An Evolution of the Concept of Evil in Macabre Fiction

Alex Rieneck

Introduction[1]

> The two leading Passions, which the more serious Parts of Poetry endeavor to stir up in us, are Terror and Pity. And here, by the way, one would wonder how it comes to pass, that such Passions as are very unpleasant at all other time, are very agreeable when excited by proper Descriptions….
>
> If we consider, therefore, the Nature of this pleasure, we shall find that it does not arise so properly from the Description of what is Terrible, as from the Reflection we make on ourselves at the time of reading it. When we look on such hideous Objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no Danger of them. We consider them at the same time, as Dreadful and Harmless; so that the more frightful Appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the Sense of our own Safety. In short, we look upon the Terrors of a description, with the same Curiosity and Satisfaction that we survey a dead Monster.[2]

The concept of 'evil' is used to describe much of life—its negative aspects—as a more abstract version of badness, wrongness, immorality, and suchlike. When examined in its myriad contexts, however, purely dictionary definitions of the concept of 'evil' are plainly inadequate: the visible signs of 'evil' (badness, wrongness) are delineated; but what the

---

Alex Rieneck is a Sydney writer of speculative fiction.

[1] This article originally took the form of an English Literature (Honours) thesis submitted in 1985 in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney. At that time, eternal thanks were due to Christina G. Brooks, Merrill Pye, Jo O'Carroll, Margaret Rieneck, Brent Thorpe and a humble electric typewriter, without which it would have hurt a lot more. No thanks at all were due to Shirley Bassey. In 2020 thanks are due to Carole Cusack, Monica Quirk, and Venetia Robertson, who guided the publication process.

[2] Joseph Addison cited in L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 143.

concept *means* is usually ignored. When used in context the word always connotates more than its visible parts. Things are described as evil when they exhibit no physical properties whatever (i.e., Satan), or when the physical machinations are implied to be only a small part of a larger more powerful force.

To further complicate matters the attributes of evil undeniably change with time, forcing us to ask whether this affects the basic concept? In western culture morality and jurisprudence have changed dramatically with the passage of time, fantastically since Chaucer's Pardoner rode his way to Canterbury, and almost as drastically again since the advent of the industrial revolution. Humanity's needs and desires remain, arguably, the same, but the notions of 'good' and 'evil' change almost from year to year with the growth of ideas, and the proliferation of communications. As society evolves, the artist's perception of reality grows with it; morality and the problems of the time are mirrored and examined in literature, which provides an acceptable way to study how society views 'evil', how the concept develops and, perhaps, whether 'evil' is one of humanity's motivating forces, negative or positive?

Changing moral values may be seen clearly in letters and diaries of a bygone era, and in contemporary news media. But humans have more than a purely physical existence; their total is more than the sum of their parts. Factual writings provide the 'reality', but literature provides fictitious characters who live, breathe, think and relate to archetypal human problems within the bounds of their societies, more real than the real. The Indian railway station in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (with the shrieks of 'the tree-ain! the tree-ain!'),[3] the fog and smell of Sherlock Holmes' London,[4] the friends we once had in the Bennets of Hertfordshire,[5] and the brutal lifestyle described in Jack London's *White Fang*[6] are more than fiction; they are memories of things we never did, more real than real. They helped us grow with people whom we 'knew', then helped us cope with the problems of our actual lives.

---

[3] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1901), pp. 22-23.
[4] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Stories of Sherlock Holmes* (UK: Wordsworth Editions, 2008).
[5] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2003).
[6] Jack London, *White Fang* (Harmondsworth: Puffin, 2008).

This article will attempt to define the changes, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the concepts of the supernatural and human evil as perceived throughout history, as the werewolf and the succubus are pushed further into the twilight of unreality by the complexity of modern life. As technology provides its own horrors, transcendent evil evolves with the eyes of the artist: the greatest invention of the 1940s becomes the overwhelming mushroom cloud terror; witches are harmless nature worshippers with businesses in sunny California; and ghosts become electro-magnetic anomalies. As society changes the old horrors are stripped of dignity, becoming naked and laughable, then left to die in the cold of disbelief. Yet the human need for fear keeps us creating new horrors, mirroring the dark corners of the human mind. Our modern terrors are just as fetidly terrible as the Russian witch Baba Yaga and her house on chicken legs.[7]

