argument, Connell's concept works well; when they are not, "traditional" serves me just as well as a qualifier as do other adjectives.

My sixth and last remark is that understanding masculinities as multiple implies that both women and men can be masculine or reproduce masculine behavior. The masculine/feminine duality is conceptually independent from the concept of male/female gender or male/female sex, while those pairs may not be pairs to begin with, which is beyond the scope of this discussion. Here it suffices to say that, in a socially rare but possible context, we can have a heterosexual woman who is seen as more masculine than a heterosexual man, who may both be seen as less masculine than a transgender gay man.

If we try to align these ideas with the notion that masculinities are plural, then, the elusiveness of the concept of masculinity becomes apparent. If women can be masculine and if there are many perceived masculinities, which are not necessarily tied to being a man (either socially or biologically), but rather to being male-like, then femininity and masculinity remain vague concepts. After all this discussion, we seem to return to our most basic questions: What is masculinity, anyway? And who should answer that question? The first question is, of course, part of an ongoing discussion that spans centuries. The answer to the second seems to be society and culture. Those are the places where we can find the tools that help us understand men and masculinities. Maleness is in the way we relate to each other, in our music, our cinema, our photography, architecture, fashion, rituals, and celebrations. And in our literature, of course, which, to some critics, has its unique ways of portraying what is manly.

With Connell's concept in mind, Hobbs argues (but not convincingly) that social studies of masculinity, despite their inclusive nature, treat hegemonic masculinity as being universally glorified, while literature is more critical about these traditional forms. She writes,

> Whereas men's studies theories are, by their nature, more broad-stroke and universalist, especially considering Connell's Australian perspective of (largely) uniform American masculinity, literary masculinity studies may take a more complex approach. While stressing multiple masculinities, men's

studies seems to try to provide one construct for evaluating these many identity formations; although masculinities are multiple, the existence of a hierarchy and the glorification of the hegemonic ideal are put forward as universal. . . . Literary masculinity, on the other hand, has a tendency to bring the opposite type of man to the forefront, especially in comic and tragic genres. Clearly there are examples of hegemonic heroes in literature, but if these are present in literary fiction, they are largely deconstructed within these novels. (387)

I understand that behind this argument exist two incorrect premises: that hegemonic masculinity is glorified in its entirety and that there is a general system of literary depiction of men.

Regarding the first, even if it is true that social scientists see hegemonic masculinity as universally glorified (which it is not), it does not entail that they believe this to be a valid standpoint. When Connell describes other masculinities as subordinated, she means in a social context, not in relation to her theory or beliefs. It seems probable that this is indeed what Hobbs means in the first place, although she still mentions some criticism of how Connell supposedly equates hegemonic masculinity to macho masculinity (Hobbs 387). Hegemonic masculinity is not a philosophically superior concept; it is merely socially more exalted. As Hobbs herself explains, the concept of hegemonic masculinity "has its roots in post-structuralism, with objects—here identities—defined in relation to others around it" (385). This invites us to consider not how this hegemony is exalted by being in the center, but rather how it highlights the importance of all the masculinities that are non-centric.

As to the second premise, Hobbs's assertion that literature tends to highlight non-hegemonic masculinities seems generalized, and, as it tends to happen in generalizations, it is sound when applied to some cases, but less so in other contexts. She defends that "there is a gulf between the forms of masculinity that Connell and men's studies theorists more generally assert are culturally celebrated in America . . . and the protagonists of American

literature" (Hobbs 387), but paints American literature with the same generic broad strokes with which she characterized Connell's approach to power relations. Horror literature alone provides examples of men who are both traditional (Lovecraft's academics, Robert Neville in *I am Legend*) and non-traditional (Father Damien Karras in *The Exorcist*). It may be, however, that Hobbs is referring to canonical American literature, in which case her assertions seem more plausible, as some forms of literature are canonical precisely for being both inserted on tradition and critical about it.

What literature seems unable to do is to go beyond its dissection of traditional masculinity and provide an alternative. As Peter Filene puts it,

> The American literary tradition has presented us with men who embody any number of manly ideals and men who struggle, often unwittingly, under the burden and limitations of these ideals. But seldom are we given positive depictions of men who represent alternatives to those traditional ideals. (qtd in Hobbs 390)

In American literature, we find men who do not conform to stereotypes, but we do not find healthy, complete alternatives either. A similar preoccupation is the danger of reverting positions of power while retaining dichotomic reasoning. Peter Schwenger alerts us to the danger of viewing "[literary] books . . . as case books, a happy hunting ground for Men We Disapprove Of and Good Guys" (qtd in. Hobbs 390). In a reversal of the traditional values, stereotypical machos would be frowned on, while sensitive men would be praised. The problem is not the inversion itself, but the dichotomy. Other critics, such as Antony Rowland, Emma Liggins, and Eriks Uskalis in *Signs of Masculinities* (1998), argue that some critics may find it difficult to perceive positive traits in male characters, as patriarchy is "an almost insurmountable stumbling-block for critics aiming to provide an affirmative reading of masculinity, as men have been historically categorised as oppressors, exercising their power over

women at every opportunity and at every level of society" (qtd. in Hobbs 391). In other words: in some forms of American literature, masculinity is an open wound.

THE SHINING: TRAPPED IN A PLACE OF TRADITION

Masculinity in *The Shining* should be considered primarily in terms of tradition. A commercial best-seller and icon of popular culture would typically be established far off the preoccupations that the American canon holds in respect to engaging tradition and eventually constituting tradition itself, but, while King's novel holds a great distance to canonical literature, it is through this distance that it speaks, as its non-canonical position grants it a particular vision. As Magistrale observes,

> *The Shining*(s) [novel and film] also possess profound cultural-historical resonance as specifically *American* works of art. It is on this level that I believe King and Kubrick created masterworks that are as deep a reflection of American culture as the paintings of Norman Rockwell or the music of Aaron Copland, although truth be told, the America represented in *The Shining* is certainly a discordant variance from anything we typically associate with Rockwell and Copland. (*America's Storyteller,* 92)

In true Gothic fashion—considering the Gothic as a "wide-ranging and persistent tendency within fiction as a whole" (Punter 14)—*The Shining* does what King attributes to horror fiction in general, as it "reaffirm[s] the virtues of the norm" (King, *Danse Macabre* 442-43) while warning us against repeating the so-called normal. The intersection between tradition and masculinity manifests itself in at least four forms: literary/artistic tradition, work tradition, the relation between tradition and space, and the tradition of masculinity itself. The following chapters develop the first three angles and this section of chapter one concerns the last.

Approaching the plot in *The Shining* is at first a fruitless task, as little of the hesitation that characterizes the novel's treatment of masculinity is contained in the plot itself.

Magistrale deems the plot "deceptively reductive" (92), which in our case proves true. In *The Shining* (whose popularity and cinematographic adaptation exempt me from writing a longer summary) Jack Torrance, an alcoholic and unemployed teacher who wants to publish a play and become a professional writer, spends the winter with his wife Wendy and son Danny caretaking a secluded hotel in the Rocky Mountains. Tormented by the traumas of his past and by the ghosts of the hotel, Jack loses his mind and starts seeing the sacrificial death of his family as the solution to his frustrations as a man and as a provider. *The Shining* is set in a masculine world, where the bosses, saviors, and villains are men. The plot hints at the issues at hand, but it is the long characterization, typical to King's fiction, that cements the importance of studying this novel in relation to masculinities. The internal struggles of the male protagonist and other men work as a critical evaluation of traditional manhood, or, in Magistrale's words, it is "[w]hen we watch Jack Torrance struggle with his alcoholism [that] we experience firsthand the ambivalence that comes with choosing to stay sober" (93). This ambivalence is, at its heart, linked to masculinity.

If we read *The Shining* as the account of a man failing to be in unison with his maleness, elements of Jack's characterization and backstory serve us more than the bedrock that is the plot. Among these elements, phallic sticks are of greatest relevance. Stephen Davenport reads these metaphorical sticks in *The Shining* a bond between three generations of unstable males. Jack's father is a hard ruler: his cane, a literal stick that represents a metaphorical idea, is his scepter. He uses it to enforce his will and power by beating Jack's mother. "[E]ngraved on [Jack's] memory like the irrational swipe of a chisel on stone" (King, *The Shining* 331), the cane approximates Jack and his father, attributing artistic characteristics to both. Jack's stick is the unused mechanical pencil "he always kept with him [in] his breast pocket" (King, *The Shining* 231). It functions as a metaphor for how Jack's writing takes him away from his family. As Davenport describes, Jack "uses the play [he is trying to write] as a means of restaging the moment of his wounding, although he does not always seem to understand his use of the

headmaster and student, or father and son, as doubles for real people in his life" (318). Along with the mechanical pencil, Jack has a stick that functions as a counterpart for his father's cane: the roque mallet Jack uses to assault his wife, which establishes a link between father and son, with Jack bearing the fear of being a copy of his brutal predecessor. Jack's use of the mallet to discipline his son Danny reiterate his father's cries—"you'll take your medicine" (King, *The Shining* 401)—and gives Danny traumatic reasons to repeat the cycle of toxic masculinity. A third generation, then, is added to the cycle with Jack's son Daniel "Danny" Torrance. Danny's stick is a fishing rod he holds in the final scene during a conversation about the expression of negative emotions with his surrogate father Dick Hallorann, the cook in the now-gone Overlook Hotel. The dialog can be read as liberating or emotionally constricting, and I discuss it in detail in the section dedicated to *Doctor Sleep* at the end of this chapter. Whatever the case, Davenport reads the stick as a symbol of male anxiety "because it sustains, or keeps open, the father-son wound" (316). The dangers of the abusive and oppressive components of traditional masculinity in *The Shining*, then, are indissociable from tradition itself. The plot suggests a ghost story, but the specifics of the characterization reveal that what haunts the Torrances is their inability to rise above tradition.

Jack's internal conflicts of masculinity may be the center of the novel, but their implications reach far beyond his character. There is a metaphoric level in which the phallic symbolism informs us of Jack's position as a man, but also of symbolic significance is that *John* "Jack" Torrance represents the everyday American men from the final decades of the twentieth century. On that level, the Overlook Hotel and the school where Jack worked function as a stand-in for corporations in general, while the Torrance household, with its unspoken resentments and untended headaches, can be found in a number of streets and corners, fictional or not, both in the 1970s U.S.A. and, perhaps, in the world. In his thesis on the evolution of female characters in some of King's novels, Guthrie notes that "Jack is a victim of the American Dream turned American Nightmare" (32) and quotes Alan Cohen,

adding that Jack's "dishonorable fall at the end of *The Shining* [is the] cathartic close of a nation's . . . mistrust of many of its most significant institutions—big business, government, and most important, marriage and family" (qtd. in Guthrie 32-33). The Overlook Hotel functions as the pivotal metaphor for this fall: its luxurious suites, unrivaled landscape, and sublime view promise opulence, while its criminal history of murder and suicide dismantles its façade and reveals decadence at best and, at worst, the collapse of the ideals of a nation. The explosion of the Overlook in the end of *The Shining* results from Jack's failure to attend the defective boiler located in the basement, and it closes King's novel with an anything but gentle reminder of how the inability to negotiate with tradition or institutions, be they marriage, businesses, or masculinity, may finally disrupt a balance that is already in disarray.

What remains controversial is Jack's status as a victim. He can be read either as scapegoat who suffers at the hands of the other male characters and the specters of the Overlook, or as an accomplice who does not take responsibility for his immoral actions. As I discuss in chapter two, those readings are not mutually exclusive, and, if we analyze Jack and similar characters in the lights of masculinity, the ambivalent nature of both man and manhood becomes apparent. Moreover, this is less a debate related to characterization than it is an illustration of the difficulty of understanding the awareness or the moral standpoint of some works of art. Since I develop this argument in chapter two, for now an open question seems enough: does *The Shining* agree with the stereotypical and conservative standards to which the male characters hold Jack, or are those men mere caricatures of the failures of traditional masculinity?

On the one hand, Sharon Russell criticizes the stereotypical portrayal of male characters in *The Shining*, arguing that they are abusive, drunk, mean, greedy, and dangerous (60). Frank Manchel, on the other hand, indirectly reinterprets Russell's arguments, seeing male characters in Kubrick's adaptation of King's novel not as a failure, but as a means to convey a message. To Manchel, critics condemn Jack Torrance and forget to probe deeper into what

created and motivated his actions—they ignore that behind Jack's sins lie "the sins of a patriarchal society" (68). Just as *The Shining*'s male-centered society benefit some men, namely well-off men who conform to the ideas of the male as a provider, it thwarts men who cannot fit into expectations, who cannot lead a family, or be successful.

The Shining is indeed populated by stereotypical men, but there are those who do not fit the type, therefore putting manhood in perspective. While Jack's father, his male bosses and his rich male friends showcase those traditional and negative traits Russell enumerates, Jack himself has a more uneasy relationship to tradition. He is a man "in between": he is an imaginative writer, but is pressured to conform to the dominant concept of the male as a hardworking, down-to-earth, practical figure. In addition, his son Daniel, even if young, does not show an inclination toward greed or misogyny, as other characters do. His curiosity, his love for reading (like his father's) and his imaginative playful behavior approximates him to a figure well known in King's works: the untainted, pure child. Those children, when boys, represent a masculinity that is not dangerous, but in danger. They are constantly bullied (*It*, *The Body*, *Blaze*, "Sometimes They Come Back") or physically/psychologically abused by parents (*The Shining*, *Doctor Sleep*, *Blaze*). Masculine evil in *The Shining* is not inherent to manhood in general, but is, instead, tied to the blind acceptance of its traditional forms, which results in a hereditary, self-perpetuating cycle of suffering, or, in other words, in an open wound.

PET SEMATARY: A FATHER'S WILD WORK

Pet Sematary shares significant characteristics with *The Shining* regarding elements of both plot and characterization. The novel tells the story of how Louis Creed, after moving with his family to the small town of Ludlow, Maine, loses his infant son in a car accident and is offered the opportunity to bring him back from the dead by burying him in a Native-American cemetery endowed with supernatural powers. He does so but is reunited with a monstrous version of his son, who, after being unearthed, seems neither alive nor dead,

reminding us and Louis of the price one pays when one does not accept grief and insists on controlling even the end of life. Many of the similarities between *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* exist because of conventions in the horror genre. For instance, both are set in an evil place with a sublime view. The Creeds' new house stands in a large propriety that includes a hill where everything is "still, hazed, silent" and whose "gorgeous" (33) view of the valley is reminiscent of the windows in the Overlook's presidential suite. Additionally, both house and hotel are touched by a supernaturally compelling force (the Native-American cemetery in Ludlow and the undead in the Overlook) who manifests its power in a violation of the barrier between life and death (zombies in *Pet Sematary* and ghosts in *The Shining*). These, however, are common tropes in the horror genre, found in works such as *The Amityville Horror*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, *The Exorcist*, and numerous stories by Lovecraft. But the similarities between these two Stephen King novels go beyond the characteristics of their genre.

Central to *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining* is the figure of a fatherless male family leader attempting to control the evil place, either by using its powers or becoming part of it. While the evil place itself is frequent in horror literature, the protagonists in these two novels demonstrate a specific interaction with such settings by associating them with characteristics of traditional masculinity. Magistrale, commenting on the filmic adaptation of these novels, writes,

> . . . in each film, a supernatural phenomenon is at work exploiting the remarkably similar weaknesses that these men share in common [sic].
>
> Like *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary* is a film about the destruction of a family exploited by supernatural forces that exist outside the perimeters of the family itself. In both films, it is the particular susceptibility of the fathers who are at the head these respective families that make their collapse possible. (102)

To Jack Torrance, the Overlook represents professional success, financial prosperity, and artistic recognition, while Louis sees in the Native-American burial ground a possibility of restructuring the family he could not control, reassuring himself of his value as a father.

Another parallel between Jack and Louis is the lack of a proper father figure. Jack's father was abusive and inconsiderate, while Louis's died decades before the events of the novel. It is remarkable that *Pet Sematary* starts with the narrator stating that "Louis Creed, who had lost his father at three and who had never known a grandfather, never expected to find a father as he entered his middle age, but that was exactly what happened" (3). This position of traditional fatherless father—an adult and ideally responsible man who has to manage a family without ever having learned the necessary skills—puts men in an ambiguous position that is common in Stephen King's novels: they are both victims and culprits when it comes to neglecting affect or losing control of their emotions.

I have mentioned the effects of this ambivalence in *The Shining* in the previous section of this chapter, and, since this topic is developed in chapter two, here it is enough to discuss how the critical works on *Pet Sematary* understand these conflicting readings. In "From the Present to the Past: An Exploration of Family Dynamics in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*," Erica Dymond claims that Louis's narcissistic behavior, along with his extremely traditional and misogynistic values, traps him in the oppressive family life of which he wishes to be free. Dymond indicates that "Louis' narcissism is most acutely illustrated in a quotation which he twice employs before stealing Gage's body from Pleasantview Cemetery" (801), which is "wild work," a phrase Louis uses to refer to the process of exhuming and reburying his son. He attributes the words to "some Victorian novel or other" (403), and Dymond recognizes it as part of *Dracula*. Indeed, it is used at least four times in *Dracula* and is notably used by Van Helsing in the passage "There is work—wild work—to be done there, that [Mina's] eyes may not see. We men here, all save Jonathan, have seen with their own eyes what is to be done before that place can be purify" [sic] (ch. XXVI). As Dymond continues to explain,

"Van Helsing twice uses this phrase to describe the harrowing work of slaying the undead [and] Louis positions himself as hero by appropriating Van Helsing's words. In Louis' methodical mind, he will become a hero in one of two ways" (802). Either he manages to resurrects his son and then becomes a heroic figure for his family, or he fails at it and becomes the town hero by slaying the half-dead boy. Moreover, in "Postmodern Gothic: Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*," Jesse W. Nash sees Louis as an irrational and inconsistent man who insists on his mistake of bringing back the dead (who return evil) and who does not take decisive action to protect himself and his children. The blame, according to those critics, lies on Louis. Nash, however, already hints at another reading. Citing Natalia Schroeder, he warns the reader that Louis's motivations are questionable (156). It is uncertain if Louis breaks the taboo of bringing back the dead to protect the image of his perfect, traditional fatherhood or because ulterior supernatural powers compel him to do so.

Patrick McAleer develops this view in "I Have the Whole World in My Hands … Now What?: Power, Control, Responsibility and the Baby Boomers in Stephen King's Fiction." He views Louis as responsible for his actions, but, simultaneously, as a man whose mind is clouded by the unprecedented ability to resurrect people. To the critic, this is King's way to examine the Baby Boomer generation as "people who were positioned to radically alter their social landscape and who reportedly had the means to do so, yet failed to use the available resources" (1210). McAleer considers Louis's shortcomings a representation of larger issues. Sara Martín Alegre, in "Nightmares of Childhood: The Child and the Monster in Four Novels by Stephen King," takes the argument further and defends that Louis is far from a patriarch and defends that he treats his family with love and care. He creates no trouble in the household; instead, his wife's depression and his children's whims are more than what he can handle, pressuring him and causing problems.

Criticism varies from interpretations related to gender studies to a more Naturalistic point of view. According to the first, Louis Creed is a male leader who feels he must control

the household. In the second, Louis is part of his generation, a product of his environment. Even though he has the means to escape, the circumstances render the means useless, the escape impossible, and his guilt debatable.

The alternative I propose is to acknowledge that those two views merely seem conflicting, but are complementary instead. Even if we employ labels such as "victim" or "victimizer," we may still let go of their restrictiveness and understand that the multiplicity of sides of a character requires a more nuanced analysis. Louis's weakness against the supernatural neither excuses nor eclipses his misogynistic behavior; rather, it sheds light on the roots of his immorality and on the nature of evil in King's fiction. A father's "wild work," then, seems less suitable to describe the task of purging monstrosities and more appropriate to describe a man's responsibility of mediating different types of masculinities. This is the wild work Louis Creed and Jack Torrance face, a wild work with unclear expectations and serious consequences, a wild work which is not black and white as hunting the undead, and a work at which they fail substantially.

Rose Madder: Essentialist Zoomorphism

The representation of gender and masculinities in *Rose Madder* carries a duplicity typical to Gothic and horror stories: while it displays politically progressive features, they are structured on prejudicial assumptions. On the one hand, one may see it as story of independence of women, since the lead character, Rose McClendon, with the aid of female friends, manages to escape a marriage so oppressive that it almost becomes deadly. On the other hand, the main male character is remarkably static. Norman Daniels, Rose's husband, enters and leaves the stage as an essentialist representation of anger, which is often associated with masculinities. I discuss social and sexual relationships between male and female characters in chapter three, so for now it is sufficient to mention that, while the Gothic (including

contemporary ramifications) deals with social taboos and the nuances of sexuality, it often does so with deficient conservative assumptions.

Nine years after a miscarriage resulting from physical assault, Rose Daniels finally finds the strength to leave the fourteen-year abusive marriage that sets up *Rose Madder*. After noticing a drop of blood on her bedsheet—a small moment that nevertheless moves her emotionally—Rose leaves an unnamed city carrying nothing but a credit card in her purse. She is soon followed by Norman, her abusive husband whose routine involves physical aggression both at home and at his work as a police officer. In an intimidating new city, she finds friendship among the residents of a shelter for abused women. She also finds a job, a new love interest, and what she calls the Rose Madder painting: an oil landscape depicting a grassy hill, the ruins of a temple, and a woman wearing a chiton whose rose madder color names not only the painting and King's novel, but also the woman herself. The canvas changes slightly as the days go by, while leaves and insects fall from the painting world to Rose's reality. The painting works as a window, and, as Rose soon discovers, it is a window that can be crossed in both directions. On the other side, Rose McClendon meets Rose Madder and her companion Dorcas, who request that Rose save Rose Madder's child from a labyrinth, which she does. This is a task they cannot perform themselves, as they are infected with a disease that involves physical deformity (e.g., darkened, rotten skin) and sudden outbursts of rage. The disease, they claim, would allow them to be smelled by Erinyes[4], the blind bull (or minotaur) who inhabits the labyrinth. After performing this task and almost being caught by the monster, Rose returns with the baby, who is as much of a double for her lost child as Rose Madder is a double for Rose herself. The reward comes in the form of a promise, as Rose Madder says, "I repay" (272). When Norman arrives in the city, he attacks

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[4] According the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Furies, Greek Erinyes, also called Eumenides, in Greco-Roman mythology, [are] the chthonic goddesses of vengeance." The bull's violent behavior alludes to the meaning behind the Erinyes' name in English (Furies) and the plot later puts the creature in the role of vindicator.

and murders some of Rose's friends before attacking Rose herself and almost killing her new lover. Norman turns increasingly insane, as his perception of self becomes clouded: he has blackouts and develops a bull-like personality marked by aggression and uncontrollable anger, alluding to Erinyes and marking yet another relationship involving doubles. Rose manages to lure Norman into the painting, where he fully becomes Erinyes, only to be destroyed by Rose Madder. After returning to her world, Rose establishes a new, healthier family, but finds herself plagued by the same anger that defined Rose Madder and Norman/Erinyes. In an introspective, almost therapeutic moment, Rose plants a seed given to her by her double. The seed grows into a beautiful but poisonous tree that Rose visits frequently in a meditative manner, providing herself with control over her temperament.

In *Rose Madder*, two processes of characterization—Rose as free woman and Norman as hopeless aggressor—are created through the use of zoomorphic representations that establish two motifs of King's fiction: the angry man, or the bull, and the apparently weak but deadly woman, or the spider. In the beginning of the novel, Rose is characterized in light of weaker animals. After physically assaulting Rose, allegedly because of the novel she is reading, Norman "wags the remains of the book at her like a man shaking a rolled-up newspaper at a puppy that has piddled on the floor" (17). Here she is not merely described as a dog, but as a dog in a shameful situation, being punished by its master. A relationship of servitude is established. This is the first description of many to come, subtly reducing Rose and other characters not only to nonhuman beings, but to fragile animals in demeaning situations.

Meanwhile, Norman's animalistic attributes are also under construction. After being assaulted by Norman, Rose once more adapts to her unhappy life, detaching herself from reality and sensing danger in the world as she sensed the dreams she had as a girl, where she ran in a trackless wood or a shadowy maze, with the hoof beats of some great animal behind her, a fearless and insane creature that draws ever closer (22). If Rose's life is like her dream, it stands to reason that Norman, the one tormenting her, is similar to the beast pursuing her

in her nightmares. Later, when Norman becomes a version of the Minotaur and pursues Rose in this maze, making her dream real, the paragraphs express this animal/human correlation with more certainty,

> The eyes below the flower-decked rubber horns [in Norman's bull mask] regarded [Rose] with complete unreason. The lower half of the mask was twitching spastically, as if the man buried inside it were trying to smile. "Rose," the bull said. "Stop this."
>
> "I'm not Rose," she said, then gave an exasperated little laugh, as if he were really the stupidest creature alive—el toro dumbo. "I'm Rosie. Rosie Real. But you're not real anymore, Norman ... are you? Not even to yourself.
>
> But it doesn't matter now, not to me, because I'm divorced of you." (430)

Yet, even in the first scene we may realize that the bull and Norman share some characteristics. Close reading reveals that one of the adjectives describing the dream animal—"insane"—is similar to a word used in connection to Norman in the following paragraph, in which the narrator explains that Rose "slept within her husband's *madness* for nine more years [italics added]" (22). Already in the prologue, then, Norman is painted as an aggressive, animalistic character. This will only be reinforced later in the novel.

If the bull is the enraged man asserting his power via aggression and control, the spider represents female cunning. We have discussed how Norman sees Rose in terms of fragile animals, but she challenges his view when she encounters her double from the world inside the painting. Even before the novel delves into its supernatural themes, Rose's relationship with her version from the painting is already a source of power. After being restricted to her house for decades, Rose has little real-world experience, and has to turn to "the blonde woman in the rose madder chiton" (138) as a means to achieve self-assurance. "Think of the woman on the hill," she tells herself during her nervous first day at her new job as an audiobook reader. "She doesn't have a single weapon, but she's not afraid" (139).

As the narrative progresses, Rose grows in power, as if the contact with her other version both scared and inspired her. Later, the double becomes a monstrous spider when her "lips drew back, disclosing a hole in her face that was nothing at all like a mouth, [so] she no longer looked even remotely human. Her mouth was the maw of a spider" (447). Another example of a spider in King's fiction is Annie Wilkes (*Misery*), who ties author Paul Sheldon to her bed, reminding us of flies caught in a web. It becomes more curious and less of a coincidence, then, that Rose has access to a Paul Sheldon romance novel in *Rose Madder*, and that she likes the genre and works as an audiobook reader for that type of publication. Rose herself never becomes a spider, but her double does, and, by extension, we can understand Rose's courageous acts in this light.

Behind zoomorphic representations in *Rose Madder* lie both a promise of hope and the reassurance of continuous doom. On the one hand, the novel provides female characters with the possibility of escaping abuse, which previous King stories, such as *Carrie* and *Pet Sematary*, do not. Through her unexpected change in nature, realized via a change in zoomorphic representations from weak animals to a deadly spider, Rose is granted a rare ability in King's fictional world: escaping one's predicaments and becoming more than a victim of abuse. King's male characters are not so lucky. As the narrative of *Rose Madder* nears its end, readers realize that its main conflict can only be solved by either Norman or Rose being killed or permanently incapacitated, because Norman's fury guarantees that he will only stop his murderous destruction when he is dead or Rose is killed and his goals completed. This signifies either literal or moral self-destruction, via death or murder, respectively.

In most of King's novels, men are cursed with an irremovable evil essence. His most iconic characters are not labeled evil because they do evil deeds, but the inverse: they act maliciously because of an internal nature they cannot overcome. Magistrale, in *Stephen King: America's Storyteller*, writes,

> We never get the . . . opportunity to respect the men in *Dolores Claiborne*,
> *Gerald's Game*, and especially *Rose Madder* because they are never that ambiv-
> alent; they remain too preoccupied with getting drunk, sexually abusing their
> daughters, and humiliating their wives when they are not tying them up in
> bed. (140)

Some critics maintain that that is also the case of Jack Torrance in *The Shining* and Louis Creed in *Pet Sematary*. More obvious examples are Randall Flagg in numerous works, but mainly in *The Stand* (1978), in which he symbolizes the purest, rawest form of evil; and Brady Hartsfield in *Mr. Mercedes*, who seems stuck in a cycle of perpetual wrongdoing. The nature manhood in *Rose Madder* is common to King's fiction in general, being one of the most disturbing forms of evil in his stories: the inability to escape, change, or reshuffle the cards life has dealt us.

BLAZE: DIRTY MEN IN A DIRTY WORLD

Blaze is an atypical Stephen King novel and so is its portrayal of masculinities. First, it was written in "late 1972 and early 1973" (King, *Blaze* 2) but first published in 2007. I use it here as a representation of both the 2000 decade and the earlier tendencies in King's fiction, as he himself characterizes it as a "throwback" novel (5). Second, it is a book published under the authorship of Richard Bachman, who, more than just a pen name, was a persona whose prose carried particular stylistic and thematic preoccupations. Even though some Bachman books involve horror (*Thinner* is the main example), they tend to avoid King's characteristic approach, relying more on literary naturalism. Bachman's fondness for the genre created a variation of manhood amongst the novels written by Stephen King, which indicates the importance of taking into account the Bachman books.

Blaze presents men who, like those in King's earlier novels, seem unchanging. Unlike *The Shining* or *Pet Sematary*, however, this novel is less psychological and more biographical in

its reflection about the protagonist's coming of age. If the open wound of manhood in some early Stephen King novels comes from unmediated traditional values, in *Blaze* it is more correlated to the inability of becoming an individual and more than a product of the environment. While the difference seems subtle, as environment and tradition influence each other, the implications are more conspicuous, as *Blaze*'s singular style and subject matter stands out in Stephen King's bibliography.

Blaze opens with its titular character, a mentally impaired male con artist, speaking to George Rackley, his government-hating, rule-bending friend who is the astute counterpart for Blaze's muscles in the frauds they committed together. George, the readers soon realize, is dead, and the listener of Blaze's worried plights regarding his recent loneliness is only a figment of his own imagination. Flashbacks from Blaze's childhood reveal a story involving physical abuse and a life in a government institution for orphans, as readers follow his coming of age and understand that behind his intellectual disability is an abusive father and years of being treated as a stereotypical thug. Now alone, Blaze uses his resourcefulness, his unusual proficiency for visualizing and mechanically assembling objects, and the advice of the imaginary figure to continue with George's "big score every small-timer dreams of" (22): invading the property of a wealthy family and kidnapping their infant son for the ransom money. Despite gross mistakes, such as leaving behind blood evidence, killing a witness in a fight-or-flight moment, and leaving other witnesses behind, Blaze manages to escape with the baby. The police follow the evidence and force Blaze, who treats the baby according to the genuine affection he comes to nurture for him, to evade his home and seek a new hideout in the now-empty orphan house from his past. The closing moment is Blaze trying to evade the FBI in confusion, protecting the baby, and being shot and killed.

Considering *Blaze*'s plot, its thematic differences, and even the peculiarity of its publication process, I judge that a discussion on representations of masculinity should begin with the question, "How naturalistic are Stephen King's novels?" The answer is that it depends,

as King has written more than fifty long works of fiction. Some of them exhibit clear marks of naturalism, while others are only faintly touched by it. In *Dissecting Stephen King*, Heidi Strengell dedicates an entire section to discuss literary naturalism in Stephen King's works, analyzing how distinct types of determinism influence the narrative of novels like *Pet Sematary* or the Bachman books. Strengell maintains that, "[d]uring his search for moral truth, King frequently surpasses the boundaries of realism and cannot thus be regarded as a realist in the strict sense of the term" (180). As she uses Martin Gray's definition of naturalism as a mode a realism (qtd. in Strengell 179), her observations indicate that, if the label of "naturalist" is applied to King, it must be done so only tangentially. Then again, Strengell contends that "a number of distinctly naturalistic works can be distinguished in King's oeuvre, such as the early Bachman books: *Rage* (1977), *The Long Walk* (1979), *Roadwork* (1981), and *The Running Man* (1982)" (181-2). To these I add *Blaze*, which was published two years after Strengell's book and, I believe, would have made into her list had it been in the bookstores before.

While deterministic tendencies inhabit King's fiction as a whole, their impact on representations of masculinity varies from novel to novel. In *The Shining* and *Doctor Sleep*, for example, the central conflict in male characters involves accepting an unfavorable situation. Jack Torrance fails to recognize his alcoholism, avoiding even the use of the word. In a medical appointment for his son Danny, Jack is told that their avoidance of such matters is in itself a problem (King, *The Shining* 214). Louis Creed, in *Pet Sematary*, is not an alcoholic, but refuses or is unable to come to terms with his son's death. Recognizing such circumstances jeopardize the characters' self-acknowledged traditional manhood, as Jack's alcoholism is portrayed as a symptom and a component of his inferiority as a man and Louis's lack of control over death, to him, indicates professional failure, since he is a medical doctor. In *Blaze*, though, male characters undergo a contrasting determinism: they recognize the state of affairs with enough intensity to be trapped by it.

The main illustrations of this failure to reach beyond one's fate or environment are Blaze's disability and the novel's general depiction of class conflict. Blaze shows a remarkable natural aptitude for some mechanical activities, and, as a child, before suffering neurological damage in an episode of physical abuse, he possessed great intelligence and "could already read when he started the first grade" (King, *Blaze* 33), but his mental disability is still portrayed as an inescapable limitation. One conversation involving Blaze and George is a fitting example. George asks,

> "What are you, Blaze?"
>
> [Blaze] hung his head, snorkled back snot. "I'm a dummy."
>
> George always said there was no shame in this, but it was a fact and you
>
> had to recognize it. You couldn't fool anybody into thinking you were smart.
>
> (11)

On another instance, Blaze refers to his inability to remember significant matters as "the curse of being a dummy" (17). When he realizes the FBI is probably tracking his whereabouts once more because of an elementary mistake, "[h]e began to feel hunted again, trapped in a narrowing circle" (283). When he recognizes such mistake, he notices how "he had thought he was being smart, but he was being stupid. Again. Stupid was a prison they never let you out of, no time off for good behavior, you were in for life" (283). There is, indeed, a correlation between this metaphorical prison and literal ones. Because of his mental disability, Blaze is characterized and sees himself as unable to fulfill the fundamental requirements for traditional manhood. There is little prospect of a socially accepted masculine identity for Blaze, as he is unemployed, unmarried, unsocial, and believes himself incapable. The solution is to embrace George's methods and rationale, and live the only lifestyle in which Blaze has found acceptance: crime.

Crime in *Blaze* is directly tied to the portrayal of class conflict as a deterministic battle between stereotypical people living prearranged lifestyles. The portrayal of crime is primarily

of sociological nature, as Blaze and George's criminal lives serve as a metonym for the condition of the lower classes. George's remarks throughout the novel indicate his position. He characterizes upper-class young women as people who "[t]hink they're better than anybody [and] their shit don't stink" (25). Similarly, he defends that upper-class gay and bisexual men "had a smell" (48) and that the Republicans "fucked the poor . . . *[f]or the same reason a dog licks his balls—because they can*" (100). These stereotypical descriptions seem to justify George's crimes to himself, as he believes that "the people you'll be rippin off, they stole the money themselves, only like Woody Guthrie says, with a fountain pen instead of a gun" (105). In George's view, wealthy people are bound to be thieves, and, while the novel presents characters as less stereotypical than George views them, those characters are still bound to some behavior. This is not because every wealthy person in *Blaze* is a thief, but because those people, like George, are unable to escape their own system of thought regarding social conflicts.

While *Blaze* presents numerous instances of the same determinism George uses as an argument toward his criminal activities, it leaves such moralistic judgement for its characters, as it seems more concerned with exhibiting their moral positions than with choosing a single stance for itself. Blaze, who in his young years was mistreated by people from every social class, seems to neither agree nor disagree with George, but rather to just follow directions. He views George as "the fox who couldn't reach the grapes and told everyone they were sour" (25), but laughs at the matter, not passing any moral judgement. Because of his impaired intellect and judgement, Blaze seems the only character who can relate to others without prejudice and any form of assumption. As a child, he was physically and psychologically abused by his father (a blue-collar worker), by the headmaster at his school, and by a farmer. The only positive male influence in his life is a man who intends to adopt Blaze but dies before that is possible. In this sense, *Blaze* seems a social experiment in which an

unprejudicial, moral, but mentally challenged child is put in a corrupt environment and we, as readers, contemplate the outcome, which, as is typical to naturalism, is often predictable and negative.

Despite the differences in the construction of the forces that keep the masculinity wound open in King's novels, the difficulties in transforming manhood present analogous results. As Strengell reminds us, "sociological concerns run through virtually all [Stephen King] novels, [but] they coexist with supernatural phenomena" (181). Strengell's arguments seems to support her decision to analyze naturalism in horror novels, but here this argument helps us understand that, even though the construction of determinism is different in some novels of my corpus, the effects can be similar. In *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary*, the male protagonists seem restrained to a path because of their inability to see their limitations, while *Blaze* is constrained by his inability to see beyond his. These different approaches result in blame being potentially shifted from characters to the nebulous scapegoat of society. While King demonstrates awareness of the shortcomings of naturalism, his novel does not question determinism to the point of overt satire. Some exaggerations, like George's view on the up-per-class, can be read as mocking certain figures of the genre, but the prevalent adversities in *Blaze* only reaffirm the depiction of masculinity as an open wound. If the blame lies on society, which is vague and difficult to change, and if "[i]t was a dirty world, and the longer you lived, the dirtier you got" (211), men have little reason to reevaluate manhood. *Blaze*, then, is inevitably set in a dirty world populated by dirty men.

Doctor Sleep: Misremembering What a Father Forgot

If *The Shining* is about the dangers of unmediated masculinity, its sequel *Doctor Sleep* concerns the same subject, but focuses on the consequences of such identity politics and on the futility of simply abandoning the influence of traditional manhood. There are at least three possible readings of *Doctor Sleep*: as restatement of *The Shining*, as mirrored version of

The Shining, and as exploration of the difficulties of actually walking the road *The Shining* helps pave in relation to masculinities. Each of these includes the other (e.g., a mirrored version is a restatement, but reversed), but they diverge in relation to how critical King is about his depictions of masculinity. The men in *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary* are often considered stereotypes, but they may also be seen a representation of problems of identity regarding revisions of manhood. *Doctor Sleep* follows the pattern. We can interpret Dan Torrance as a repetition of his father, as a reversal of his father, or as a man who refuses to repeat but also fails to avoid his father's mode of masculinity. In other words, Danny either forgets, remembers, or misremembers "what his father forgot," which is a recurrent phrase in *The Shining*. The last possibility implies that King is aware of how *Doctor Sleep* and *The Shining* fail to provide a healthy alternative to the open wound that is traditional masculinity as depicted in those novels.

In *Doctor Sleep*, Daniel Torrence, the son Jack Torrance abused physically and psychologically, grows into a man whose life seems a sad reflection of his doomed father's. Tormented by the ghosts of the extinct Overlook Hotel and apparently doomed to repeat his father's drug abuse, Dan perpetuates the Torrance tradition of unstable work ethics and drifts across the United States, switching jobs and leaving behind a tainted reputation. After years of constant movement, however, Dan arrives at Frazier, New Hampshire, a town which seems "*the [right] place*" (69). Indeed, Dan's life changes after finding emotional support in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and financial support in a job at a hospice, where he uses his psychic abilities to ease the death of patients. After a while, Dan's supernatural powers connect to someone else's. Abra, a girl whose telepathy seems significantly stronger than Dan's, senses the presence of the True Knot, a gang of soul vampires who moves across the country killing children endowed with psychic powers. Their next victim is marked to be Abra herself, who they consider the cure for a disease they contracted. With the help of Dan and others, she evades the True Knot and forces the group to a final confrontation at a

campsite that occupies the hill where the Overlook Hotel once stood. After a battle, Abra, Dan, and their allies manage to kill all the significant members of the True Knot. In his final moments at the location that terrorized him as a child, Dan sees his father's ghost, whose peaceful words indicate that the evil they faced decades before was, in most part, a force from the hotel, not Jack's evil intentions. In the last pages, however, Dan reminds Abra (discovered to be Jack Torrance's granddaughter from outside his marriage) that alcoholism and anger runs in the Torrance's blood, and that abandoning self-control was the path that led Jack to his demise.

At first, *Doctor Sleep* paints Danny's future as hopeless, hinting that his life is but another hereditary cycle of traumas and vices in the Torrance family. Even before the story begins, the novel traces a connection to *The Shining*, hinting at impending repetitions, as the initial section of both works is entitled "Prefatory Matters". As an epigraph for this section in *Doctor Sleep*, King uses what he calls an "Old A[lcoholic] A[nonymous] saying" that states, "FEAR stands for fuck everything and run." This stance of avoidance, escapism, and reck-lessness may be positive (e.g., if one avoids a life of substance abuse to choose healthy be-havior in turn, as Dan does) but, in this context, it is probably closer to meaninglessness (e.g., ceasing to care for one's family, for one's own well-being, and escaping toward false prem-ises, as Jack does). Jack's lack of responsibility contributes to the outcome of the Torrances in *The Shining*, and, with that in mind, the reader of *Doctor Sleep* probably wonders about the implications of fucking everything and running, since Jack's son can run toward or away from his own father's unbalanced manhood.

These repeating problems are indeed what *Doctor Sleeps* presents in "Prefatory Mat-ters," which deals with young Danny's traumas after the events at the Overlook. Three years later, Danny, now eight, wakes up in the middle of the night and encounters an old ghost from the hotel: Mrs. Massey, the woman who killed herself in the bathtub in room 217 and whose spirit accompanies Danny to his new home in Tampa. After Danny's mother, with

whom he refuses to talk, calls Danny's surrogate father Dick Hallorann, the boy voices his concern, saying, "[The ghost will] come *back* and come *back* and come *back*" (12). The Overlook burned to the ground, but its horrors, in form of ghosts, fears, and traumas, remained with Danny. Hallorann's solution, not unlike the advice he gives Danny in the last scene of *The Shining*, is to give the boy a "lockbox" inside which he must keep all the ghosts he encounters. This is not merely a metaphorical figure of speech, but somewhat literal and symbolic, for Danny imagines a box inside his head and traps the traumatic spirits there. King leaves for the readers to wonder how many ghosts a boy can store in his mind. After the section ends, the narrator states,

> What mattered was [the ghosts] were never getting out. [Danny] was safe.
>
> That was what he thought then. Of course, he also thought he would never take a drink, not after seeing what it had done to his father.
>
> Sometimes we just get it wrong. (24)

When *Doctor Sleep* describes the future in relation to the past, in relation to Jack, and to alcoholism, the message it clear: what is in the past (or in one's mind, even if locked inside boxes) rarely remains there.

The promises of repetition made in the first sections of the novel, however, are reshaped as the pages turn, since, even though the state of affairs in *Doctor Sleep* initially seems similar to the one in *The Shining*, its characteristics are reversed. In a thought that flows almost independently from its owner's minds (a common device in King's prose) Dan characterizes Frazier as special "*[t]he way the Overlook was special*," but then immediately corrects himself out loud, "'No, I don't believe that'" (86). The relevance of the setting in *The Shining* and its sequel is less directly connected to ghosts, memories, and similarities, but more dependent on their impact on characters, who attach meaning to those places. Danny first thinks and then verbally expresses his real beliefs, as if he were ensuring that, even though he cannot control his thoughts or urges (and here his alcoholism comes to mind), he can master his

words and his actions. In this reading, he does what his parents failed to do: to use one's voice to triumph over the predicaments King sets for his characters.