The Context of Evil in Western Literature

Western religion states that human beings are driven by two powers which, whether biological or metaphysical, are either positive or negative. The primal condition means that humanity is basically creative: creation exemplifies intelligence and the emotive or spiritual drive to make tools to survive and live in varying degrees of comfort, to love, to co-exist, to reproduce and to raise children, in such a manner that they have basically the same drives, needs and methods of gratification. Humanity is also of a tribal nature, requiring more than family connections. Thus, society must be a force for peace endorsed by (arguably) the totality of its members. That which makes society, and in microcosm the human individual, is what must be termed the creative/constructive capacity, and thereby the positive side. All which is against the drive to create—death, destruction and violence—must be seen as (despite all rationalisations) aberrations of the human form. The possibility of death and violence, while acknowledged as part of human life, must be seen as alien to ideal existence, and consequently viewed by a majority of people with fear and trepidation.

[7] Mari Ness, "Chicken Feet and Fiery Skulls: Tales of the Russian Witch Baba Yaga," *TOR.COM: Science Fiction. Fantasy. The Universe. And Related Subjects*, 24 October (2018), at https://www.tor.com/2018/10/24/chicken-feet-and-fiery-skulls-tales-of-the-russian-witch-baba-yaga/. Accessed 14 August 2020.

Humans on the individual level are beings composed largely of opposites: for all creation there is destruction; for all agreement, argument; and for all life there is death, both natural and unnatural. In spite, or perhaps because of, the positive attributes of existence, there is an overwhelming, deep-rooted, largely suppressed fascination with the attributes and possibilities of death, pain, and suffering. This is the reason for the existence of macabre fiction: the need to see, feel, and examine, but not be harmed by, the negative aspects of existence, which are basically suppressed in industrial modernity. This literary form is described by some as works read by people who ogle at traffic accidents, yet the savage 'realities' of macabre fiction are needed to replace the lack of face-to-face horror in our sanitised world:

> There's a weird educational side to war, too. Like the first time I seen a guy's guts laying on top of him, ad disgusting as that was, I said to myself, 'Oh wow. So that's what they look like.'[8]

Humanity existing in bodily form is always a hand's breadth from blood and death. The torpor of mechanized society makes for forgetfulness of gut-level reality and requires relief through imaginative means.

The need to see, feel and touch (if only in the imagination) the horrors of life and death is archetypal. Such situations in horror fiction, while pleasantly distanced, provide an opportunity for critical analysis and psychological growth without danger; the harsh realities are there, but rendered harmless. Such fictions are necessary and a more civilising form of experience than the real horrors of animal nature.[9]

> The hood of the parka matted the blow, but not enough. A rocket exploded in his head, leaving a contrail of stars… and then nothing.
>
> He staggered against the silk wallpaper and Jack hit him again, the roque mallet slicing sideways this time, shattering Halloran's cheekbone and most of his teeth on the left side of his jaw. He went down limply.
>
> 'Now,' Jack whispered. 'Now, by Christ.' Where was Danny? He had business with his trespassing son.[10]

At speed, the idea of a man hit in the head with a croquet mallet, falling and messing the wallpaper is an idea which often passes for comedy of the Three Stooges ilk. Horror fiction has often to contend with the unexpected and unwelcome laugh when the terror does not ring true. The

---

[8] Mark Baker, *Nam* (New York: Berkeley, 1986), p. 58.
[9] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), pp. 151-155.
[10] Stephen King, *The Shining* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 388.

theory of Jan Kott that comedy is simply speeded up tragedy,[11] and Aristotle's definition of tragedy as a purging by pity and terror,[12] are here in close alliance. The pain and actions are the same, the needed release is gained and both types of art gain their object, to achieve effect. While pratfall comedy causes relief from thought (but perhaps guilt from laughter), macabre prose causes vicarious release of pain *for* (rather than against) the human condition, empathy for the characters' feelings, and an expansion of consciousness against the horror that is so much part of reality.

Vampires and Humans Part 1: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)

For humans the connection between blood, spirit and life is incontrovertible. Death is anathema to life and feared; loss of blood causes malaise then death. To lose blood is to have your vital energy (spirit, individuality) either seriously impaired or lost altogether. In this way the vampire attacks on two fronts, both killing totally and drawing energy from the living:[13] "[t]he blood is the life".[14] The vampire is opposite to the living human, possessing no energy but that stolen from others, by nature a creature of the night. Vampires attack when spirit is at low ebb, during sleep; their soul stealing and hatred of life are at first identified as mere fossilised superstition, fear of darkness, and the need to survive.