Another good example of mirrored but reversed devices is how Ullman, the manager for the Overlook, and Watson, the in-season caretaker, contrast to Kingsley and Freeman, respectively the manager and the caretaker of a park in Frazier. The pattern begins in their names, all of which contain references to male figures: Ull*man*, Wat*son*, *King*sley, and Free*man*. In *The Shining*, a "man" and a "son" symbolize the tradition of male dominance, depravity, and abuse involving the Torrances and the Overlook, frequented by "the richest men in American and their women" (227). In *Doctor Sleep*, a "king" and another "man" seem to remind the readers of the capitalist exploitation Manchel sees in his analysis of *The Shining*. When Dan first meets Kingsley and recalls, "Once upon a time, his father had probably sat in a room like this" (King, *Doctor Sleep* 80), we remember how Jack "is seduced by false myths of success and patriarchal authoritarianism" (Manchel 70). Dan even uses, for the second time (the first being when he was a child) his father's remarkable phrase that initiates *The Shining*: "*Officious little prick*" (3). The phrase as repeated by Dan in his own mind, however is "(*officious prick*)" (King, *Doctor Sleep* 82). This difference is crucial.

The difference between Dan and Jack's usage of the phrase seems obvious at first, but, when analyzed closely, it presents several implications. Initially, it seems that Dan drops the word "little" simply because, unlike Ullman, who stands "five-five . . . [and moves] with the prissy speed that seems to be the exclusive domain of all small plump men" (King, *The Shining* 3), Kingsley is "a big man who [does not] so much inhabit his small, cluttered office as wear it" (King, *Doctor Sleep* 80). This is a remarkable difference between the two, but not the only one. By omitting the word "little," the narrator reminds us of other subtle differences between Jack and Dan's bosses. For instance, both are against their employees drinking, but, while Ullman's reasons have to do with making sure Jack does not jeopardize the Overlook's integrity during the winter, Kingsley's are personal. He is an alcoholic himself

and does not tolerate having one as an employee. This difference extends to how both men approach their workers. Ullman only accepts Jack because Al Shockley, Jack's friend who is in the Board of Directors of the Overlook Hotel, makes "his wishes in this caretaking matter quite obvious" (King, *The Shining* 7). Kingsley, however, accepts Dan knowing that, as Billy Freeman puts it "[*Dan*] *needs us more than we need him*" (King, *Doctor Sleep* 103). When Dan, because of Billy's indication, approaches Kingsley asking for help to deal with his alcoholism, Kingsley assumes a serious but compassionate approach that helps Dan stay sober. Much like the similarities between the Overlook and Frazier, then, the connection between Ullman and Kingsley hints not at the inevitability of repetition, as it seems at first, but at the opposite. In the job interview, Ullman puts Jack in a position of inescapable subservience, but what Kingsley offers is opportunity to communicate, which is accountable for the positive changes in Dan throughout *Doctor Sleep*. As a final citation states, "fear" no longer stand for "fuck everything and run" but for "face everything and recover" (King, *Doctor Sleep* 615). In this reading, *Doctor Sleep* does not present a drastic ending, but an optimistic one, adding hope to a repetition that was fatal.

These matters of repetition and healthier alternatives, however, can be scrutinized even further. Is the hopeful air surrounding *Doctor Sleep* enough to grant the novel the label of mirrored repetition of *The Shining*? *Doctor Sleep* presents communication as an alternative, but is it a solution? What does it solve? How? And how effectively? The answers follow two opposite approaches: the first understands that communication is a considerable step toward healthy forms of masculinity, while the second sees this argument as a form of backlash in which men arguing for communication as solution are in reality obscuring systemic issues of manhood.

To understand the first argument, we need to recognize how silence is a toxic part of traditional maleness. Seidler, for instance, observes how the inability to communicate generates anger. He writes,

Men may feel they should be 'in control' of their experience, so admitting
that uncertainty [about traditional models of masculinity] can threaten their
male identities. Rather, men learn to keep their anxieties and fears to them-
selves as they project a certain public image. Inner distress can build as men
are haunted by a fear that if they show what they are feeling to others, they
will surely be rejected. (xvi)

When lack of communication and anger mix, then, the result is anxiety building up to deadly
levels. If we adapt Seidler's considerations to literature, they become an accurate description
of Jack Torrance. In *The Shining*, the deadly levels of repressed anxiety are represented by the
malfunctioning boiler located in the basement of the hotel, whose pressure, almost in a ritu-
alistic fashion, Jack must relieve, thus relieving, by metaphoric extension, the pressure of his
own temper. In this reading, the adult Dan Torrance in *Doctor Sleep* is troubled by what de-
stroyed his father—alcoholism, professional failure, and ineffective anger management—but
manages to find an escape. Dan ultimately ignores the semi-healthy advice his surrogate fa-
ther Dick Halloran gives him in *The Shining*—"when you feel you have to cry . . . you go into
a closet or under your covers and cry" (658)—and openly shares his traumas with others in
Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. In the process of recovery, he finds Abra, a younger friend
and pupil who is also troubled by a bad temper. In an ending that differs from *The Shining*'s,
both Dan and his pupil share the secrets they hold most intimately and manage to cope with
the type of angst that contributes to Jack's demise. If the Torrances are three lonely people
snowbound in an isolated hotel, Dan, in *Doctor Sleep*, is part of a group. By relying on com-
munication, a strategy his father neglected, Dan manages to cope with what he inherited
from Jack.

Even if those considerations are sound, we must still be skeptical about communica-
tion as a general solution. The first logical step would be to question the basic premise, "Are
the problems that communication solves even real?" In "Men's Liberation, Men's Wounds,"

Sally Robinson argues that there may be nothing to be solved in the first place. The idea that men (in her case, men from the U.S.A.) suffer and must be liberated was fabricated by a movement that was, in its conception, simply a backlash against women's liberation. In a few sentences, she captures this point:

> Lacking the social grounding for a collectivized and politicized call for rights, white men in post-1968 American culture enthusiastically begin to elaborate wrongs, constructing narratives about individualized psychological and bodily wounds. While women, people of color, lesbians, and gay men were able to argue convincingly that they had been disenfranchised socially by their marginalized position in U.S. society and culture, the middle-class white men most likely to join men's lib did not attempt to claim a social disenfranchisement; instead, they increasingly began to argue that they were personally and individually wounded by a vaguely sketched "society" that, while awarding them power and privileges, produced psychological and bodily symptoms of powerlessness. (207)

In this perspective, communication is not a new solution to old problems of masculinity, but rather an alternative to an issue that only exists in the mind of early masculinists. If we consider this true, then, we are acknowledging that the problems King's male characters go through are not indeed problems, but sexist constructions to justify an unstable, misogynistic form of traditional masculinity.

The following chapters revisit Robinson's idea, so for now it is sufficient to clarify that, while I agree with her social-historical considerations, I understand there is no inherent relationship of cause linking the misuse of an idea and its invalidity. In other words, sexist men do use and exaggerate the discourse of men as victims of traditional masculinity, and, while this discourse is harmful and of dubious political soundness, it does not mean that the

arguments behind the discussion are untrue. They are simply misused, inflated, or abused in dishonest rhetorical discourses.

Between these opposite views on the effectiveness of communication, my thesis inhabits a middle ground. While I deem Seidler's considerations on the side-effects of non-communication pertinent, I recognize that the mere act of sharing does not close wounds. I am not as skeptical as Robinson, as viewing communication as a solution is not inherently part of an anti-women discourse, even though they frequently go hand-in-hand. Moreover, I am primarily interested in the questions this clash suggests, especially those related to evil characteristics that are culturally and literarily associated with maleness. They are the core of the next chapters.

Chapter 2: Masculinity and Evil

In the first section of this chapter, using a provisional definition of evil, I discuss the moral implications of King's depiction of manhood. I move from general considerations to a more precise division between diegetic and extradiegetic presuppositions about what is deemed malevolent in terms of morality. This discussion concerns both how the beliefs of fictional characters form certain politics of evil and how moral assumptions are implied in the logic of the novels themselves.

In a discussion about open wounds of masculinity, the most relevant attributes of evil in King's fiction are its lack of source and its monological nature. As is expected in contemporary extensions of the Gothic, evil is connected to the past; King, however, takes the process to an extreme when he suspends any origin for evil, assigning immorality to generations that, being further and further away, evanesce as we seek for any source of evil. Most manifestations of evil are either personal or political in King's stories, as we rarely find evil in its natural form. Magistrale and Karen Hohne also characterize evil as a presence that erases alternative discourses and, always reasserting itself, aims to eradicate diversity. While femininity often symbolizes an alternative voice in King's stories, masculinity is almost exclusively characterized in terms of unhealthy traditions and restrictive discourses. This indicates general problems with the representation of gender, as women and men are developed stereotypically.

In section two, I discuss masculinity in terms of responsibility and free will. The evil deeds of King's male characters are frequently attributed to external influences, acquitting them of their guilt, but also robbing them of any self-development that may come from assuming responsibility. Those external influences come as supernatural entities or compose the form of the novels, which often substitute determinism for free-will.

At first sight, communication seems a plausible solution for the problems of manhood that King depicts. This notion, however, as we saw in chapter one, is based on a

reactionary discourse that shifts the blame to society. An alternative would be assuming responsibility and identifying both personal and political flaws in men and masculinities. Indeed, this seems applicable to some novels, but not to King's works in general. Numerous characters are aware of their shortcomings or even of their extreme evil nature, but no change happens. The works in which responsibility generates any improvement have a tautological design, as responsibility is complemented by good actions, which indicates that improvement does not really happen, since characters eventually behave well because they were already naturally good. Good and evil male characters remain imprisoned in their own morality, and the wound—or the persistent problem—of masculinity remains open, since any instance of personal growth and social revision seems illusory.

THE NATURE OF MASCULINE EVIL

Unlike the current research on masculinity, debates on evil span millennia. Precisely because it has been discussed over a long period, "evil" is a term that should be defined as tentatively as I defined "masculinities". When I refer to evil, I mean the descriptive property of entities who systemically perform evil actions, which, in turn, are actions that are executed willingly and consciously by moral agents and that are extraordinarily immoral, frequently involving complete disregard for basic human boundaries. In *Rose Madder*, for instance, Norman Daniels is evil because he repeatedly murders and rapes while being mostly aware of his actions. This definition can be broken down into six parts: 1) evil people commit evil actions; 2) they do it systemically; 3) they do it willingly; 4) they do it consciously; 5) they have moral agency; 6) evil actions are immoral.

This provisional concept of evil is based on Todd Calder's entry on the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, in which he explains and compares well-established approaches on the subject. Calder explains how we may see highly frequent evil actions as an indicator of someone's evil and notes, "According to the frequent evildoer approach, an evil person is simply

someone who performs evil actions often enough" (sec. 4.1). The definition of "evil action" varies, as some viewpoints regard it as quantitatively distinct from wrongdoing (i.e., evil is tremendously wrong) and others see it as qualitatively distinct (i.e., the proprieties of evil and the proprieties of wrongdoing are different). These specificities are not so relevant for this discussion, since the actions of King's evil characters tend to be of intense quantity and quality. The discussion is not *if* those characters are evil, but *how* and *why*. Calder also cites Luke Russell, who provides an even more refined version of the action-based argument when he defends that people are evil if they possess a "disposition" toward evil actions, a disposition on which these people may or may not act. In this sense, a person can be evil and never find stable ground or opportunity to perform evil actions. Such person is not essentially evil, because Russell's explanation still relies on actions rather than essence. The difference is that an essentially evil person is evil regardless of actions or intent, while Russell refers to people who specifically wish to commit evil actions, but fail (e.g., an assassin misses the target) or are unable to (e.g., a terrorist is caught right before exploding a bomb). While Russell's argument enriches discussions on morality, it is not so useful in my analysis of Stephen King's literature, as the books in my corpus present evil characters directly through their realized actions. There is rarely some form of constraint, since, in King's *oeuvre*, evil always finds a way to rear its head.

Calder differentiates between "narrow evil" (evil that "involves moral condemnation", e.g., an adult murdering a spouse for insurance money) in opposition to "broad evil" ("any bad state of affairs, wrongful action, or character flaw", e.g., an earthquake killing dozens of people). The core assumption is that the first is tied to moral agency, while the second can be any catastrophe. In relation to King's novels, we can think of these concepts as moral and natural evil. Natural evil comprises both natural and supernatural phenomena that are not caused by moral agents and that result in significant harm. The best example is the force in the Micmac burial ground in *Pet Sematary*, who calls on Louis Creed and entices him to

bury his family there. Another case is the titular building in the Dark Tower series, which functions as a hub for all planes of existence and as a goal for the protagonist Roland Deschain, who reaches the tower and is transported back in time to restart his Sisyphean journey. Both the cemetery and the tower, even if they are humanized via harbingers in dreams and a supernatural voice, respectively, are more agents of fate or coincidence than of any moral. There is, of course, the matter of responsibility and intent, as Louis is just compelled and not forced to bury his family at the cemetery, just as Roland travels uncountable miles and reaches the tower by his own volition. I examine this point further on, but here I remark how there is certain human-related responsibility even in instances of purely natural evil. My focus, at any rate, remains on narrow or moral evil, as it can be connected to masculinity.

Calder's analysis leads us to another assumption: that an evil action is always carried out intentionally, considering the adequate expectations of moral awareness about the perpetrator. "To meet [the] conditions [of this concept of evil]," Calder writes, "evildoers must act voluntarily, intend or foresee their victim's suffering, and lack moral justification for their actions." An evil action, then, is always done intentionally by a moral agent, otherwise it is not evil. Evildoers must also be in a state in which they are able to establish moral judgement. If we read a horror story about a man who was unwillingly cursed and magically manipulated into murdering people, we cannot justly label such character as evil. Some monsters, too, are in an ambiguous position in relation to their agency, as they are simultaneously human and animalistic (e.g., mindless zombies, bloodthirsty werewolves). Such discussions are not black and white, since moral agents may still be responsible for evil actions they commit in a state of moral unawareness. For example, while being subjected to a werewolf transformation may explain away an aggressor's guilt, being intoxicated is not an accepted excuse for engaging in criminal behavior. For this reason, this definition of evil is neither exhaustive (it seems strange, for instance, to label as evil a person who wishes to do evil actions but only effectively does good deeds) nor perfect, for the philosophy of evil is an open debate. What this

definition does, however, is examine evildoers in a fashion that incites questions in relation to masculinity and responsibility in literature.

To better understand representations of evil and masculinity in King's stories, we need to establish a distinction between two ideas regarding moral evil. King's novels (and perhaps fictional representations in general) portray what, for practical reasons, I here refer to as "diegetic evil": a form of evil whose assumptions begin and end in the diegesis. The best novel to exemplify this concept is *It*, as, in some respects, it functions as study about fear, its individuality, and, likewise, its social nature. When young Eddie Kaspbrak encounters the evil force terrorizing the children in the town of Derry, he sees It as what he fears the most: a leper with decaying skin and one malformed eye who chases after him. This connection between leprosy, monstrosity, and evil is diegetic and cannot be traced back to the assumptions behind the book, even less to the assumptions of Stephen King. In other words, King is not implying that lepers are monstrous. The novel is merely reporting that, under some circumstances, such as being raised by a hypochondriac parent like Eddie is, some people may equate human illnesses to monstrosity. Diegetic evil may function as social criticism and possibly refer to extradiegetic social conceptions, but only as example, symbol, or metaphor. While its functions are clear in King's novels, the roots of this form of evil are more obscure.

The origin of evil in King's novels is not an origin *per se*, but a refusal of one. Trauma, ghosts, and haunted places work to defer any suggestion of how evil begins. In *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter establishes a connection between the Gothic and the barbaric. The barbaric, he writes, may come "as the fear of the past, . . . as the fear of the aristocracy, . . . [and] as a fear . . . not only from the past but also in the present and even the future" (183). In *The Shining*, King explores this past as a form of diegetic evil. Through his fear of repeating his brutal father, through the sins of the Overlook Hotel, and through the fusion of present

and past in the building, Jack faces barbaric history. King does what Punter attributes to other writers who

> bring us up against the boundaries of the civilised, who demonstrate to us the relative nature of ethical and behavioral codes, and who place, over against the conventional world, a different sphere in which these codes operate at best in distorted forms. (183)

While *The Shining* an *It* reveal that anxieties held in the past resurface to reshape our present, these works tend to excavate the past so intensely that all origins of diegetic evil are postponed to infinity via Gothic haunting or hereditary repetitions.

In King's Gothic, evil is without origin because there is often a previous generation that committed the same sin, explaining the mistakes of their children. At different times in the *The Shining*, Wendy Torrance states that Danny has always been Jack's boy (77), that she feels left aside (128), and that Danny expresses worry in a manner similar to her husband and herself (282). While this could be considered as just a boy being closer to his father and learning gestures from both parents, in context this requires a more specific reading. This is part of a broader theme of the novel—that children will repeat the sins of the parents—and, when read together with the symbolism, the foreshadowing, and the mirroring in *The Shining*, it composes a bigger picture: that repetition is linked to heredity and, if not attended to, may become a psychological buildup that ultimately leads to a breakdown. The reading of Dan as another angry, destructive, and alcoholic man is only developed in *Doctor Sleep*, but it is hard to ignore the first indications of how that destructive type of masculinity echoes through the Torrances. It is present even before Danny is born. It is from Jack's father that come the traits that twice destroy Jack's family, both when he is a child and when he is an adult. Davenport, as we have seen, reads metaphorical sticks in *The Shining* as links connecting these three generations of problematic males. The origin of diegetic evil, in this case, is deferred to

previous generations to the point of evanescing in the family history, since the recurrence of transgressions is considered enough explanation, ceasing the search for any origins of evil.

Evil is also postponed in terms of socio-cultural history. In the Overlook evil is in "the sins of a patriarchal society" (68) that Manchel describes, while in the Micmac burial ground, as in Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*,[5] evil is tied to references to Native-American peoples and their relation to colonizers. This is a direct example of the barbarism Punter describes. By providing evil with historical tones, King, in tune with Gothic tradition, creates parallels between evil present and past, as the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons. In some character's views, which I will discuss later, this attribution of evil to a distant past means a cleaning of consciousness and the erasure of responsibility.

This socio-cultural aspect is frequent to an alternative representation of evil, which I refer to as "presumed evil." It is the form of evil that comes from extradiegetic presuppositions and that has unironic and unaware diegetic reflections. It indicates the moral assumptions behind a literary piece. While *It* does not necessarily assume that lepers are monstrous, but instead that some people may see them as such, some works by Lovecraft, for example, paint non-Anglo-Saxon people as an uncivilized enemy, serving as an example of presumed evil. In "The Street," Lovecraft describes how a congregation of "sinister men in great numbers, yet always was their speech guarded or in a foreign tongue" urged people "to tear down the laws and virtues that our fathers had exalted; to stamp out the soul of the old America— the soul that was bequeathed through a thousand and a half years of Anglo-Saxon freedom, justice, and moderation" (304). Men in Lovecraft stories are frequently aristocrats or scholars whose intellect is depicted as a form of cultural superiority, and his stories and letters are plagued with an abnormal amount of racism. He considered, for instance, that "fascism is

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[5] In Kubrick's adaptation, the Overlook Hotel is not only "supposed to be located on an Indian burial ground," but also adorned with Native-American decoration, alluding to the how the United States and ex-colonies in general were built on the decimation of native peoples.

the one sound course to follow" and that the "cumbrous machinery of democracy ought to be eliminated—affairs being administered by commissioners appointed by a dictator seated through an intelligent & educationally select electorate" (qtd. in Murphy 171). Racism is not (or not only) a stance taken by Lovecraft's fictional characters, but by the assumptions behind the work itself, as it requires readers to momentarily regard some racist presupposition as true so the textual logic makes sense.

In the example of Lovecraft, that viewpoint can be traced back to the author because his non-fictional writings expose his political views, but this is not always the case. If we return to *It*, we notice that the description of Eddie's mother as being overweight is used to emphasize monstrosity. The narrator states,

> At the time of her death Eddie's mother had topped the scales at over four hundred pounds—four hundred and six, to be exact. She had become something nearly monstrous by then—her body had seemed nothing more than boobs and butt and belly, all overtopped by her pasty, perpetually dismayed face. (92)

This is not entirely in the perspective of Eddie, but in the postulations of the novel. Phrases like "pasty, perpetually dismayed face" imply that being overweight results, esthetically speaking, in the repulsive appearance of a monster; therefore, behind *It*'s usage of high weight as a monstrous characteristic is the assumption that to be fat is to be monstrous. In relation to leprosy, we can reason that, diegetically, it makes Eddie afraid because he is afraid of diseases in general, as his mother is a hypochondriac. Regarding fatness, however, it is not the case that Eddie alone believes in this assumption, as he is not afraid of his mother because of her fatness, as, unlike leprosy, it represents no concept he fears. This quality intensifies general monstrosity and requires that we agree that being fat can be monstrous. If we disagree with the premise, we recognize that *It*, like many horror novels, functions under prejudicial assumptions. We may also understand that monstrosity, in this case, is achieved via an

exaggeration, or, to use Noël Carroll's term, "magnification." In *The Philosophy of Horror* he explains that a "recurring symbolic structure for generating horrific monsters is the magnification of entities or beings *already typically adjudged impure* or disgusting within the culture" (48-49; emphasis added). Still, it reveals much about how "weight" is a concept loaded with social assumptions.

While we may find similar usage of fatness as a monstrous characteristic in other works by King, like the overweight witch in "Gramma," (1984) we must be careful not to trace such assumptions to the author himself. I do not have the intention of studying the representation of manhood in King's novels to attack his beliefs and label him as sexist, non-sexist, or to make any judgement of value whatsoever. The novels stand by themselves, be it in relation to their diegetic representations or to the non-diegetic assumptions.

One reason for such distancing from the author is to mitigate the problem of incorrect labels, since diegetic and presumed evil are often indistinguishable. The perspective of the focalizer[6] often blends in with the presuppositions of the novel. It can be argued that, in "Gramma," the grandmother is described as "huge and fat and blind" (612) not because the short story's construction presupposes that fat people are scary, but because the assumptions of the character leak into the construction of the narrative. It is as if, for one moment, we were perceiving reality through the grandson's eyes, even though the narrative is in the third person. We carry his presuppositions (which represent social prejudices, but not necessarily represent the author's prejudices) and we, for narrative purposes, acknowledge them. Sometimes this device is clear, as in the passages from *The Shining* and *Rose Madder* in which King word choice becomes vulgar and aggressive. When *The Shining* interrupts its narrative with disembodied thoughts inside parentheses to call Dick Hallorann "(*a nigger cook*)" (519), it

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[6] The entity or conscience through whose perspective the narrative is presented or filtered (*Narrative Discourse* 189). While the narrator is related to the act of producing a narrative, the focalizer is related to the limitations of viewpoint and the often-subjective angle of whoever or whatever observes and has access to the diegesis. The term was coined by Gérard Genette.

reveals that the racism in the Overlook works its way into Jack's thought processes and into the narrative, almost threatening to corrupt the reader's own views. After that, we return to the usual narrative, and this shift makes the device powerful in the restlessness it creates. By bringing us close to the immoral villains, it plays with the certainty we have in relation to our own conceptions and morals. When this narrative resource is not that clear, however, we may find representations of evil that cannot be properly qualified either as diegetic or as presumed. Several misread interpretations of King's fiction happen because critics see evil in one light, while the evidence is ambiguous.

This misreading is detrimental because of how moral evil pervades King's works. Even when the entity behind the bad deeds is natural or supernatural, a moral agent tends to affect the situation. As Will Napier reminds us,

> In most of the inanimate, malevolent centers in King's fiction—from Christine, to the Micmac burial ground, to the Overlook Hotel, to the Tommyknockers' spaceship—a connection and/or identification with the human world is absolutely necessary to animate their malefic energies. King may well be suggesting that evil exists only as a theoretical construct without human beings—and that it only becomes real when we humans, with our greeds, liabilities, and unchecked urges, serve as its hosts. (102-03)

Even though evil forces themselves are amoral, the perception or representation behind them is not. Evil is seen either in a personal perspective (e.g., the bull in *Rose Madder* carries an animalistic and natural rage, but has moral implications, as it is a double for Rose's abuser) or in a political perspective (e.g., the Micmac burial ground is a stand-in for the historical relationship of oppression regarding Native-American peoples and colonizers). In yet other instances, evil is both personal and political, as in the case of *It*. Magistrale proposes,

> The various masks that Pennywise wears in luring children to their grisly deaths are symbolic of the masks that disguise and distort the true history of

> Derry itself. Underneath the veneer or Rotary Clubs and dusk curfews established out of concern for its children is Derry's reality, a history of persecution of outsiders—from [black people] . . . to the children . . . to Adrian Mellon, who is murdered because he is a homosexual. (*Second Decade* 103)

The polymorphic creature that feeds on children's fears represents forms of evil that are both individual, as each character sees It differently, and political, as It influences an entire adult population toward racism and homophobic behavior, or toward ignoring systemic abuse and hate crime. Evil in King's fiction is either personal, political, or both, but rarely, if ever, will we find it entirely in its natural variant.

In general terms, presumed evil in King's fiction is associated with nonacceptance and monologism. The evil entity is one of unification and constraint. Magistrale writes,

> Throughout King's canon evil manifests itself as a monological presence. Whether it takes the shape of a religious fanatic, the fascist authority of Randall Flagg, or the social conformity dictated by the Tommyknockers and It, evil thrives in a rational, highly ordered world . . . [and] always tries to make its knowledge the only knowledge. It manipulates, restricts, and silences opposition. (*Second Decade* 117)

Behind the basic premise of some Stephen King novels is the presupposition that evil is a force against diversity or multiplicity. These characters Magistrale mentions carry their own monological discourse, which veers into a rhetoric centered on absolute difference.

This is not only a specific problem of some discourses, but a general blemish on the manner in which they are conducted. Hohne comments that, in some of King's works, "[s]cience and religion, which appear to be completely opposed (when viewed from the rational/irrational axis), are thus revealed as identical in terms of their negative relationship to otherness: if it is other, eradicate it" (98). Diegetic evil, then, is whatever is different: the monstrous other, regardless of what composes such otherness, is to be purged. Presumed

evil, in turn, can be both the monsters and the people carrying prejudicial assumptions about them. In some cases, King's novels present the evils of the extreme other without skepticism or without challenge. Such is the depiction of Eddie Kaspbrak's mother, for example, and the portrayal of non-traditional sexuality, as I discuss in chapter three. Often, however, King's novels develop arguments *against* the extermination of whoever is different, connecting presumed evil not to the other, but to the prejudicial perspective of "normal" characters. Readers are put in a position of identification with the different, be it through the Loser's Club in *It* or through the socially shunned protagonist in *Carrie*. Nonetheless, when we enter many of King's fictional worlds, we recognize that human boundaries and individual autonomy are at risk of being disregarded or erased either by the presumed notions of the work itself, or by the diegetic representations of officiality, authoritarianism, and monologism.

One of these monological presences is traditional masculinity. Be it in novels whose main themes involve gender inequality or in works that touch the subject only tangentially, discourses of traditional men or male-centered institutions attempt to overpower femininity and alternative forms of masculinity. While I do not believe that maleness is inherently monological or oppressive, hegemonic masculinity, by Connel's definition, is both, and traditional forms of masculinity are correlated to hegemony. In *The Shining*, as I indicate in chapter one, traditional and non-traditional forms of manhood constitute a problem of mediation for Jack Torrance, as he stands undecided in his position as an artist, a worker, a father, and a family leader. *Pet Sematary* presents a similar problem of mediation that includes the officiality of Louis's scientific discourse against the town's rural, un-scientific, but time-honored forms of knowledge. *Rose Madder* is less subtle, as its male antagonist uses psychological, physical, and sexual violence to enforce his authoritarian position. In *Blaze*, monological discourses of authority are clear in the devitalizing voices of institutions. *Doctor Sleep* is the only novel in the corpus that provides a positive ending that involves men in collaboration against the evil force. This does not mean that King's novels have completely shifted paradigms. It seems

more plausible, instead, that *Doctor Sleep* is an initial movement toward new politics of masculinity, which so far only highlights the preceding pattern.

The pattern in question is recognized with most clarity in *The Shining*, which tackles matters of tradition directly. As I enumerated in chapter one, this novel portrays problems of traditional masculinity in relation to literature, work, and space. Each of these relate to the difficulty in balancing central and marginal forms of manhood.

First, Jack's identity as a writer is ambiguous, as it confers him power, but ultimately signifies failure. Like other writers in King's fiction, Jack sees his work as a promise—in his case, a promise of ascending financially and socially. In a discussion about King's *Misery* (1987), Napier reminds us that

> most of King's writer characters lead double lives, writing genre fiction but dreaming of going straight. They are often horror or romance writers who aspire to being taken seriously as authors of literary fiction, only to find that they are haunted by the world they wish to leave behind (35-36).

Jack Torrance is the author of some commercial short stories and has one published in *Esquire*, which distances him from the prestigious place he wishes to occupy as the "Eugene O'Neill of his generation, the American Shakespeare!" (168), as his wife humorously refer to him. Jack's great achievement is supposed to be his play, which, as he loses his grip on reality, is gradually replaced by the idea of writing a book on the history of the Overlook. Magistrale notes, "The play offers Jack the opportunity to reassert control over his mind and to redirect his imagination in a positive manner" but later "Jack becomes convinced the hotel is a subject worthy of inspiring his greatest composition, when in reality his authorial energies are being siphoned away" (*America's Storyteller* 112). One of the tensions shaping Jack's confusing relationship with his own responsibilities is his position regarding commercial and "serious" literature, which respectively stand for failure and fulfilment of social expectations. Magistrale helps close this argument when he quotes from Jason Sperb, who remarks, "We do not

begin to experience Jack's loss of reality until we also begin to see him fail to write his novel"
(qtd. in 112). Jack's writing is mentioned early in the novel, but only in tangential connection
to his moral and psychological descent. One example is Jack breaking Danny's arm because
the boy spills beer over his play. The situation functions as a metaphor underlining several
issues in the father-and-son relationship, one of which is that Jack's untended traumas, rep-
resented by his alcoholism and the beer, interferes with his creative freedom, symbolized by
the play. At this point, however, even if the scene involves physical abuse, it serves merely
as a foreshadowing for even more disturbing events. At any rate, there is a psychological
aspect to the relationship Jack has with his writing: he is both a displaced writer and a dis-
placed man.

Similarly, Jack's work functions—or rather, malfunctions—as an assurance of his
manhood. Stephen Snyder observes that, in Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*, "Jack ex-
presses disgust for both the intellectual chore of teaching and the physical chores of manual
labor which he envisions waiting for him in Denver. At the hotel he does none of the work
for which he was hired" (8). This comment should be read in light of an idea that Snyder
borrows from D. H. Lawrence: that American people "idealize work into an ethic precisely
because [they] dislike it" (5). If this is true to the United States as a whole, it is hard to tell,
but it seems a plausible insight on the impulses that contribute to Jack's wish for social as-
cension. Of course, the novelistic version of Jack is developed much slower than its filmic
counterpart, so readers have access to Jack doing some work (e.g., repairing the roof, tending
to the boiler), while viewers see a disheartened man from scene one. Unlike Kubrick's Jack,
King's does not dislike work in general, but resents being in the position of *needing* to work.
In the opening scene, which begins in the middle of a work interview, Jack reveals "that he
probably could not have liked any man on that side of the desk—under the circumstances"
(3). The problem is not doing the job itself but knowing that there is always an institution
above him, composed by people who earn more, get more credit, and receive greater

recognition. In his own evaluation, Jack's professional situation is portrayed as a failure: he is described as the "supplicant" in his job interview (6) and feels he has "no worth at all" (25) when he descends into the boiler room for the first time. Work is simultaneously what keeps the structure of the Torrance family from collapsing at first and what later removes its first brick.

Finally, the Overlook Hotel itself is an ambiguous locus, since it is both traditional and non-centric. In the basement of the hotel, Jack finds a scrapbook containing a detailed account of the Overlook's history, and, when reading about the masked ball hosted in 1945, he can "almost see them in the dining room, the richest men in American and their women" (227). This excerpt introduces three ideas: that the Overlook is a man's place, not for rich people, but for rich men and their women; that the Overlook is a place for pleasure and celebrations; and that, from Jack's perspective, the past seems present. At first the hotel appears respectfully luxurious, but, as its past loosens its mask, as does the Red Death in Poe's story, from which King uses a section as epigraph, it is revealed that behind that luxury lies what Manchel calls "the sins of a patriarchal society" (68) and Fredric Jameson refers to as "the American past as it has left its sedimented traces in the corridors and dismembered suites" (90). The hotel was not only a place for parties, but for orgies, suicides, and murders. In their hiding, the women and the rich men transgress moral codes, leaving footprints that shape the hotel into what it is—a hive of sinful ghosts armed with an individual consciousness—violating boundaries of moral and time, unearthing the Torrances' anxieties, and driving Jack into madness. Initially, it seems Jack is given a set of seemingly hopeful paths to reassert his traditional manhood, but, being an outsider (literally in relation to space, but also in relation to social class, work, and literary ambition), he sees the opportunities escaping him and falling apart like the mask of the Red Death or the hedonist façade of the Overlook Hotel.

What those three facets of tradition have in common is that they not only relate specifically to a monological discourse of hegemonic masculinity, but also that they are tied to King's use of language as a tool of officiality. Hohne develops a significant argument regarding monologism and King's language when she draws on Mikhail Bahktin's observations on dialectic stories to discuss King's linguistic characteristics in terms of "official" and "unofficial" accents. The first would be "a set of verbal and non-verbal authoritative languages which attain value in society based on their association with entrenched power," while the second "embraces otherness" and belongs to "a category composed of languages not valued . . . by a particular society and which usually are furthermore rule-breaking in their form as well as their spirit" (94). An example of the first is in Ullman, the self-important manager of the Overlook, who utters grammatical, serious, and arrogant sentences such as "Certainly your feelings toward me play no part in my own belief that you are not right for the job" or "They would be correct in their judgement of my character" (7). Opposed cases are Dick Hallorann in *The Shining*, and Jude Crandall in *Pet Sematary* (whose title is also an example). Their use of slang and their accent connects them to King's linguistic representation of old or black people, who he usually depicts in opposition to officiality. Hallorann has lines such as "It ain't happened yet" (123) and Crandall once says "Ayuh, corker, ain't she?" (10). If we read Hohne's remarks side-by-side with Magistrale's idea of monologism as an evil force in King, rigidly set and official language seems connected to evil, while the diversity of "unofficiality" connects it to good.

Most significant, however, are not those characters who prototypically represent either side of the spectrum, but those who inhabit the unstable middle. Hohne notes that, in King's writing, "there is a great tension between the heteroglossic orality that is slang speech, which codifies a knowledge rejected by those in power, and monologic orality, which embodies power" (94). This tension may be realized in the narrative voice and in the different characters who represent different approaches to language, but it is also in the internal

contradictions of specific characters. The duality of Jack Torrance's language reveals much about his character. When asked by the manager of the Overlook if he knows the definition of "cabin fever," Jacks replies,

> It's a slang term for the claustrophobic reaction that can occur when people are shut in together over long periods of time. The feeling of claustrophobia is externalized as dislike for the people you happen to be shut in with. In extreme cases it can result in hallucinations and violence—murder has been done over such minor things as a burned meal or an argument about whose turn it is to do the dishes. (12)

Almost in professorial fashion, Jack reveals not only his knowledge of the term, but also his ability to structure formal sentences. This becomes immediately relevant in a discussion about how the previous caretaker was more prone to boredom-induced violence because of his lack of formal education. After being cross-examined regarding his drinking habits, Jack replies to the manager,

> A stupid man is more prone to cabin fever just as he's more prone to shoot someone over a card game or commit a spur-of-the-moment robbery. He gets bored. When the snow comes, there's nothing to do but watch TV or play solitaire and cheat when he can't get all the aces out. Nothing to do but bitch at his wife and nag at the kids and drink. It gets hard to sleep because there's nothing to hear. So he drinks himself to sleep and wakes up with a hangover. He gets edgy. And maybe the telephone goes out and the TV aerial blows down and there's nothing to do but think and cheat at solitaire and get edgier and edgier. Finally … boom, boom, boom. (13)

After an explanation that comes from a layperson, but is substantially formal, Jack continues the dialogue with utterances that are already less formal and continue to decrease in formality as he enters the subject of familial relationships. His word choice goes from "externalize"

and "claustrophobic" to "bitch at" and the onomatopoeic "boom, boom, boom". Even his detached use of the present perfect in the passive voice ("murder has been done") is substituted by fast-paced sentences in the active voice that narrate the process of an alcohol-induced meltdown with disturbing familiarity. Finally, the context makes it hard to not interpret Jack's use of the phrase "stupid man" as containing some resentment for the men he deems less capable than him. Sentences in the first excerpt exemplify Jack's academic side, while those in the second passage indicate less formal and less intellectual aspects of his personality. Considering other tensions we have recognized in Jack's psychological makeup, we should not dismiss this one as a variation in register, but rather read it in context, which only highlights his troubled sense of self. In this case, non-formal orality is still connected to positions that lack power (like Jack's unemployment) but does not necessarily convey positive heterogeneity. It is an example of an internal conflict, instead, since Jack remains disoriented and seduced both by the promise of power and the promise of happiness, which, in his case, are diametrically opposed.

Blaze is yet another example of in-betweenness regarding heteroglossic and monologic forms of orality. In sentences like "I'm scared, George. I want to go home" (112), and "You don't care nothing about teaching me" (74), he displays a non-official form of language deprived of intellectualism but adorned with genuine empathy. Simultaneously, he commits crimes. His unlawful behavior and his informal, naïve discourse put him in a position of both evildoer and carrier of alternative voices and rationales. Moreover, Blaze's double-sided position does not result in a third option or any sort of liberation, as his nature is reasserted by secondary male characters in the novel.

In accordance to Hohne's general observations on King's fiction, Blaze is not corrupted and does not commit crimes out of greed. He exemplifies Hohne's statement that "[a]s aggressive as unofficiality is in its demystification of officiality, it does not usually attempt to gain the position of power" (94). Indeed, while George's initial reason for the

kidnapping is monetary, Blaze seems merely influenced by George, not displaying any wish to gain either the power the ransom money represents or the vengeful superiority that would be kidnapping a child from a wealthy and well-protected family. Blaze's honest paternal attachment to the baby closes the argument: he only wants to "watch [the baby's] eyes open and look at him" since "[w]ho knew what those eyes might see in the years ahead?" (282). Like Jack and Louis, and even Dan, Blaze's genuine paternity is not in question, but rather interwoven with other issues.

While displaying a good nature, Blaze is simultaneously characterized via bad intentions and evil actions. His immoral deeds are discussed in the next section, as they are best approached in relation to questions of responsibility, since Blaze's self-awareness is questionable. It remains, however, that throughout the novel, he gives voice to his recently dead friend and criminal mentor George, who serves as a vehicle for Blaze's own immoral tendencies. Since "now *he* was George" (185), Blaze has an immoral and self-aware personality coexisting with his good-natured self. If we consider that the *post-mortem* image of George is part of Blaze's psyche, and if we understand this duality in terms of masculinity, it follows that Blaze is partly convinced that the upper-class society whose money and behavior hurt George also hurt people in general. The ending of the novel, in accordance to King's depiction of masculinity, does not attempt to come to terms with this duality. George is already dead, so, when Blaze is killed, the problems are consequently buried, too.

In *Blaze*, institutionalized authority, much like upper-class people in the eyes of George, helps constitute an environment that traps characters and reassure its own monologism. This monologism is not necessarily one of traditional manhood as we find in the Overlook or in Norman Daniels, but it is, nevertheless, affected by masculine practices. Blaze's father, for instance, is yet another example—like Jack Torrance, Norman Daniels, and their fathers—of an abusive man. When he throws Blaze down the stairs repeatedly as punishment for eating in the living room, his father starts a predicament that will be

reaffirmed by other male figures of authority in Blaze's life. The headmaster at his orphanage comments that "even if you ever attain your sophomore year in high school—which I doubt—you will never get closer to Geometry than the drinking fountain at the end of the hall" (72-73). He is received with a similar attitude when he is temporarily adopted by a couple, as they disregard any aspects of his personality that does not involve his abilities to perform manual labor on their farm. When he rebels against their harsh treatment and their physically abusive punishment, he is sent back to his orphanage and, in the middle of a beating involving a paddle, remarks that "there was always someone bigger, with a bigger paddle" (97). The only important male figures who are not abusive in Blaze's life are his criminal partner George and Harry Bluenote, a farmer who respects Blaze and considers adopting him. Both these men die, leaving Blaze to a world plagued by aggressive and uncaring people. This pattern reinforces the naturalistic tendencies of the novel, as Blaze is constantly forced to conform to his subservient but discontent personality, represented by himself and his mental image of George.

If presumed evil is monological in King's stories, it stands to reason that virtuous powers may be connected to diversity. Magistrale acknowledges this when he writes that "the forces of good in King embody Bakhtin's principle of metafictive dialogue" (*Second Decade* 118). What this translates to is that heroic groups in King's fiction are not only composed by people with different social backgrounds, but by people whose background difference plays a crucial role, as it creates diverse viewpoints and discourses. Commenting on Jeanne Reesman's "Riddle Game: Stephen King's Metafictive Dialogue," Magistrale remarks how she "argues that generally, when maleficence is defeated in King's fiction, a small group of people must band together in a democratic and participatory union to counterbalance evil's monarchy" (*Second Decade* 118). Examples abound: the Losers' Club in *It;* the ka-tet (group of gunslingers) in the Dark Tower series; the group formed by Dan, Abra, and other allies in the final sections of *Doctor Sleep;* the people of the Free Zone in *The Stand;* the members of the

home for abused women in *Rose Madder*, along with Rose's double and her servant. King structures those groups as diversely as possible. The ka-tet is composed of various ages, ethnicities, and social backgrounds, and each of its members come from a slightly different universe and from different points in time. The Losers' Club is even more diverse, each member featuring a characteristic that others use to belittle them: Stan is Jewish, Mike is black, Eddie has psychosomatic asthma, Richie shows in his impersonations a form of creativity not unlike King's writer characters, Bev is the only woman in the group, Ben is overweight, and Bill stutters. *It* indicates that what other characters see as characteristics of a loser (diegetic evil) is, in fact, a diversity that should be welcomed (presumed good). King's representation of some social groups is far from perfect, but it cannot be denied that his novels constantly associate general social diversity with prosperity.

It is difficult to even list any story written by Stephen King the ending of which is both positive and not brought about by a group composed of a conglomeration of backgrounds. In all twenty-five King novels I have read, evil does not ever triumph against a good diverse group. The closest example would be the Dark Tower transferring Roland back in time for him to retrace his steps, but that is not so much an evil action as it is the postponement of a conclusion. Interestingly, Roland approaches the Tower by himself, after abandoning the rest of his ka-tet or witnessing their deaths. The novel could be implying that, if the gunslinger ever manages to approach the tower without sacrificing his humanity (e.g., friendship, love, compassion), then he would stop repeating his journey. Indeed, in Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," the poem that served King as an inspiration for his longest series, Roland states,

> Names in my ears
>
> Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
>
> How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
>
> And such was fortunate, yet each of old

Lost, lost! one moment knell'd the woe of years. (194-98)

Likewise, in *The Dark Tower*, chronologically the last book of the series, when Roland reaches

the Tower, he finds rooms with mementos from his life. He remarks, "T*his is a place of death*,"

and the Tower replies that it is "*only because your life has made it so*" (1,026). By exhibiting the

deadly consequences of Roland's choices, the Tower reinforces an idea recurrent in King's

novels: that, if evil is intrinsic to humankind as a diverse collective, good is also essentially

here, provided we can go through life without losing it.