The vampire has been with humanity too long to be ignored: his or her existence can be seen as a metaphor of life itself; archetypally interwoven with the concept of life is spirit, and consequently death and the theft of spirit. [15]

> But under heavy loads of trampled clay
> Lie bodies of vampires full of blood;
> Their shrouds are bloody, and their lips are wet.[16]

---

[11] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), passim.
[12] S. H. Butcher (trans), *Aristotle on Tragedy: Selections from the Poetics of Aristotle*, at http://web.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/AristotlePoeticsEdited.htm. Accessed 14 August 2020.
[13] Anthony Masters, *The Natural History of the Vampire* (New York: Putnam, 1972).
[14] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Coronet, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979 [1897]), p. 17.
[15] Masters, *The Natural History of the Vampire*, Chapter 1, "Human Vampire or Psychic Sponge: Origins."
[16] W. B. Yeats, 'Oil and Blood', in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner Paper Fiction, 1989), p. 239.

In the history of horror fiction three main works delineate the activities, effects and raison d'être of the soul stealers: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955); and Stephen King's 'Salem*'s Lot* (1975). These fictions demonstrated the evolution of evil in three different societies.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is the great horror novel of the Victorian age.[17] The close confines of family and society, the strictures of morality, and preconceptions of life in general are menaced by an attack from outside, by a thing from the shadows of the known world. Jonathan Harker is the catalyst, providing Count Dracula's foothold in England. Harker, on the instigation of his superior Peter Hawkins, leaves his close-knit family and clearly defined society—where his place is known and his responsibilities so clear that they seem 'natural'—and travels beyond any western European system of ethics to the nightmarish region of Transylvania.[18] The book starts midway into Harker's disjointed fantasy journey.

Continually warned by the natives in a foreign language, treated as already cursed by those who know his destination, the further from London and his 'reality' Harker travels the less his experiences mesh with 'normal' reality. His journey through the Borgo Pass is punctuated by the coachman piling stones around strange blue lights in the forest for no particular reason, and the fact that the lights *shine through* the man's figure it taken by the traveler to be a sign of his fatigue. At Dracula's castle, a romantic gothic silhouette jagged against the moonlit sky, the Count is the only visible occupant. The edifice is in desperate need of cleaning and repair. Harker soon realists the Count is in fact also the coachman, and the preparer of meals. His host exhibits a marked ferocity on the subject of mirrors, an all too personal memory of centuries of history, and the ability to climb down walls head-first. His unappealing qualities include the vicious treatment of women, divined after Harker has seen a woman approach the castle walls screaming 'Monster, give me back my child!'[19] The woman is by eaten by wolves summoned by the Count.[20] Harker's

[17] Colin Wilson, *The Strength to Dream* (London: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 145.
[18] The literal meaning of Transylvania is 'beyond the forest'. See Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 118 for more on Count Dracula's Romanian and later Hungarian cultural background.
[19] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 47.
[20] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 48.

anguished sensitivities seem more pronounced when his personal possessions (notes, diaries, clothes and letter of credit) are stolen by his host (who till this point had remained distanced). The Count has now become a thief and everything 'Englishness' forbids;[21] to complicate matters the visitor, Harker, is now a prisoner immured in the castle.

Besides establishing the mood of the novel (consisting of notes, letters and personal journals), Stoker is making one thing crystal clear to readers—foreigners are strange, dangerous, criminals—and in this instance, child-eaters. The next plot development, once this xenophobic intent is established, is to show how and what effect this anti-societal subversive-degenerate will have on a 'respectable' society of the period, namely Victorian England.

The vampire is not omnipotently evil.[22] He has prepared for his attack on England, as the reader realises from Harker's description of the count's reading matter.[23] The 'modernity' of London is anticipated and used by Dracula; he speaks English well and uses his money to establish a position as property owner with correspondingly respectable overtones. His power of mind soon attracted disciples in Renfield, a vampiric lunatic,[24] a following among the creatures of the night, bats, rats,[25] and an escaped wolf.[26] His presence in the country affects people on a psychic level: the incarcerated Renfield finds a similar stronger form of himself;[27] and the naturally telepathic Lucy Westenra is drawn to him. Since Lucy and Mina Harker are close friends the vampire's depredations are confined to a small group, a normal, respectable middle-class family of the period.[28]

The family unit is symbolically destroyed as the innocent bride-to-be Lucy is attacked on the grave of a suicide[29] transforming her into a lustful menace to her lover (Arthur Holmwood), and an attacker of small children. If women were the strength of Victorian society, Stoker is saying that

---

[21] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 52.
[22] Masters, *The Natural History of the Vampire*, pp. 3-43.
[23] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 29.
[24] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 155.
[25] Stoker, *Dracula*, pp. 160-174.
[26] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 164.
[27] Stoker, *Dracula*, pp. 155-170.
[28] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: MacDonald, 1981), p. 94.
[29] The grave of a suicide being both a gothic convention, and in religious tradition, unsanctified ground.

society is only as strong as its individual members, who are always vulnerable: Lucy changes from being a pillar of the community, upwardly mobile—her fiancé's full title being Lord Godalming—to the antithesis of normality, depraved, a destroyer of love and a polluter of life. Such, says Stoker, is the power of evil; this is the possible end result.