In those twenty-five novels, good rarely triumphs without a diverse group. First, the

only instance in which a novel ends on a positive note without the participation of a diverse

group is *The Dead Zone* (1979), as Johnny Smith manages to expose Greg Stillson's true nature

and prevent a third World War. Other situations of good overcoming evil all involve a diverse

group. Second, when the diverse group is absent, the ending is mostly not neutral or post-

poned, but explicitly negative. Similar to *Pet Sematary* and *The Shining*, with their failure of

mediation, is *Carrie*, in which as the titular protagonist herself commits evil actions after being

ostracized and deprived of the opportunity to be part of any socially healthy collective. More

than a correlation, the recurrent diverse groups seem, almost always, a requirement for pos-

itive endings in King's novels.

The relation between that dynamic and masculinity is that the former reinforces how

the latter is an open wound. While some novels reveal that the prejudices of diegetic evil are,

in fact, a welcomed form of diversity, that only seems to work for *some* non-centric aspects

of the characters' composition, which do not include aspects related to manhood. If we con-

sider sexuality, for example, we see that there are few openly gay or bisexual characters in

King's novels. When King's gay or bisexual men are not depicted as perverts, they are sec-

ond-hand characters who do not bring any form of diversity to a group—often, they are

both. Examples go from the crimes involving Horace Derwent in *The Shining* to Dick Hal-

loran's abusive grandfather in *Doctor Sleep*. None of them are an example of diversity in

masculinity like characters with non-traditional religions and ethnicities are in relation to other aspects of human personality. We return to these observations in chapter three, which discusses how King's works correlate immorality and non-standard sexuality.

Beside sexuality, another diversity in masculinity self-expression could be found in King's writers, but their portrayal does not sustain such reading. While traditional men are stereotypically stoic and equate open communication to weakness, King's writer male characters could provide a diverse alternative, but that is not the case for two reasons. First, there are arguments against communication as solution, to which we will return later. Writing and self-expression, then, would only be solutions to non-existent problems. Second, and most obvious, King's writers are not in a position to bring any form of masculine diversity because they are often portrayed in a process of negotiation of manhood, and rarely with a good outcome. Jack Torrance is the prototypical example, but the list goes on, including Thaddeus Beaumont in *Dark Half* (1989) and Harold Lauder in *The Stand*. Those writers are in constant difficulty with coming to terms with their own writing and self-expression.

In most of King's diverse groups of characters who fight against evil, the contributions of each person for the collaborative unit come from parts of their identity that are not connected to their maleness. In *Rose Madder*, the entire group is composed of women who find strength to fight back against abusive people. Peter Slowik, who helped the Daughters and Sisters by guiding possible new members, is murdered by Norman, and Rose's male love interest provides almost no help in the final conflict, as he does not enter the world of the painting. I do not defend, of course, that every diverse group should have a traditional man in it; rather, I am merely reporting on the configuration of those groups in King's novels and considering the diegetic consequences. The main one, in this case, is a relationship of marginality in King's representations of genders. In older novels like *It*, masculinity seems the default, while femininity is portrayed as different. Like Bill's stutter or Ben's asthma, Bev's

femininity is the diversity she brings to the group. King's female characters get more complex as the decades pass, but we cannot say the same about most aspects of his men.

While femininity provides a counterpart for the evil monological forces, rarely can we say that masculinity has the same functions in a story by Stephen King. *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary*, *Blaze*, the Dark Tower series seem to work under the assumption that men constantly fail to understand their own masculinity, while *Rose Madder* shows that it is more literarily feasible to challenge stereotypes of womanhood and explore alternative forms of femininity. While works like Guthrie's and Beal's theses on the representation of female characters in King's stories convincingly argue that there is room for change in the lives of King's female characters, men remain generally the same. Amy Canfield cites from Kathleen Hofeller's *Social, Psychological, and Situational Factors in Wife Abuse*, connecting *Rose Madder* and real-world statistics about the problems depicted in the novel. Canfield observes, "Rose also felt that she had few options as she was not permitted to work, making her economically reliant on her spouse, an occurrence that 32 percent of women cite in explaining why they stay with abusive husbands" (397). She then refers to an argument from Nielsen, Endo, and Ellington's "Social Isolation and Wife Abuse":

> Isolation is powerful, as sociologists and psychologists argue, not only because it cuts the woman off from any outside help, but also because it cuts the man off from outsiders. With no social feedback that his conduct is wrong, the abusive husband continues his violence unchecked. (397)

While, in King's fiction, female groups have shifted from Wendy Torrance's passivity in *The Shining* to a positive kind of unity shown by the helpful women from Daughters and Sisters, groups of men have gone through such change years later, and only in a smaller scale.

Even non-traditional masculinities are often portrayed in a problematic manner. Homosexual men are often shown through essentialist lenses, and the same applies to black or old men, who are often stereotypically good and wise, representing alternative forms of

knowledge, but confined to this role. I expand on this subject in chapter three when writing about homosexual and homosocial relationships. It remains true, then, that, while men can be diverse in King's stories, the aspects of their personality that pertain to their manhood, be it traditional or not, are presented as negative. The possible exception to this pattern, *Doctor Sleep*, suggests that communication is an alternative for toxicity, but this comes with its own problems.

Initially, we should ask what problems communication would solve, after all. And whose problems are those? Are those male characters the victims or the perpetrators of their toxic masculinity? On the one hand, we can subscribe to the idea that manhood is generally negative. We can try to explain this socially, by understanding that maleness, historically speaking, has been in a position of power over femininity, which leads to authors portraying men either in a stereotypically powerful manner or in a negative light. Neither is satisfactory to me, as they do not recognize the plurality behind masculinities. On the other hand, instead of seeing manhood as generally negative, we can relativize even further and see *some* aspects of *some* masculinities as negative, as I so far have been doing. I base the following section on the questions in the beginning of this paragraph and discuss one of their ramifications: "How does the monological and sourceless aspects of evil in King's stories affect the distribution of blame and its interpretative consequences?"

Responsibility and Intent

Evil men have become a defining feature of the representation of society in Stephen King's fictional worlds. The depiction of each male character molds his fiction to the point that figures like Jack Torrance and Roland Deschain are hard to interpret without wider implications in mind. Magistrale once more reminds us that "violent sexual predators roam the landscapes of King's universe, and they are invariably male," adding, "[T]he figure of the heterosexual serial rapist is a recurring male figure throughout King's film and fictional

canons" (*American Storyteller* 86). Magistrale's observations are correct, except for the restriction of sexual orientation. More recent examples, such as Dick Hallorann's stories about his sexually abusive grandfather in *Doctor Sleep* (18) portray rape being committed by more than one configuration of sexuality, which highlights how this crime often involves a heinous form of abuse of power, be it physical or psychological. These terms shape the portrayal of masculinities in King's fiction.

Conversely, we must ask ourselves, "If these evil men compose the *status quo* of masculinity, up to what point are they shaped by their fictional society?" What external presences influence these men? And how? If there were no Overlook Hotel, no Micmac burial ground, and no Rose Madder painting, would the fate of Jack Torrance, Louis Creed, and Norman Daniels be the same? Does that external influence exempt them from guilt? And, if King's novels work under the assumption that evil is without origin, up to what point can we blame men for being bad? This section investigates the extent to which King's male characters are responsible for their own doom and, alternatively, the extent to which they are victims of external (natural, supernatural, or social) forces. Some critics take sides and argue either for or against assigning blame and responsibility to those characters, while others hesitate and choose to establish either a middle ground or no ground at all. I, too, stand undecided, and actively so. My skepticism comes not from any confusion in King's representation of masculinity, but from his purposefully ambiguous construction. While they seem openly moralistic at times, many of his novels reveal the dangers behind moralism.

As I am working with a definition of evil based on evil actions, which require moral agents, understanding the dynamics of free will in King's fiction is a necessary initial step. The absence of free will could support an argument against moral agency in King's characters, which would put our assessment of their evil in question, inciting different questions in relation to representations of masculinity. So, how is free will depicted in King's novels, assuming there is any free will there at all? Magistrale defends that "Stephen King's universe

contains ample evidence of free will at work [and that] characters flourish or perish primarily of choices they make" (*American Storyteller* 75). Strengell partly reaffirms this by observing how some ghosts in King's fiction are morally neutral, which "illustrates King's view of free will" ("The Ghost" 227). This argument is compelling, since readers of *Blaze* and *Rose Madder* witness the slow processes of decision-making behind the male characters' meaningful choices, such as when Blaze kidnaps the baby and when Norman leaves after Rose with murder on his mind. When discussing the structure of *The Shining*, however, Strengell notes that "the form of this novel, modelled on *Hamlet*,[7] limits [Jack's] behavior" and that "[l]ike a true Gothic character, Jack, full of hubris, directs himself toward his own doom" (232). Even if the first argument is compelling, we must recognize that an opposing argument seems equally sound. What criticism indicates is that sometimes King's characters are responsible and fully aware, while, at other times, they are influenced by external powers.

The existence of free will in King's fiction is undermined by the characters' relationships with deterministic forces, which often come in the form of supernatural entities. While I maintain that a more complete reading of his works requires not abruptly taking sides in order to understand the discussion on free will vs. determinism, I also recognize one argument against free will: that the oppressiveness of some settings and supernatural phenomena erases possibilities of characters escaping certain predicaments; or, in other words, erase choice. In *Danse Macabre*, King notes that horror fiction works at two levels: the first involves sensorial representations (disgust, physical monstrosity) while the second contains what the first represents via metaphors (primordial fears and anxiety on a social level). This dynamic implies a balance between presumed evil and its supernatural representations, a balance that

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[7] *The Shining* references plays; it characterizes Jack via inactiveness, delay, indecision, and impulsiveness; it is divided into three movements respectively involving conflict exposition, psychological deterioration of the protagonist, and the belated regain of mental composure.

King's novels usually put in a state of disequilibrium. King also differentiates between evil that comes from free will and evil that is predetermined. He writes,

> All tales of horror can be divided into two groups: those in which the horror results from an act of free will and conscious will—a conscious decision to do evil—and those in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning. The most classic horror tale of this latter type is the Old Testament story of Job, who becomes the human Astroturf in a kind of Superbowl between God and Satan.
>
> The stories of horror which are psychological—those which explore the terrain of the human heart—almost always revolve around the free-will concept; "inside evil," if you will, the sort we have no right laying off on God the Father. This is Victor Frankenstein creating a living being out of spare parts to satisfy his own hubris, and then compounding his sin by refusing to take responsibility for what he has done. (79-80)

Strengell, in "Frankenstein's Monster: Hubris and Death in Stephen King's Oeuvre," reads this passage in terms of how *Frankenstein* and *Pet Sematary* are best read side by side, and, while I address these observations further on, here I wish to note that, despite King's clear division, his novels are rarely so clear.

In *Pet Sematary*, the representation of manhood is so influenced by supernatural forces that the logical integrity of the novel collapses. The main conflict puts Louis, in his attempt to assimilate death and restructure life, battling against the loss of his son, but the novel, in its later chapters, creates a state of unbalance by providing Louis with access to the supernatural cemetery. Nash summarizes the core of this argument when he notes that, in *Pet Sematary*, "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" ("Postmodern Gothic" 153). If,

when evaluating Louis's responsibility, we recognize that his behavior is influenced to a degree that the reader cannot fathom, we are also recognizing that we do not have the means to understand Louis's intentions. *Pet Sematary*, like *The Shining*, *Blaze*, and *Rose Madder*, never provides the reader with enough clarity to identity what King refers to as free will or predestinate evil. There is always doubt. As Nash also observes, "Horror [in *Pet Sematary*] is achieved at the expense of logic," compromising "the novel's ability to address real problems." This is true only partially. What this resource achieves—indeed, at the expense of logic—is a healthy dose of relativism. King's novel poses the questions, "If grief is one of the saddest of human states, but an unavoidable one, and if 'sometimes dead is better' (*Pet Sematary* 208), how are we to reconcile our opposing views on death? And which are the tools we must use to judge other people's reactions? Can we ever evaluate something so relative and personal?" These questions are developed throughout the novel using images from Christianity and horror culture, such as quotations from the Bible or references to *Frankenstein*. The relativism created by the supernatural interference is the final bittersweet touch: by questioning the extent of Louis's responsibility, we can extrapolate and question our evaluation of many grief-related situations, but suddenly those questions above are too relativized to answer.

External interferences put male characters in a position of self-evaluation without self-improvement, as, instead of assuming responsibility and revising their morality, they find perfect ground to project their flaws on other individuals and extraneous systems. While readers can come to terms with the situation if they accept the relativism, we are also in a position that allows us to dismiss characters' mistakes by pushing the responsibility to outside entities, destroying chances of self-improvement and keeping the masculine wound open, since problems persist with little expectation of change. Alegre is right when she argues, "In King's novels external agencies—from alcoholism to supernatural possession . . . are invoked not so much to excuse the father's behavior as to explain the dark roots of his victimisation" (107). What I want to observe, however, is that, even though the open wound of manhood

is a social one, shifting the blame toward society is a mistake King's men make and we should avoid when arriving at plausible interpretations. The victimization surrounding those men is both a reality, as they are often abused and ostracized by their male peers, and an excuse, as they work under the premise of victimhood as justification.

This is why separating the diegetic from presumed morality in King's works is important, as many of his novels are designed as to put us in a position of doubt, forcing us to evaluate our assumptions regarding morality and manhood. In *Blaze*, George's recurrent argument is that rich people, who "pretend people like him weren't there" (122), deserve to be robbed and tricked. His idea is that social injustice grants him the right to commit crimes. Many of King's male characters are victims, but we must make a fundamental distinction: while the status of victim may erase the responsibility for innocuous behavior, it does not work as a free pass for criminal activity. Under the circumstances of these novels in my corpus, the moral agency of the male subject withstands their status of victim, revealing that their victimhood is partly a self-fabricated scapegoat. The masculine wound, in this case, is not some condition from which men suffer just for being inserted into a social order, but a self-inflicted injury that is never healed for fear that the remedy smarts too much.

In this case, what keeps the wound of manhood open is not society, but the inability of King's male characters to take responsibility for their own shortcomings and improve themselves. Alegre describes it as "symptomatic of a complex social and cultural situation in which men, as David Savran [in *Taking it like a Man*] has argued (1998), are split between a masochistic need to assume their guilty and take punishment and a sadistic need to deny guilt and recover their lost privileges" (107-08). This is King's manner of writing about "the darkest aspect of masculinity and [of] consider[ing] how the destruction of the current model of failed fatherhood may bring hope for the child and the future" (108). While I agree with the first part of Alegre's observations and recognize that King's works depict the nuanced ambiguities of destroying a damaging form of traditional masculinity, I am skeptical about any

significant possibility of re-constructing these models. King's books do disassemble and examine the inner workings of masculine social life and personal responsibility, but do not proceed beyond this, leaving the structure bare and exposed for the readers to carry out the interpretative task of putting everything back together.

The critical analyses of Jack Torrance in *The Shining* fluctuate between assigning blame to him or not, with some critics taking either side and others recognizing the ambiguity. From Jack's mediation problems, Magistrale singles out his narcissism. While King's sexually predatory characters "are without redeeming flaw," his "flawed fathers," Jack included, have "good intentions [that] are always thwarted by the need to feed some personal narcissism" (*American Storyteller* 88). Even if the Overlook Hotel has some influence over Jack, it remains that his aggressive nature and his feelings of self-importance make him significantly responsible for his actions. While in *Pet Sematary* we mostly have access to Louis in his new life near the cemetery, *The Shining* gives us numerous examples of Jack's failure to take responsibility and communicate: in moments of rage, he breaks his son's arm and attacks a student who was damaging his car, while, in less heated moments, he drives while drunk. Concomitantly, the novel shows Jack teaching Danny how to read, walking in the snow with his family, and acting worried when he accidently presents his son with a nest that still contains dangerous live wasps. Through these scenes, King puts readers in a heartbreaking position of evaluating the other in his or her entirety, erasing the simplicity of the victim/victimizer division and inviting for a less dualistic evaluation of the characters.

Ironically, Jack the playwright does not recognize the extent to which his life follows the structure of a tragedy. Strengell notes how *The Shining* ignores free will, as "[w]hatever is going to happen to Jack has already been decided," because he "has the opportunity to choose differently, but the form of his novel, modelled on *Hamlet*, limits his behavior" ("The Ghost" 232). Extremely oppressive supernatural forces are not the only factor behind stripping characters of their own agency, then, since the structure of those novels may serve the

same purposes. Magistrale comments, "Like so many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Torrance is both helpless to alter the course of his own destruction and endowed with enough free will that he participates directly through his bad choices in the catastrophe that befalls him" (*American Storyteller* 108). When Jack enters a shed and throws away a battery magneto that could provide power to a snowmobile and help his escape from the Overlook, he apparently acts deliberately. Later, however, when Dick Hallorann enters the same shed and feels the forces from the Overlook dominating his mind, readers understand that Jack was being manipulated. The difference is that, while Hallorann immediately admits to himself he is "*thinking of murder*" (649), Jack argues he "can't win" because fighting the Overlook "was like trying to play solitaire with one of the aces missing from the deck" (416). By using the same analogy with which he describes a process of mental breakdown earlier, Jack engages in a discourse that reveals both his awareness and his fatal flaw: his irresponsibility.

Jack is not the only of King's "flawed fathers" whose situation incite a debate over his own responsibility and the intention behind his evil actions: Louis Creed is as complex as Jack and can be interpreted likewise. As I mention in chapter one, one alternative is understanding Louis as a product of the forces behind the Micmac burial ground and, as Alegre defends, as a man who is "no patriarch" and, according to King's depiction, a "sensible, sensitive man [whose life] might be easier if only the children and [his wife] Rachel were less difficult to handle" (111). Even if Louis sees himself that way, however, assumptions like Alegre's should begin and end in the protagonists' warped self-assessment and not shape the reader's perspective. If Louis judges his family to be a burden and internalizes his angst in fantasies that involve leaving and "driv[ing] south, all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as a medic, under a new name" (4), that reveals more about Louis himself than about his "hostages to fortune." Alegre also argues that "not the father but his grief springing out of love is the real monster" (112) in *Pet Sematary*. While it may seem that way, emotionally mature and psychologically healthy men do not relate to loss with

the selfish and unstable demonstrations of grief Louis displays. Louis refuses to accept the death of his son and is, therefore, unable to grieve healthily. A better alternative to explain this relationship with his own role as a father and provider is recognizing that his own hubris (a word Strengell uses to describe Jack Torrance) prevents him from assuming responsibility for his actions.

The opposite reading, which identifies a greater degree of free will and moral responsibility in Louis, seems equally problematic, as it ignores the influence of paranormal sources. Strengell defends that "the flaw in Louis's character is hubris" ("Frankenstein's Monster" 5) and that "[s]ince the notion of hubris includes both pride and defiance, two emotions which call upon conscious action, I regard Louis as responsible for his actions" (5-6). This is a pertinent reading based on sound textual evidence, such as the explicit warning that Jud Crandall gives Louis about the moral responsibility of bringing back the dead. My point is not that this reading is incorrect, but that other critics successfully defend its exact opposite. Even if we focus on comparisons between *Pet Sematary* and *Frankenstein*, we must not forget that there is no significant supernatural force compelling Victor Frankenstein in the process of creating his monster. While readings involving reason, hubris, and the boundaries of religion and science are often applied to both novels, and while Louis and Victor go through a correlate process, they are different because they inhabit fundamentally different worlds. Louis Creed is not Victor Frankenstein and we cannot treat their similar decisions, characteristics, and mistakes as if they were analogous. We cannot transfer our interpretation of Shelley's novel to King's in its entirety. *Pet Sematary*, like most King novels, inhabits a sort of interpretative limbo, particularly in relation to masculinity and moral responsibility.

Perhaps it is easier to spot such interpretative limbo in *Rose Madder*, as it exhibits a crucial thematic difference if compared to *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary*: its male character is developed entirely in a negative fashion, which highlights the difficulty of establishing moral judgement. The prologue reveals the aftermath of one of the recurrent episodes of physical

assault involving Norman and Rosie: he beats her to a point she feels "there has never been any pain like this pain" (15) and has a miscarriage. Throughout the novel, Norman acts solely as a monological force, forcing his self-attributed superiority over other people, especially women and gay men. His only redeeming characteristic is being a victim of a parent who mistreated (or "educated") him in the same manner he mistreats others. This is a motif present in all novels in my corpus, with the exception of *Pet Sematary*, and, as I mentioned earlier, is partly responsible for the postponement of origins of evil. If Norman believes "[w]hat was left to niggers didn't get done," it is because "this was a lesson Norman's father had taught him" (103). His racism is like his misogyny and his homophobia, as they are aspects of an inherited form of masculinity.

Still, as Jack and Louis have the adult responsibility of recognizing their own mistakes, so does Norman. In fact, this is an idea that goes beyond King's literature and is related to real-world politics of masculinity. When confronted about their own mistakes, men may feel the impulsive need to defend their own manhood, since, in a vicious cycle, traditional masculinity seems to allow no room for self-doubt. Beynon observes two opposing discourses regarding manhood: the appreciation for a new form of masculinity that is often more open, but also vain and narcissistic; and the nostalgic views on more traditional forms of manhood, which he characterizes as "hard and stoical" (127). While his remarks concern mainly British masculinities, it is not far-fetched to apply them to men from similar cultural backgrounds. Nostalgic defenses of traditional masculinity, then, often come as an attempt at deflecting the blame. Beynon mentions two discourses, for example, that involve blaming fathers for the defective masculinities of their sons, either because those fathers are absent or because they have failed their children (129-31). This, in turn, affects literary readings, as some critics have a tendency to be overly forgiving of characters like Jack Torrance, who suffer at the hand of a previous abuser. What openly aggressive characters like Norman Daniels show is the implausibility of such reasoning, because, while they too were abused and

can be seen as a victim, it is hard to interpret them solely in this light, as they are not only angry and psychologically abusive, but also leave behind a trail of corpses. Through Norman, we are reminded of the seriousness of Jack's immorality and of the responsibility self-aware agents have of tending to their own psychological balance.

Norman's pure evil extends to the characterization of other men in *Rose Madder*, be it as reaffirmation or as contrast. Guthrie observes, "Even peripheral male characters in this novel engender a sense of disgust and revulsion in the reader" (*Three Decades* 93). He cites, as an example, a man Rose encounters while lost in the city to where she flees. After being described as a man with a "receding hairline [and] pale skin on which a number of blemishes stood out like partially healed burns" (57), he directs semi-coherent sentences at Rose: "'Hey baby wanna get it on you don't look too bad priddy good in fact nice tits whaddya say wanna get it on do some low ridin wanna get it on wanna do the dog whaddya say?'" (58). This man and Norman help set the disgusting and disorienting aspects of male abusers, who make Rose feel both unclean and full of self-doubt. Guthrie, however, adds that

> at least two male characters in *Rose Madder* do have redeeming qualities. Robbie Lefferts hears Rosie's voice in the pawnshop and offers her a new career recording audio books, and Bill Steiner's love and devotion are almost saccharine. Unfortunately, these male characters are one dimensional in the other extreme; they are almost too good to be believable. (94)

This is one of the most well-deserved criticisms of King's novels, as I will discuss on chapter three. Throughout his body of work, we find either men or woman developed with complexity, but rarely both.

Like Jack and Louis, Norman seems only partially self-aware and autonomous. Jack's free will is ambiguous because of the forces of the Overlook, while Louis's is affected by the Micmac burial ground; Norman's suffers a similar interference coming from the world inside the Rose Madder painting. Several times through the novel, either the narrator or the

characters hint at how the Rose McClendon/Rose Madder or Norman/bull connections indicate the interference of fate. The examples I have in chapter one still serve us here: in the beginning, Rose already sees a bestial Norman pursuing her in her nightmares (22), and, when Rose does her double Rose Madder a favor and rescues her baby, the double comments "I repay" (272). These instances of foreshadowing, once more, lead us to our problem of free will: if the doubles indicate a predetermined course of action, can we blame Norman for following it? Guthrie writes,

> It is not enough to simply flip the gender hierarchy and expect everything to be satisfactorily resolved, and the temptation to do so may be a potential problem with the trope of domestic violence. The entire concept of gender must be dismantled to determine how it is socially constructed for everybody, male and female, and then these processes must be analyzed to determine how they relate to power and violence. (94)

The process that reveals Norman's evil, and, by extension, the evil of the toxic and deadly forms of masculinity he represents, is the very process that, because of the intensity of its representation, makes it impossible for him to change. Throughout the book, the readers' concerns are directed toward Rose and her escape, and rightly so, but it is troubling that *Rose Madder* is written in such a way that readers will probably not even consider that Norman may abandon his hunt and change his behavior. The novel begins a process of dismantling the concept of gender, but determinism prevents it from being fully developed. The forces keeping the wound of masculinity open, then, are twofold: first, the determinism that characterizes Norman, who antagonizes without room for redemption; and second, the doubt regarding any possibility of change in his pattern of toxic masculinity.

The problem persists in *Blaze*, as interpretations cannot advance much beyond the suspicion whether the titular protagonist may be responsible for his actions. The determinism here is not connected to supernatural forces that influence characters or anticipate the

future, but to the influences of literary Naturalism. Like Jack and Louis, though, who are simultaneously caring fathers and irresponsible men, Blaze is characterized via an opposition: his blissfully ignorant nurturing impulses and his apparently repressed wish to exert vengeance on the stand-ins for the people who have wronged him. I discussed this duality in the last section: on the one hand, Blaze is a nurturing and blissfully moral father figure; on the other, the representation of George with whom he talks and who influences him represents his evil tendencies. Blaze, in this sense, resembles Jekyll and Hyde, except that his immoral personality does not stem from repression, but from his wish of social reparation or vengeance.

The main male character in *Doctor Sleep*, differently from those in the other four novels, is neither a lone villain working in function of monologic evil nor one of King's heroic male figures—yet, somewhat like Blaze, he draws from both types, but more successfully. Daniel Torrance is one of the few examples (if not the only one) of a male character transitioning from a man who perpetuates an abusive form of evil to a one who exemplifies a receptive manifestation of good. In the initial chapters, after spending his money on cocaine and alcohol, Dan blames the "girl-woman" with whom he slept and considers "shak[ing] her awake and ask[ing] her what she'd done with his fucking money" (49). He even means to "[c]*hoke* her awake" (49), as his father did to his mother at the Overlook. Throughout the novel, he restructures his sense of responsibility, and much of that positive change is attributed to AA meetings and the twelve-step program, which involves not only acknowledgement, but also communication.

As we saw in chapter one, Robinson contends that arguments for communication as a solution are rooted in a reactionary discourse that uses society as a scapegoat for personal failures. Additionally, lack of communication is depicted in King's novels as a symptom rather than the problem itself. Even when characters engage in some form of effective talking, the general problem persists. In *The Shining*, Jack's traumas, his childhood, and, in short, his past, are untouchable topics for the Torrances. They are taboo, a concept that Punter also

relates to the Gothic, noting how Gothic "writers . . . constantly approach areas of social-psychological life which offend, which are suppressed, which are generally swept under the carpet in the interests of social and psychological equilibrium" (184). From the beginning of the book, King hints at how, in the family dynamics of the Torrances, some signs have a fearful power, as if the mere use of words could create harmful consequences. Danny fails to understand why the word "shit" is vulgar (16), but he perceives a dark power behind more common words, which he links to oppressing thoughts. Even before the change of scenery to the Overlook Hotel, the narrator explains that the Torrances

> weren't talking much to each other then. But they were thinking. Oh yes. The thoughts of DIVORCE hung over the kitchen table like a cloud full of black rain. . . . The thought of eating with all that black DIVORCE around made [Danny] want to throw up. (40)

The narrator, through Danny's thoughts, links the absence of communication to the empowerment of words. If a word, instead of being uttered, is avoided and simply floats around "like a cloud full of black rain," it must hold dangerous power. It would be plausible to conjecture, then, that the exposure of those taboo thoughts would bring positive change, but the case is not such. When explaining the family background to a doctor in the town near the Overlook, Jack comments, "This is the first time the word divorce has been mentioned between us. And alcoholism. And child-beating. Three firsts in five minutes" (214). The doctor replies, "That may be at the root of the problem." Perhaps it is not so. Even after the doctor's appointment, after exposing what was already clear only in their private thoughts, the Torrances simply continue on the same track as before. The following scene starts with Jack, isolated from his family, rummaging through the secrets in the hotel's basement and finding a scrapbook that summarizes the history of the Overlook. He spends what seems like hours perusing the secrets of the hotel, alone, in the basement, and, when his wife calls him, "[h]e started, almost guiltily, as if he had been drinking secretly and she would smell the

fumes on him" (242). His immediate reaction is to hide "the scrapbook under a pile of bills and invoices" (242), making it clear that he intends to resume his life of secrets. Communication, once established, helps little, as Jack remains actively isolating himself from his family and hiding his problems even from himself.

Yet, Robinson's view of problems of communication as reactionary still assumes that some men have the flaws they attribute to lack of communication. The flaws exist; the solution does not. If we adapt the argument for literature, we see that King's male characters remain evil, and even the feeblest possibility of change, when examined closely, crumbles under its own fallacies, revealing that the problem is larger than it seems.

The problem of which lack of communication is a symptom is the systemic avoidance that characterizes King's male characters. In *The Shining* and *Doctor Sleep*, it is most clearly seen in Jack and Dan's alcoholism. While in the real world addiction is influenced by a myriad of social, cultural, and psychological factors, in these two King novels, it is also directly correlated to the characters' tendency to avoid intra and interpersonal problems. The narrator, in a scene focalized by Jack, describes alcohol as "the tasty waters of oblivion" (53), and, in *Doctor Sleep*, Dan drinks to avoid the psychological burden of his psychic abilities, which often cause an overload of information. The same avoidance is present in Louis Creed's impulses to flee and leave his family behind, as well as in Norman Daniels's prejudicial discourse, which places the label of "evil" on a constructed view of the other.

The core matter behind those characters' dysfunctional behavior is not so much the inability to talk about their problems, as it is the inability to acknowledge their existence. Their flaw is not an inability to communicate, but an inability to be responsible. What complicates reading King's novels in this light is their tendency to relativize and question those characters' agency. Jack Torrance does not take responsibility for his harmful actions, but should he? Society may be an illusory scapegoat, but we cannot say the same about King's supernatural forces. The Overlook Hotel does influence Jack to an extent that his personality

changes, so his inability to take responsibility may be just a consequence of his unawareness. Since his mind is clouded by the hotel, he may be excused from his behavior—or at least from his actions after his arrival at the hotel. It remains, nevertheless, that Jack, Louis, and even Norman, before being affected by supernatural forces, showed marks of control or avoidance by either abusing their loved ones or wanting to leave them altogether. Dan, besides suffering from the eerie visions of death brought by his shining, is not influenced by an entity whose specific purpose is to cloud his mind. He is able, therefore, to assume responsibility for his actions and overcome the avoidance tendencies that troubled his family for generations.

While responsibility may be a satisfactory remedy for the wounds in *Doctor Sleep* and a conjectured alternative in *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary*, we cannot say the same about King's novels in general. Throughout the eight novels of the Dark Tower series, for instance, responsibility does not result in any form of self-development. In *The Gunslinger* (1978-1981), the first novel of the series, the narrator, focalizing via Roland, comments on his self-acknowledged harshness with a younger male character and remarks, "How easily you bluff this young boy, the gunslinger told himself dryly. Again and again his intuition has led him to this point, and again and again you have led him on by the nose—after all, he has no friends but you" (184). Some of King's characters that are more villainous also display the same carelessness even though they recognize the extent of their negative actions. Randall Flagg appears in numerous novels as a force of supreme evil who basks in his own immorality. Of course, those men fulfill an antagonistic function, but this does not invalidate comparisons to King's other male characters. First, all the main male characters in my corpus are significantly flawed, often to the point they represent the same forms of evil that does. Second, my point is precisely to note that, regardless of a characters' moral compass, responsibility itself is not presented as a solution. If self-awareness were enough to warrant a positive

change, King's villainous characters would have to be blissfully ignorant, which is not the case.

If communication heals only a symptom and responsibility heals nothing, it seems plausible, then, that there is yet another concept behind Dan's self-improvement that could indicate a manner of closing the wound of masculinity. This, however, is not the case, because the process through which Dan transforms his masculinity is, when analyzed in light of morality and responsibility, tautological. As Magistrale proposes, "Moral surviving in King requires an enlargement beyond the self and toward a recognition of otherness" (*Second Decade* 118). In *Doctor Sleep*, Dan achieves such state not through assuming responsibility only, but via his actions: he acts on AA's eighth and ninth steps and makes amends by helping Abra Stone evade the vampires in her pursuit, while also passing onto her a better version of the advice Dick Hallorann gives him. In the closing section of the novel, when Abra asks for advice regarding her aggressive tendencies, Dan tells her some of their "family history" (629) and advise her to "[g]o to the dump" and use her psychic and telekinetic powers to release her anger without hurting other people. This indicates that the revision Dan goes through in relation to his masculinity is tied to good deeds as a form of reparation. In the action-based paradigm that I am using to understand morality in King's novels, this results in a tautology. In order to revise one's own toxic masculinity and stop doing evil deeds that perpetuate ostracism, a man must continually do good deeds to repair the damage caused, thus achieving a healthier form of maleness. If, according to my paradigm, there is a correlation between being a good person and performing good deeds, like evil people perform evil actions, then I can only reason that, in order for a man to turn his immoral masculinity into a healthier alternative, this man must do good deeds, which means this man has to be good. In summary, not to be evil, a man must be good. This hardly sounds like a coherent alternative.

I return, once more, to the influence of determinism in King's novels. Textual evidence indicates remarkable distinctions between Jack and Dan Torrance, so it is possible to

understand *how* Dan is a different man from his father. The open wound of masculinity, however, is not solely a wound of manner, but also one of reason. *Why* does Dan change? *Why* did Jack not change, or why could he not? Perhaps Dan did not change at all, but merely adjusted his behavior to reflect his predetermined good-natured personality, or adapted to his more positive environment, while Jack, Louis, Norman, and other men remained evil because of their already toxic situation and their own immutable selves. While analyses of characters based solely on their intentions ignore the textual objectivity of their actions, understanding morality, responsibility, and intent in literature via an action-based approach has its limitations too, especially in works in which determinism plays such an ambiguous role.

Since the publication of *Carrie* and his early short stories, King has frightened the world with numerous forms of evil and anxiety: from rabid dogs to zombies, from a virus to demonic possession, and then It to incorporate it all. Even so, perhaps the most frightening point King has made throughout his entire career hits closer to home for his male readers. The most horrifying idea in King's fiction may be that no matter how hard he tried, Jack could never be as good as Dan.

Chapter 3: Sexuality and Sociability

Interpersonal relations and politics of otherness in King's stories involve diverse but united groups representing good. In *It*, for instance, atonement is reached through a union that represents humankind's ability to form cohesive groups not despite differences, but because of them. Problems arise, however, when we scrutinize the representation of some social groups and the specifics of their contributions to this alleged cohesion. Several critics have identified problems in the depiction of black people, for example. Far from being openly prejudiced, King's novels tend to have patterns that simplify certain aspects of social identity (e.g., race, age, gender) into stereotypes. Some of those types are relatively unproblematic, such as King's imaginative children or his male writers. They represent common tropes and themes, or even the *status quo* of a certain age. Others, however, are constructed on one-sided assumptions about social groups, in which case the generalizations become more harmful.

In the following pages, I discuss both the consequence of stereotypes in the masculinities of King's novels and the influence manhood and social relations have one on the other. The first section involves men's relationships with other men, and the second, men's relationships with women. While I do understand that masculinity/femininity are concepts that do not necessarily equate to male/female gender or sex, this simplification here is useful because, in the corpus, few male characters have feminine characteristics and vice-versa. In addition, all of King's characters seem to have a male/male or female/female correspondence in the gender/sex attribution. While in the real world it makes little sense to talk so restrictively about femininity and masculinity, or female and male, in King's novels these limits barely affect any arguments.

Section one, which deals with male/male social and sexual interactions, has three main arguments. The first is that, in King's stories, unlike in the extradiegetic world, sexuality is usually an indicator of morality. In real life, a number of sexual activities are correlated to

immoral behavior (e.g., sexual abuse), but behind these activities there seems to be larger immoral acts (e.g., general disregard for basic human boundaries). In other words, no form of sexuality is inherently immoral, and all forms of sexuality (or other human traits) can be turned immoral. In King's novels, however, there seems to be a correlation between some aspects of sexuality itself, like homosexuality or kinkiness, and immorality. My second argument centers on critics' interpretations of homophobia as a mask for repressed homosexuality. While some of these readings tend to be far-fetched, others are more plausible and are supported by evidence. The last argument is a development of the second and concerns how male homosociality is defined via ostracism. What often sets the limits for "proper" homosociality in King's stories is the us-and-them political view of some of his characters, who base their sense of self on the ultimate sexual difference that the other is supposed to represent.

Section two centers on male/female relationships and on examples of how the politics of otherness discussed in chapter two also exists in relation to femininity. Through a myriad of devices, King's male characters exclude the feminine to reassert the masculine. While the opposite is also true, as some of King's female characters also exclude men, the nuances indicate a fundamental difference. While women dismiss men in post-abuse situations, and do so because of psychological trauma, men reject women because of what these men perceive to be emasculating behavior. Often, however, their assessment reveal more about the construction of traditional masculinity and its frailty than it exposes truly patronizing women. Gendered social interactions in King's works reveal fragile masculinities that seem beyond hope, as male characters refuse to acknowledge their problems and improve themselves.

Homosocial Relationships, Homosexual Undertones, and Homophobia

In Stephen King's novels, sexuality indicates what is good and evil. If we wish to gauge the morality of characters, we only need to investigate their sexual practices, not because expressions of sexuality in real-life have any inherent moral value, but because King assigns to them such values in his novels. Sound discussions on morality and sex tend to touch matters of consent and boundaries, applying ethical thinking to specific scenarios. In King's works, however, certain sexual inclinations presuppose moral or immoral qualities. What is considered normal sexuality indicates good character, and having allegedly abnormal sex is only for evil people. Concluding a chapter about sexuality in King's fiction, Magistrale remarks that "sex in Stephen King never just is, but instead exists metaphorically, in constant service to the author's larger narrative and moralistic designs" (*America's Storyteller* 90). Trouble starts when definitions of "normality" remain unchecked.

Throughout King's stories, male homosexuality is systematically presented as extremely peculiar, almost exotic or monstrous, as his gay men have immoral mentalities and lewd tones. Magistrale sees that

> King's treatment of homosexuality throughout his literary career has been particularly less than enlightened. I can think of no evidence of gay or lesbian relationships that King portrays as mature, morally responsible, or loving, but there exist plenty of examples to assert that he employs homosexuality as a metaphor for oppression, and this is especially true in the context of adult male homoeroticism. (*America's Storyteller* 82)

It would be reasonable to expect Magistrale's examples to illustrate oppression by focusing on homosexuals being oppressed, but he mentions the gay men who assault the protagonist in "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption" (1982) and the homosexual undertones in the warped master/apprentice relationship between a Nazi and a sympathizer in "Apt Pupil" (1982). This reveals that, while there are examples of gay men being oppressed in King's

stories (Adrian Mellon and his partner Don Hagarty are victims of hate-crime in *It*), homosexuality tends to be portrayed as a deviancy that opens doors for dire consequences. Either way, gay characters tend to be reduced to their sexuality in stories that deal with homosexuality only tangentially and characterize it as immoral, which is a fault King shares with many writers.

As they do with overweight people, King's novels tend to create a bridge between gay people and people who are depicted not only as heterosexual, but as normal. Problems of masculinity afflict most men in King's novels, but his gay or bisexual male characters are specifically and systemically depicted as sexually depraved. In *The Shining*, Horace Derwent, the former owner of the Overlook, who has connections to organized crime and was responsible for the masked ball the ghosts make Jack revisit, has his bisexuality connected to abuse and crime. Horace is "AC/DC" (514) and has a warped dominant/submissive relationship with a man named Roger, who is "only DC" and accepts humiliating behavior hoping for a sexual relationship. Horace, however, never has sex with the same man twice, or "never goes back for seconds … not on his DC side, anyway." Their relationship is characterized in terms of a lust that overpowers self-respect, and Roger's suffering is hinted at by "sounds [that] came hollowly out of the [dog] mask's stylized snarling mouth" among which are what "might have been sobs or laughter" (495). Dick Hallorann's grandfather in *Doctor Sleep* is another example, as he bites and burns his grandson while alive, and, after his death, returns "with his half-rotted prick all rared up [sic]" (18) and invites his grandson to have sex with him. Magistrale, commenting on the sexual compulsion of King's gay men, observes that "[t]his compulsion . . . should be viewed not just as an extension of their need to dominate others sexually; it is also a means for King to distance these characters from any degree of reader/viewer sympathy" (*America's Storyteller* 85). Instead of reducing the gap between different forms of sexuality, King represents non-standard sex based on a narrow admission of

what is standard to begin with. Not every gay man in King's novels is an abuser, but even the exceptions reveal problems in the representation of sexuality.

Even when the gay men of King's fiction cannot be reduced to their sexual depravity, they remain essentialist in other respects. A recent example is Ollie in "Mister Yummy" (2015), who is gay, is not abusive, but remains a cliché. In King's short story, Ollie, an old gay man residing in an assisted living center, foresees his upcoming death and shares this information with his friend Dave. His knowledge comes in form of a vision of the most attractive person Ollie has ever seen: a young man he met during the 1980s. A few days after telling Dave about his experience as a gay man, he passes away. After Ollie's death, Dave has a vision of a beautiful woman he met when he was young; he knows his death is coming. On the one hand, King touches issues such as the AIDS epidemic and presents heterosexual and homosexual fantasies on the same level. In this sense, "Mister Yummy" avoids King's simplistic representation of gay characters as the abnormal other. On the other hand, the story generalizes about gay people, attributing to Ollie an unreal lack of complexity. Dave, for instance, notices Ollie's sexual orientation because of gestures and body language. "It's the way you walk," Dave thinks. He adds that it is also because of the "still-life drawings in your room," but digresses and only traces a logic connection between Ollie's increasingly bad art and the loss of his motor abilities after old age. Dave's connection of homosexuality and a certain gait or artistic perspective is never explained by the short story, but rather confirmed by the fact that Ollie is indeed gay. While in the real world these assumptions are somewhat correct at best, and, at worst, are fruit of confirmation bias, in "Mister Yummy" they are factual and reductive. The assumption that gay men have a specific worldview or a favorite form of artistic representation, when read in context, only reaffirms the essentialism surrounding King's homosexual male characters.

Unconventional forms of sexuality are generally linked to immorality in King's books. Commenting on Carole Senf's "*Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne*: Stephen King and

the Evolution of an Authentic Female Narrative Voice," Napier observes that, in *Gerald's Game*, the protagonist's history of being abused by her father as a child

> structured her subsequent relationships, which ultimately led her to marry an
>
> exploitative man—the Gerald of the title whose bondage game *she plays against*
>
> *her will*—and to the tight spot in which she finds herself for so much of the
>
> novel, handcuffed to a bed recalling her life. (47; emphasis added)

The bondage game, a usually consensual and healthy expression of sexuality that can be considered non-standard, is associated both with sexual abuse from the past and with sexual abuse in the present, as there is no consent in its execution. Magistrale comments that,

> As is the case for many Americans, sex in Stephen King is either cloyingly
>
> romanticized—locked in the domain of rarified white, bourgeois marriages,
>
> such as those found in *Bag of Bones* and *Lisey's Story*—or it sinks to the level
>
> of vulgar appetite, in the form of brutal male rape assaults, both heterosexual
>
> and especially homosexual, and femme fatale duplicity. (*America's Storyteller*
>
> 90).

The problem, therefore, is not only the representation of sex or sexual orientation, but also the assumptions behind the entire concept of sexuality, which are, in turn, one of many problematic manifestations of masculinity in King's works.

These distorted depictions of sexuality and maleness, however, are not exclusive to the fiction of Stephen King, but rather the product of a literary view he seems to share with other writers of the genre. In *Danse Macabre*, King defends that "if the horror story is our rehearsal for death, then its strict moralities make it also a reaffirmation of life and good will and simple imagination—just one more pipeline to the infinite" (457-58). Magistrale remarks that, in the film adaptations of King's works, there is no "pipeline to the infinite," but rather a doom that closes in on the lives of characters. This applies to King's works in general, adapted or in the original. King's affirmation rings true, but only as a general sense of the

accomplishments and failures of horror literature. If horror "reaffirm[s] the virtues of the norm," it also, on closer inspection, reveals how the normal only exists because of the abnormal. While it seems adequate that we have our qualities reaffirmed in contrast with evil characters such as Norman Daniels, who commits numerous crimes, this comparison does not extend to areas without inherent moral indicators, such as sexuality. Assuming there is any innate lack of morals in non-standard sexuality is a mistake that backfires, as some readers, instead of having the virtues reaffirmed, may have social aspects of their identities misrepresented, being left to wonder why bondage or homosexuality are so evil.

What, however, is the extent of this problem? Should we blame King himself? Should we blame commercial literature, or horror fiction, or none of those? While part of the problems with King's representation of masculinity stems from the content of his novels, it remains that both content and form have been influenced by stereotypes from Gothic literature and its contemporary developments. Strengell, for instance, following her arguments about King's use of free will as a literary resource, observes that he "clearly embraces the moral stance of [Peter] Straub's ghosts, which, like that of most horror fiction, is firmly reactionary and defends traditional values" ("The Ghost" 227). King's stories fit into a view of the Gothic less as a time-fixed genre and more as a mode of writing as described by Punter (14), so readers should read *The Shining* and *Pet Sematary* with Gothic conventions in mind. Their passive heroines, their hero-villains, and the uneasy history behind their evil places all have ancestors in Gothic literature. At least partly, then, King's defective representation of manhood can be traced to a history of similar stock characters and repeating themes.

King's use of Gothic characters is often accompanied by ironic reversions, but not to a point in which the underlying structure is changed. Based on observations by Punter, Joanna Russ, and other scholars of Gothic literature, Beal connects King's writing to numerous Gothic elements, from evil places to stock characters, among them heroines, heroes, and male villains. She observes,

> King's use of Gothic's stereotypical characters and elements is extensive and covers nearly all of his works, indicating not only that he fully understands the elements that make up the Gothic, but also that he can use them to create interesting and terrifying tales. (18)

The fragility of Gothic heroines (e.g., Wendy Torrance), the perversion of hero-villains (e.g., Jack Torrance), and cursed or haunted characters (e.g., Louis Creed, Danny Torrance), as well as the general sense of dread of premonitions and the dark landscapes of New England, they form an atmosphere that readers recognize worldwide. Even if one of King's hallmarks is the use of Gothic stereotypes, his narratives rarely question their own premises. Beal argues that, in King's stories, as in contemporary Gothic fiction, "the elements of the Gothic are altered, updated, or otherwise manipulated into somewhat unrecognizable representations of the original Gothic element" (18). This may be true, but those changes are limited to specific elements, such as the fragile heroine of *The Shining* being transformed into a self-sufficient character in *Rose Madder*. Old castles are also replaced by hotels (*The Shining* and "1408") and the dangers of ancient, hidden knowledge often blend in with informational overload and fear of technology ("Ur"). The characters, places, and objects are never the same; the assumptions behind them, however, tend to remain unchanged, especially those that relate to sexuality.

Even if some characters go through changes that contest stereotypes, this revision often comes at the expense of other characters, as if some element had to be anchored not only to the general conventions of the Gothic, but also to its gendered stereotypes. Beal's examples of King's reworking of the Gothic involve female characters who "are forced to become bitches: women who will do whatever it takes to save themselves and those they love, with no remorse or regrets" (27). The powerless heroines from traditional horror stories, then, become self-sufficient women who have the means to revert their situation. Some male characters, too, go through changes, as

[d]espite the obvious similarities of domination, these two tyrannical figures [from *Rose Madder* and *Dolores Claiborne*] differ greatly from the tyrants of the classic Gothic because, whereas the classic Gothic tyrants have unlimited resources that allow them to assert their control over the female protagonist, the men in these novels are forced to rely on their own ability to lie and manipulate others in order to cover up their deeds and keep their families from revealing their abuse (Beal 63).

While the structure of female characters is altered, as they go from simple target to people who can respond to threats, the change in male characters hardly seems sufficient, as they merely must choose from a different skill set to continue their villainy. Lying and manipulating comes at no moral expense for Norman Daniels, for example. Readers are led to believe, in fact, that, had he murdered Rose, his position as a police officer would have granted him favors and immunity. It would not, after all, be his first homicide. Men remain stereotypes, as if to provide a foil for the realistic depiction of women. Perhaps because of the tendency horror fiction has of maintaining the status quo (or because of King's belief that it does), social criticism in King's work often changes the realization of traditional patterns, but rarely the patterns themselves. *Rose Madder* only reinforces the male/female opposition of some Stephen King's novels, which I discuss in the following section.

This restrained depiction of sexuality, however, neither contaminates other aspects of King's social criticism nor seems to be a part of a larger deficiency. Magistrale makes two observations on this point. First, he writes,

As a chronicler of postmodern Americana—particularly those elements in American culture that tend to provoke controversy and challenge norms and assumptions—King's attitude toward sexuality is remarkably staid. While highly attuned to the negative abuses that often characterize heterosexual marriages and the worst homoerotic compulsions, the writer is, on the other

hand, closed to portraying liberated constructions of either homosexual or

heterosexual unions. (*America's Storyteller* 89)

If we compare the representation of gender and sexuality to the representation of characters

of different nations, ages, or social classes, we find less problems with the latter than with

the former. King's older characters, for instance, usually have an informal kind of wisdom,

as we see in Jude Crandall (*Pet Sematary*), Dick Hallorann (*The Shining*), and Abagail Free-

mantle (*The Stand*), but they are not always perfect. There are unscrupulous old men, such as

Charles Jacobs (*Revival*), Taduz Lemke (*Thinner*), Dick Hallorann's grandfather (*Doctor Sleep*),

and George Winston ("Morality"). Other old characters, such as Phil and Pauline ("Herman

Wouk Is Still Alive") are neither wise nor evil, but everyday people, with commonplace flaws

and positive traits. Critics also identify problems in the representation of characters from

different ethnicities, but, while those critics criticize the oversimplified image of black people,

for instance, Magistrale criticizes the concept of sexuality itself, not only the characters who

bring it to life. King portrays black characters as stereotypes,[8] but does not indicate problems

in blackness and does not suggest some ethnicities should be avoided. The same is not ap-

plicable to sexuality, which, as a concept, it characterized traditionally and restrictively. Mag-

istrale's second observation is that

> [t]he severity of King's judgment [regarding sexuality] here might be tied to
>
> his career-long association with the Gothic, wherein transgressions against
>
> the status quo—particularly sexual transgressions—result in horrific conse-
>
> quences; or perhaps it is the influence of the writer's strong Methodist

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[8] Sarah Nilsen identifies in the filmic adaptation of King's *The Green Mile* (1996) the stereotype
of the "Magical Negro," an overly virtuous black character, often endowed with supernatural
abilities, who serves or supports a white character, usually the protagonist. Informal online
essays on King's fiction corroborate Nielsen's observations, noting that Dick Hallorann (*The
Shining*) and Mother Abigail (*The Stand*) fit the stereotype.

upbringing, or the ambiance of New England Puritanism with which King

has lived nearly his entire life. (*America's Storyteller* 76)

King, despite having substantially shaped contemporary horror fiction alongside authors

such as Richard Matheson, Ray Bradbury, and Lovecraft, remains latched onto Gothic fic-

tion, its familiar faces, and its familiar problems.

 Our initial tendency may be to recognize this as a major flaw of King, his colleagues,

and their genre, and Magistrale's arguments indicate the plausibility of this approach. A dif-

ferent view, however, shows that perhaps King is aware of such flaws and understand them

as a necessary consequence of his less serious approach to writing. In his review of *Mr. Mer-*

cedes (2014), Tim Parks compares King to more serious authors, but his conclusion is less

judgmental of King's value and more descriptive of his method. Parks comments on the

predictability of the plot in *Mr. Mercedes*, on its extensive use of detective novel tropes, and

on its simplistic distinction between good and evil, then asks, "Could it be that King is de-

liberately preventing us from taking his stories too much to heart?" (27). Echoing King's

remarks on the morality of horror fiction, Parks observes that "we good folks, who always

feel a little guilty when we do something mean, can relish the utter destruction of our utterly

evil enemy without any qualms or misgiving," all that while "the reader *knows* [the story] is

not true" (27). While this does mean King is freed from the responsibility of writing stock

characters and depicting some components of human identity simplistically, it at least pro-

vides us some perspective. A strange aspect of writing about Stephen King's novels is as-

suming his literature is worthy of academic analysis while understanding that this does not

mean we should write about King as we write about Shakespeare or Dostoyevsky.

 It remains, nevertheless, that troubling patterns accompany King's one-sided depic-

tion of non-standard sexuality. The representation of homosexual characters is comparable

to the presumed evil discussed in chapter two, as the logic behind narratives often implies

that homosexuality is immoral. A diegetic counterpart is King's how male characters sustain

homosocial relationships that are ridden with homophobia as a means to repress, shun, or hide their own homosexuality. Sullivan, in an article on King's depiction of masculinity in relation to femininity, concludes that he

> understand[s] authentic manhood to be diametrically opposed to either female embodiment or gay male identity. Thus, what could be a progressive move—the expansion of ideal masculinity to include stereotypically feminine attributes and behaviors—is yoked to both cultural misogyny and homophobia.

Separating masculine and feminine, or putting some masculinities in opposition to others, may be an invitation to examine intricate constituents of manhood, but only when gender difference is seen not as absolute, but as circumstantial.

While Sullivan's observations are well structured, capturing the gist of manhood in King's works, other critics, seeking psychological or psychoanalytical explanations for the behavior of characters, tend to rely on negligible textual content as evidence, resulting in implausible readings. Steven Bruhm, for instance, establishes a Lacanian reading of *The Shining* involving the father's unrecognized homoerotic desire toward his male child as cause of the familial collapse. According to Bruhm, "By placing Danny and Jack in the arena of historically entrenched male homosocial relations, King documents the anxiety over this forced male proximity, an anxiety that gradually yields psychic dissolution and collapse" (470). Sexual anxiety, indeed, is abundant in *The Shining*. We find it in Jack's homophobia and in the sexualized ghosts of the hotel. Bruhm's psychoanalytical approach, however, relies on a sexual connection between father and son that the novel states only vaguely, if at all. *The Shining* provides numerous other sources for the "dissolution" and the "collapse" of the Torrances other than their sexual complications: historical unease, physical abuse, trauma, alcoholism, lack of responsibility, and conflicts related to work and social classes. To reduce *The Shining* to sexuality is to deny its criticism of American masculinity as it was settled in the twentieth century.

I concede that suppressed homoerotic desire often involves open displays of homophobia, but the plausibility of such correlation does not indicate it always exists, even if the pattern is frequent in King. Homophobia, in his fiction and in the real world, is not necessarily correlated to any hidden lust. Bruhm's article, while useful in its observations about the dualistic nature of homophobic masculinities, seems to excavate Jack's and Danny's psyche for answers to questions the novel already elucidates more directly.

Alegre, commenting on Bruhm's article, observes that, even if he is right, he suggests an unreachable state for masculinity awareness. She observes, "Bruhm may be right, but his thesis—that the relationships between men are distorted by their difficulties to acknowledge basic homoerotic impulses—is used to criticise King rather to explain [sic] the context from which his fiction arises" and comments, "Bruhm proposes reaching a stage of liberalism which is radically utopian, in which men are in touch with *all* their feelings" (109). Even if Bruhm's reading recognizes the interplay of homosociality and homoeroticism in King's stories, it works more as an exercise on possibility than as a sensible textual analysis, since it overstates tensions at which *The Shining* merely alludes, seeking a sexual dimension for problems that are connected to sexuality only to a small extent, if at all.

Other novels are more explicit about the relationship between homophobia and repressed homosexuality. Magistrale mentions a "nexus King forges between out-of-control (homo)sexuality and malefic intent" (*America's Storyteller* 85) that includes characters from *The Green Mile* and to which I add Norman Daniels, from *Rose Madder*. Norman's aggression toward people is of sexual nature and his violence toward men indicates homosexual desire behind his homophobia.

Norman's focalization is contaminated by his self-asserted superiority, to which readers access through his view of secondary characters as inferior animals. When Norman is in a park interrogating a man who saw Rose leave the city, the narrator describes the witness as feeling "like one of the three little pigs sitting on a park bench next to the big bad wolf" (72).

Here Norman is not the focalizer, but, as he hurts the witness by clutching his testicles and states that "You fags don't like getting hit, do you?" (73), it becomes clear that his aggressive superiority is, in his mind, not only physical, but also related to masculinity. He is a man, while the witness, as Norman states, is "just a greasy little halfbreed cockgobbler" (71). Gay and weak men are equated to pigs, while heterosexuality and virility are wolfish. The narrative does not corroborate these correlations, but rather makes us understand how they sprout from the minds of characters whose notions of manhood are discriminatory.

Behind Norman's anti-gay views, however, is the sexual pleasure he derives from torturing other men. When he refers to Peter Slowik, the man who helps Rose find a shelter for abused women, two labels stand out: the name "Thumper" and the term "Jewboy". The first refers to a character from Disney's *Bambi* (1942). Thumper is a rabbit, which is yet another instance of Norman referring to men in terms of small animals. The second term also connects Slowik's Jewishness to being less than a man. When he murders Slowik, Norman, who "wasn't very surprised to find he had a raging hardon" (153), bites him "over three dozen times" and leaves him with "at least one part of his anatomy . . . missing" (217). The process escalates to a point in which "half of [Norman's] face was covered with blood and hair and little tags of skin" (154). Later, Norman still has "no idea how much forensic evidence he might have left downstairs in the basement" (154). The connotation is less than subtle: biting off Slowik's penis and possibly leaving saliva and semen in the crime scene connects Norman's animalistic impulses to a veiled homosexuality that is expressed in unhealthy forms, as is common in King's works.

The problems of masculine sociability in King's novels are not confined to the masculine sphere, since certain arguments for male liberation imply the exclusion of the feminine. Sullivan reads King side by side to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement and recognizes how the difficulty of establishing communication and closeness is part of the discourses of both the mythopoets and King's characters. She observes, "Part of the difficulty in sustaining male

intimacy, according to [the Mythopoetic] men's movement theorists, is the lack of safe spaces to express such emotion." Intimacy and communication, as we have seen, are insubstantial concepts that, in the context of masculine revisions, carry negative implications and structure dishonest arguments. Sullivan quotes from Michael Schwalbe's "Mythopoetic Men's Work as a Search for Communitas," in which he explains how the work of mythopoets who long for masculine connections "reaffirms the lesser value of women, whether this is intended or not" (qtd. in Sullivan). Because of their belief in fundamental distinctions between men and women, mythopoets construct an argument in which men connect to each other in retreats not only to recapture masculinity, but also to reject femininity. Closing her argument, Sullivan notes how "Schwalbe's observations about the men's movement also explain why [in King's "The Body"] Gordie's relationship with his wife is so peripheral—women have 'a lesser value' and cannot understand or appreciate male truths." Behind some of King's characters and their exclusion of femininity, which I will explore in the next section, is their wish to reinforce masculinity via contact with other men only. While King's male characters are often non-traditional and not "football players or any other version of empowered masculinity" (Sullivan), the shortcoming of their views on communication remain. In "The Body," as Sullivan notes, "intimacy . . . is difficult to sustain, and the novella posits that male love, although desirable, is also unstable and even untenable." This is yet another moment in which the wound of masculinity seems about to close, only to reassert its openness. It is the same weakness of a logic that sees communication as a solution: there is an attempt at shifting the cause of the problem to society (or women), but there is no honest endeavor to remodel masculinity.

This shift of responsibility is part of how traditional masculinity in works like *Rose Madder*, *The Shining*, and *Blaze* is defined via an inimical, or even monstrous, view of the other. By blaming other people, traditional discourses of manhood not only exempt traditional men from being guilty, but also paint women and non-traditional men as less adequate or less

human. When discussing British Imperial masculinity, Beynon states, "Late twentieth century accusations that the majority of men are estranged from their emotional selves, from women and the feminine, and are homophobic have their origins in the shaping of masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century" (28). If, then, as Beynon claims, "[i]mperial masculinity was a product of time, place, power and class, along with firmly held and unquestioned conceptions of racial and national superiority" (28), it holds true that contemporary developments of traditional manhood are identified through an opposition to masculinities from other countries, ethnicities, social classes, and sexualities. King's depiction of manhood does not represent these concerns with the awareness they deserve, just like the us-and-them rationale from his stories is often taken for granted instead of challenged.

In the masculinities of King's novels, the ultimate other is the gay man. Homophobia sets the limits and definitions via negation: whatever the true man is supposed to be, he is certainly not gay. Watson, the in-season caretaker in *The Shining*, summarizes the matter when he asks Jack, "Say, you really are a college fella, aren't you? Talk just like a book. I admire that, as long as the fella ain't one of those fairy-boys" (29). While King's male characters are overly careful not to have their camaraderie confused with eroticism, they do admire, envy, or even crave the company of other men. As Magistrale points out, many of King's most solid social unions are homosocial relationships involving male writers. "[I]ronically," Magistrale writes, "some of the strongest and most life-affirming unions that take place in this writer's world occur in same-sex relationships" (*America's Storyteller* 84). If we extrapolate to characters other than writers, we see that Blaze and George are a fitting example of such "life-affirming unions," even though the appropriateness of their relationship is questionable, as George is a negative influence. Flashbacks also reveal how close Blaze was with a childhood male friend, whose significance is illustrated in the chapter in which they both leave their orphan house and travel to Boston, sharing adventurous experiences common to King's male young characters.

The Body, *Duma Key*, "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption," and the Dark Tower series are further examples of how male homosocial relations are endorsed and even idealized. As I mentioned, however, "Shawshank Redemption" and *The Body* establish these relations at the expense of gay men. As Sullivan observes, "In 'The Body,' homosexual panic is marked by the boys' excessive concern with proper masculinity". She mentions how Arthur Biddle, in "The Mythic Journey in 'The Body,'" sees the boys' "frequent teasing about being 'pussy' or 'queer'" (qtd. in Sullivan) as a form of distancing their male companionship from eroticism. Sullivan also remarks "The boy's repetitive taunts to each other about effeminancy [sic] reflect a common theme in King and in the mythopoetic men's movement: the fear that male emotion or sensitivity will be construed as homosexuality". Homophobic tendencies do not appear *despite* the transformative and non-romantic companionship of King's male characters*, but *together with it*. One side of the relationship feeds off the other, revealing how the social nature of masculinities in King's stories renders them incurable.

MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

Stephen King's works are marked by a constant friction between the masculine and the feminine. I have discussed the most notable examples, such as *The Shining* and *Rose Madder*, but even King's short stories often focus on the marital problems of his almost exclusively heterosexual couples. When King's men and women are not arguing with each other regarding trivial subjects ("Premium Harmony") they have their marital stability permanently destroyed by external agencies, be they dead rock-and-roll musicians ("You Know They Got a Hell of a Band"), an immoral sadistic reverend ("Morality"), or even frogs with sharp teeth ("Rainy Season"). In the rare occurrence that happiness takes center stage, one of the characters is promptly removed, usually via catastrophes. In the Dark Tower series, Eddie, an ally whom the protagonist rescues and trains, dies and disrupts the unity of the group, leaving his wife Susannah especially scarred. In *Blaze*, childhood love is as brief as any other comforts

of the main character. The broken homes in *It* are additional examples, as are the accidents that contribute to the separation of the main romantic couples in *Duma Key* and *Dead Zone*. King's novels depict men and women as inhabitants of different worlds who, when in contact, will clash.

Like King's representation of male homosocial and homosexual relationships, the interactions between men and women in his novels exemplify both his moralistic views on sexuality and the problems of defining the self via the other. The presence of female characters, while assuring their male partners' public and open heterosexuality, also help define masculinity based on the exclusion of the feminine. Sullivan compares the rejection of homosexuality with the rejection of the feminine, noting that "[e]ither the homosexual threat intensifies . . . or in the case of King's more overt horror, the mediation of the threat shifts to female and/or queer monstrosity". While they are bothered by the supposed risk of being labeled homosexual, King's groups of men relish the opportunity of being unrestrained by feminine figures. Jack Torrance hides the Overlook journal from Wendy, Louis Creed wishes to leave his family behind, Gordon LaChance hides his tears from his wife—these are part of a pattern of male/female relationships characterized by miscommunication and avoidance.

In terms of social relations, manhood in King's stories is constructed on a framework of extreme differences, of which one of the most severe is that between men and women. This is ingrained into the assumptions of his older stories, while his newer books tend to question this logic in their critical representations. They cease to be the assumptions behind the novel and become the assumptions of characters. Nevertheless, manhood is constituted in essential opposition to femininity.

Like the homophobic panic that surrounds King's narratives, the presence of femininity is used by male characters as a public assurance of their own traditional heterosexual masculinity. Homophobia is a divider between homosocial and homosexual relationships in

King's stories, establishing proper and improper social interactions based on bigotry. While male characters yearn for contact with other men, be it through a history of masculinity like the Overlook's or through a nostalgia regarding all-male childhood groups of friends like those of "The Body," they try to "balance" these needs with a restatement of their hetero-sexuality. They may be part of a group of men, but they are openly homophobic to avoid being seen as gay. King's depiction of femininity often has the same purpose: to restate traditional masculinity. When writing about Wendy Torrance's agency in his thesis about female characters in King's fiction, Guthrie quotes from Jackie Eller, who explains, "Enhancing the strength of the male lead, King contrasts his fictional husbands with pathetic wives or partners, individuals who are not quite able to accept or deal with the events of horror . . . [Wendy's] main contribution is to highlight the more interesting male" (qtd in Guthrie 28). This is not her only contribution to the novel, as she has a complex connection to her son, and the construction of her character provides insights into the household dynamics, but, primarily, she exists in relation to Jack's masculinity. In remarks such as "If it's what your [Danny's] father wants, it's what I want" (King, *The Shining* 20), Wendy reveals that much of her character depends on Jack's. Other women, like Rachel Creed in *Pet Sematary*, also highlight the male protagonist's role, either in the way they are depicted or in the way they are treated by their husbands. The focus female characters give to men is based on contrast rather than on similarity.

More specifically, this dynamic relies on depictions of the feminine as an emasculating presence. In *Pet Sematary*, this is exemplified not only by Louis's sudden desire to leave his family, but also by his constant fear of emasculation. Dymond remarks that, while "Louis' rash desire to flee his family soon dissolves [and, a]llegedly, the stress of the journey had overwhelmed his faculties . . . the feeling of emasculation lingers throughout the text, most prominently expressed through his profound castration anxiety" (796). While I find most readings involving phallic symbolism and fear of castration in King's works unconvincing,

this, along with Davenport's interpretation of symbolic sticks in *The Shining*, is substantiated by textual evidence. Dymond, for example, finds that the family cat "acts as a vehicle for Louis's fears" (796), and quotes relevant passages, such as Louis's initial reluctance to have the cat castrated because his "strong feeling that it would destroy something in Church [the cat] that he himself valued—that it would put out the go-to-hell look in the cat's green eyes" (22). Dymond concludes that, when Louis eventually accepts Church's castration and pins the veterinarian's number to the fridge, relegating the appointment to be made by his wife, "he grants Rachel the power of emasculation" (797). In King's fiction, female characters are not necessarily emasculating, but are seen as so by men, often in self-fulfilling prophetic alarm. Some aggressive characters such as the nurse Annie Wilkes, who kidnaps and tortures the writer Paul Sheldon in *Misery*, can indeed be read in direct connection to emasculation, but Rachel Creed and Wendy Torrance are a source of fear for a castration that happens only through their own husband's actions and only because of their disproportionate fear.

Because of men's perception of emasculation, female characters are excluded from male environments, which only reinforces male/female opposition. Beynon's research on British masculinities and culture identifies a type of literature involving British imperial manhood and the exclusion of women. "For many writers of the period [from late Victorian times to World War I]," Beynon writes, "the Empire was the site of 'masculine imaginings' in which men could enjoy homosocial comradeship in physically challenging, arduous circumstances far from what they perceived to be the damaging influences of 'the feminine'" (31). This form of literature was (and its repercussions today often are) "overtly masculinist, didactic and (in our eyes) racist, written by Imperial men for their heirs". While contemporary readers and authors tend to be more skeptical about anti-feminine masculinities, Sullivan still identifies in King's "The Body" a search for male bonding that rejects the presence of women. In this sense, King's work is in tune with the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. Magistrale, however, attributes more responsibility to King's male characters. In his discussion

about one of Hohne's essays on King's female characters, he agrees there is a clash between powerful forms of language involving King's male protagonists, but he also notes that "it is likewise true that his male protagonists use the silence of secrets—that is, the deliberate omission of language—to exclude women from narrative action" (*America's Storyteller* 116). The scene in which Jack lies to Wendy about the scrapbook containing the Overlook's history is one example, as it ensures that the secrets of the hotel remain connected only to a history of unhealthy masculinity.

In her observations regarding American literature and the representation of heterosexual marriage, Hobbs discusses how literature complicates the link between heterosexuality as part of hegemonic masculinity. While she relies on premises that are not necessarily true, her argument incites thoughts on the correlation between traditional manhood and the avoidance of women. Hobbs cites Leslie A. Fiedler's discussion on how American fiction is devoid of "adult heterosexual love" (qtd. in Hobbs 391). Fiedler argues,

> the typical male protagonist of our [American] fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility (qtd. in Hobbs 391).

The argument involves two plausible premises—that heterosexuality is a characteristic of traditional masculinity, and that some male protagonists in American fiction tend to avoid the responsibility of marriage. Hobbs concludes that the average portrayal of men in American literature involves flaws of masculinity, which indicates that "hegemonic ideals are not left intact by literature as they may be in other cultural media, like advertising or film, for example" (392). This conclusion, however, does not follow the initial arguments correctly, as it overlooks how non-marital and non-monogamous romantic relationship may also characterize traditional masculinity. While "adult heterosexual love" is a core component of

traditional masculinity, so is the figure of the unmarried heterosexual man who has multiple romantic or sexual encounters and strongly displays both his macho heterosexuality and what he sees as the freedom of being outside a relationship. Variations of this male figure live in the fantasies of Louis Creed when he considers abandoning his family and similar tendencies are seen in King's absent fathers. Avoiding women is not an escape of traditional masculinity, but rather a consequence of its core tenets: that women constraint men and that genders are so fundamentally different that they cannot coexist peacefully.

When masculinity embraces difference, it is always under the premise that there is *inherent* and *inescapable* difference. When Jud Crandall, in *Pet Sematary*, comments that "[t]he things that are in a man's heart . . . are secret things [and that] any woman who knows any-thing at all would tell you she has never really seen into any man's heart" (173-74), he is putting into words the logic behind King's representation of genders. This sentence is echoed in the words of Watson, the in-season caretaker of the Overlook, who says to Jack, "I wish I could be as charitable as my mother was. . . . Me, I'm just as mean as a snake with the shingles. What the fuck, a man can't help his nature" (27). Generalizations like these lead to forms of masculinity that are self-referential but not self-aware. By excluding the feminine without contesting the assumptions behind traditional masculinity and femininity, male char-acters tend to maintain their notions of masculinity without referring to alternatives and without realizing they are doing so. Magistrale comments, "'King complicates Jack's response [to self-repression and alcohol abuse] by contextualizing it into very specifically gendered terms" in which "[w]omen are associated with sobriety and punishment" (93). In this sense, Jack's conflict with his alcoholism is also a conflict between his independence and his wife's restrictions. The tendency of King's male protagonists is to cut contact with women and disregard alternative masculinities, perpetuating their flawed manhood.

Without proper examination of what constitutes the feminine or the masculine, the already elusive alternative of embracing femininity becomes even more disadvantageous.

Behind this option is the belief that masculinity and femininity naturally lack what the other possesses, having complementary essences. This reasoning assumes identities have simplistic essences, and it goes against notions of plurality. If the composition of masculinity and femininity go unchecked, and if we assign essentialist attributes to them, the result is the ambivalence we find in King's logic: while men want to avoid emotional silence (portrayed as inherently masculine) and wish to give voice to their feelings (portrayed as inherently feminine), they also fear being seen as men who feel attraction to other men (also portrayed as inherently feminine). The problem lies in the assumption that these attributes, or any fixed trait at all, constitute masculinity or femininity. Similarly, Sullivan notes that "King's version of heroism necessarily departs from traditional definitions of masculinity to embrace stereotypic feminine qualities but not to such a degree as to construct the hero as homosexual". This is yet another practice that keeps the wound of masculinity open: problems of manhood are identified, but femininity is seen as the only alternative and then rejected, as it is wrongly correlated to homoeroticism. The perceived need for self-expression invites for a movement toward the false cure of femininity, and this movement is cyclically followed by a movement away from femininity. Always approaching, but never getting there, and never realizing the fallacy that is the movement itself and the narrow concepts involved, masculinity remains unchanged.

While these matters remain open throughout most of King's novels, the representation of femininity shifts as the decades pass. The rejected feminine characterizes King's initial novels, but several works King published in the 1990s operate under a different premise. In *Gerald's Game*, *Dolores Claiborne*, and *Rose Madder*, female characters are less cardboard and more human, displaying the complexity with which King paints his male protagonists. While the content of King's initial novels seems to corroborate the characters' essentialist views of femininity, his recent novels narrate such circumstances more critically. Abusive men frequently exclude women in King's older novels, but his recent stories show exclusion coming

from female characters instead. This is not, moreover, simply a mirrored copy of an already inaccurate representation, since women do not reject men to reassert femininity, but to avoid unhealthy male traditions.

From *Gerald's Game* on, King's female characters seem less passive in relation to abuse, often overreacting with complete distrust for men. As Magistrale writes, "In *Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne*, all of King's female protagonists grow so disillusioned by abusive male sexuality that they retreat into asexual, exclusively female relationships" (*America's Storyteller* 86). In this initial stage, the portrayal changes from victimhood to rejection of masculinity, which, without questioning the correlation between abuse and masculinity, changes the *status quo* of women while maintaining their simplistic portrayal. Even in novels published later, like *Doctor Sleep*, King presents such characters. Andrea Steiner, for example, "didn't like men" because of the abusive actions of her father, who "had raped her for the first time when she was eight" (*Doctor Sleep* 25). She is the stereotype of the lesbian who rejects maleness, attributing it to the crime of her father. In this full reversal of his passive female characters, King alters the words, but does not correct the premises behind the discourse. His shortsighted female characters remain attached to traditional and outdated gender stereotypes. Sustaining the gap between the masculine and the feminine, some women tend to see men as utterly destructive, while the recurrence of perpetually flawed male characters ensure those women are right.

Despite the constant presence of these characters, their significance tends to decrease in King's works produced after the 1990s. While Andrea Steiner (*Doctor Sleep*) reverses the reaction but not the stereotypes, other characters are complex enough to recognize plurality in masculinities. When Rose leaves home she is also leaving behind the archetype of the abused woman, not merely reversing the way it is represented. She finds the company of women in a home for victims of abuse and, while they actively reject abusive men, they welcome the help of emotionally healthy people independently of gender. In an event hosted

by the women of Daughters and Sisters, the home for abused women of which Rose is part, "there were enough men that Norman did not feel particularly conspicuous" (325). After blending in and asking a woman if he was interfering with the event, Norman hears that he should "Stay. Hang out. Enjoy" (326). Additionally, Gert, a friend of Rose, is one of the few typically masculine women found in King's fiction. She is "an extremely large woman, one who actually did bear a slight resemblance to William 'Refrigerator' Perry" (328), a heavily built retired football player. Her size, her strength, and her fighting abilities, despite giving her an emblematic masculine quality, are never a problem for Daughters and Sisters. Rose's personality is shaped by the abuse she suffered, as her rage demonstrates, but her depiction, as well as that of other women in *Rose Madder*, surpasses the stereotypical limitations shared by other female characters who are victims of abuse. While King tends to represent abused women as either fragile or irrationally aggressive, Rose carries the marks of her traumatic experiences, but refuses any oversimplified response to her trauma.

Male characters, however, do not undergo the same adjustment. Norman, for instance, begins and ends *Rose Madder* as a one-sided monstrous figure. Magistrale identifies a general problem in King's representation of men in his novels that focus on women, noting,

> The men in King's feminist fictions are severely drawn, as caricatured as the women characters for which he was so justly criticized in his earliest writings. They are vicious, one-dimensional miscreants that sacrifice everything—families, marriages, children, and their own sanities—in their will to dominate and, even more objectionably, sexually violate daughters and wives (*America's Storyteller* 140).

The complexity of one gender, then, comes at the expense of the other, who is transformed into a foil whose lack of dimension only serves to highlight the complexity of other characters.

Doctor Sleep is, once more, a partial exception. Unlike *The Shining, Pet Sematary*, and *Rose Madder*, it features two protagonists of different genders who are not in diametric

opposition. While secondary characters (e.g., Andrea Steiner) carry certain stereotypes, Dan Torrance and Abra Stone have a healthy relationship. There is neither a failed sexual aspect to their relationship nor a dynamic of domination or passivity. The key difference, though, is that Dan and Abra's relationship is not romantic, but one of uncle/niece or mentor/apprentice. They do not so much break a pattern as they circumvent it. Not every male/female relationship is problematic in King's fiction, but when they involve prospects of romance or the influence of marriage, they often include men and women who either clash violently or live happily ever after in love. The abusive marriages I have been discussing exemplify the first, while flawless and saccharine couples such as Rose McClendon and Bill Steiner in *Rose Madder*, or Frances Goldsmith and Stuart Redman in *The Stand* exemplify the second. Realistic romantic relationships, with both enjoyment and strife, happen mostly in secondary couples, such as the Stones (*Doctor Sleep*) or the Coslaws (*Cycle of the Werewolf* [1983]). Frequently, when a romantic relationship has any relevant bearing on the plot, it works under these stereotypical patterns, being either abusive or too perfect. Perhaps this indicates that these opposed stereotypes are tied to the representation of marriage, sex, and romance, and not to any relationship between men and women. Nevertheless, what Magistrale observes about sexuality in King's fiction remains true: adult, heterosexual romantic relationships can never just be, always, instead, existing to fulfill a function.

Even though female victims of abuse in King's stories tend to carry more traumas, they address them more openly and are more successful in their process of healing. Jack Torrance, Dick Halloran, and Norman Daniels were abused by older men, either physically or sexually, but they tend to ignore their traumas. It is women like Rose who can address their past experiences. In addition, when thinking of masculinity in King's novels, it is easier to correlate it to abusers, not victims. When Rose escapes her abusive marriage, she successfully solves a personal instance of a social problem, which can be handled more easily by fiction writers, since escaping from abuse is an adequate start for solutions in relation to the

victim. Since in King's stories the abusers are predominantly male, approaching the problem through the lenses of masculinity means that escaping is neither a personal nor a social solution, since adjustments on the behavior of abusers requires meticulous processes, not an escape. To provide any meaningful healing to the wound of masculinity, King's novels would have to delve into the assumptions behind it, which implies both a return to the open matters of morality, evil, and free-will and a revaluation of the portrayal of social and romantic relationships involving men and women. This is a much harder task, which King has approached only tangentially.

Conclusion

Masculinity in King's fiction is not only a wound, but an open one. In his novels, King provides a number of possible strategies for healing this wound, but, while they seem promising at first, they ultimately bring no significant change. Personal injuries, such as unhealthy relationships with alcohol or sexuality, may be corrected, but the state of affairs persists. When *The Shining* exposes the dangers of repression, it does not necessarily mean that communication is a proper solution. In *Pet Sematary*, Louis's irresponsibility is symptomatic of larger complications. Self-awareness would possibly change the events in the novel, but not to the extent of providing a different view on manhood. *Rose Madder* and *Blaze* show us that essentialism is an unstable base on which to build masculinity. Their characters are doomed to irreversible predicaments, and gender, which is given innate proprieties, functions as a cage. These restrictions also emerge in *Doctor Sleep*. Its protagonist changes from an uncontrollable man to an example of healthy masculinity, but readers are left to wonder what would occur had he not shown reliable moral inclinations since page one, already hinting at the reparations to come. Other works, such as *It*, "The Body," "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption," and "Mister Yummy," reaffirm the open nature of the masculine wound, revealing problems in the interpersonal relations between King's characters. Sociability and sexuality, which is frequently tied to morality, reveal how traditional masculine identity is often established at the expense of others, excluding and restricting whoever is different. The wound of masculinity, unable to close, causes perpetual pain to men and women alike.

King's male characters, frequently in negotiation between traditional manhood and its alternatives, initially seem to have their communicative abilities restrained. This argument is found both in therapeutic men's movements and in reactionary discourses that range from a defending men's liberation to advocating criminal behavior. This indicates that communication works less as a real solution and more as an escape, since personal flaws and lack of

maturity could be explained away as a silence imposed by society. This discourse, however, hides a larger problem: the refusal to acknowledge personal and political flaws, which results in the preservation of the *status quo* of masculinity. If the fault lies elsewhere, men have no cause to reexamine their notions about maleness, which evokes Magistrale's observations about evil in King's stories as a monological presence. Masculinity becomes comparable to forms of evil that perpetually consolidate themselves.

Acknowledging the failures of masculinity and taking responsibility for personal imperfections would apparently close the wound of masculinity—that is not, however, what King's fiction indicate. Numerous characters from his novels and short stories recognize their shortcomings, which range from anger to bloodthirstiness, but such mindfulness does not result in moral improvement. Those characters' essential evil nature prevents any change.

Yet another possibility of closing the masculine wound would be moving beyond acknowledgement to make reparations. Nevertheless, like the other attempts, this one is also unfruitful. Since King's characters tend to be essentialist, those capable of atonement usually already possess inherent moral qualities. Shifting from immoral behavior to make amends may, in some cases, result in personal growth, but only to characters already destined to improve. The toxic *status quo* of manhood remains.

While the depiction of women characters has arguably improved throughout King's fiction, male characters tend to live as representations of problems of masculinity. The complexity of one gender comes at the expense of the other. Multifaceted women are either pursued by masculine embodiments of anger or married to passive and tasteless men, while complex men abuse overly simplified women.

The problems that King portrays are impossible to solve in the fictional worlds he builds. From King's stories, we gather the impression that traditional, conservative men are in crisis because of sexually-deviant (usually gay) men and nagging women, as Magistrale and Sullivann point out. The gay men are portrayed as predators; the women, as nagging and

emasculating. If one takes those stereotypes in consideration, it becomes clear that King's masculinities are there for rhetorical purposes, ensuring the conservativeness of traditional values at the expense of non-traditional groups. They adhere to dated "truths" with little hesitation or skepticism.

King's depiction of masculinity as an open wound is partly a flaw and partly a representation of real problems. Some of his descriptions of traditional and toxic manhood are laudable achievements. Jack Torrance's self-fulfilling fears and Louis Creed's negotiation with responsibility are good examples. Nevertheless, none of these depictions suggest significant ways to handle issues of masculinity, since this is a much harder task. Even if we generalize and forget about the sensitive nature of gender relations, the most basic question King's novels would have to answer in order to suggest a closing of the manhood wound is, "What is it that makes a person stop acting immorally and acting morally?" This inquiry seems too vast even for a writer whose published novels now span decades. Even so, King approaches the subject with portrayals of characters who exist at the expense of others, who, in turn, are badly represented. While the difficulty of answering the questions of open wounds of masculinity is tremendous, many authors, canonical or popular, try to answer them without recurring to biased depictions of femininity and non-traditional manhood.

These comparisons between King and other authors lead to questions outside the scope of this thesis. Is the representation of masculinity as an open wound a specific flaw of King's fiction, or is it a larger issue? Is it a correlate of popular fiction, who some view as an overly simplistic form of literature? Or does it have a relationship with horror literature, which King characterizes as conservative? When studying masculinity and literature, we must take into account the status of each work in its own field, as well as the status of the field itself. Some of King's flaws may be the flaws of his genre, not of his fiction.

Some researchers also observe how the history of masculinity creates difficulties in representing it. Beynon and the authors of *Signs of Masculinity* argue that finding positive

elements in manhood is generally difficult. Due to a history of patriarchy, we have a tendency to analyze it only to attack its problems. Solutions are often based on the incorporation of feminine traits to non-traditional masculinities, which hints at a moral division of gender. While masculinity is toxic, abusive, and restrictive, femininity is caring and compassionate. It may be that problems in the representation of manhood have less to do with horror or popular literature and are, instead, caused by the restrictions of how we view gender culturally.

During my research I had access to innumerous works that study maleness worldwide, rejecting any unity to the concept, but this relativism is rarely accompanied by perspectives that recognize positive traits. If King or any other author had chosen to depict being male not as an open wound, but, for instance, as a revision in progress, would they even be able to, considering our cultural assumptions? How can researchers identify the positive traits of masculinities? How about its literary depictions? And does it even make sense to make such judgements? Is there anything particularly good in being a man or a woman?

The most inconvenient part of studying masculinities in King's fiction is not that I recognized how masculinity is seen as an open wound. The trouble is that, even after all my observations, it remains hard to imagine masculinity being shown as anything else. I do not mention this with the intention of rethinking or rewriting King's novels, and not even as an exercise in imagination. This is an observation about popular horror culture and the difficulty of understanding manhood as something positive while inserted in such culture. Throughout my thesis, several choices illustrate this adversity. I explained masculinity not by what it is, but by what it *is not*; I discussed the connections between failed discourses and King's portrayal of manhood but could not identify healthier alternatives; I mentioned other works of fiction, but never as examples of less problematic masculinities. Some of these shortcomings come from the nature of my corpus and from King's choices, while others are the constrains of any research. Yet, some reveal that, in our culture, seeing masculinity in a favorable way is not an easy task.

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