All are vulnerable to the power of Dracula, but for different reasons. Lucy was apparently born with this sensitiveness, while normally being a charming decisive person with a strong character (as is proven by her reasons for choosing one of her three suitors).[30] The reasons for Mina coming under the influence of the Count are both more clear and dramatically understandable; the "baptism of blood"[31] forced on her under threat of the death of her husband is both a description of rape, and a male power fantasy of an innocent women's basic driving need for domination:

> I was too bewildered to do or say anything. With a mocking smile, he placed one hand on my shoulder and, holding me tight, bared my throat with the other, saying as he did so: 'First a little refreshment to reward my exertions'… I was bewildered and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is part of the horrible curse that such is, when his touch is on his victim. And oh, my God, my God, pity me! He placed his reeking lips upon my throat!' Her husband groaned again. She clasped his hand harder, and looked at him pityingly, as if he were the injured one, and went on;—
>
> 'I felt my strength fading away and was in a half swoon. How long this horrible thing lasted I know not; but it seemed that a long time must have passed before he took his foul awful sneering mouth away. I saw it drip with the fresh blood!'[32]

Dracula then makes a declaration of power, laughing at those who would pit their minds against his, states the consequences for those who oppose him, and makes reference to his long 'life' as a king and warlord.

He then refers to the by now hysterical Mina as his "bountiful wine press for a while". Mina's description continues:

> 'You have aided in thwarting me; now you shall come to my call. When my brain says 'come!' to you, you shall cross land or sea to do my bidding; and to that end this!' With that he pulled open his shirt and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding

[30] She reacts to an emotionally taxing situation calmly, intelligently and with understanding.
[31] The opposite of, and a perversion of, Christian baptism and traditionally associated with witchcraft.
[32] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 269.

> them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some of – oh my God! My God! What have I done?... then she began to rub her lips as though to cleanse them of pollutions.[33]

The sexual imagery is obvious, as is the domination by force of will. What Stoker describes is basically rape and cuckoldry in the presence of Mina's husband.[34] The most notable reaction, due to its non-appearance, is resistance on the part of Mina.

Her choices of words to describe the occurrence do not give much validity to the idea that perhaps she enjoyed it, until one compares it with an earlier description of Harker, her husband, being attacked by Dracula's wives, while half-asleep. The method employed here is different, the reaction (total inaction) similar:

> 'I was not alone… in the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. Looked at me… whispered together… two were dark… the other fair… fair as can be… brilliant white teeth… voluptuous lips… longing and deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips... it is the truth… silvery, musical laugh… the girl went on her knees and bent over me simply gloating… deliberate voluptuousness… thrilling and repulsive… arched her neck and actually licked her lips like an animal… red lips… lower and lower… licked her teeth and lips… languorous ecstasy… waited with a beating heart…'[35]

It is possible that if Mina had not wakened to find herself in the company of her menfolk,[36] but had been able to write of the experience in her diary as her husband did, her description may have been rather different. This may be considered unfair since the differences between the texts clearly illustrate the dichotomy of accepted views of sex in the Victorian era. Stoker as an author of the period, obviously at least in part subscribed to the common preconceptions, but also as a critic of character and society delved deeper into individuals' reactions to extraordinary stress.

The character of Lucy is charming but vague; Mina on the other hand possesses strength far in excess of the norm for female characters in Victorian fiction. Compared to Esther Summerson of Charles Dickens'

---

[33] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 270.
[34] Her husband is unconscious, having received a hit on the head during Dracula's entrance.
[35] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 45.
[36] Who collectively burst in, interrupting the proceedings.

Bleak House (1853), Mina is a female of power, possessed of femininity but also an active agent, in terms of her friendship with and support of Lucy, for example, and her marriage to her extremely sick fiancé while he was in hospital.[37] Once her baptism of blood/rape in the presence of her husband occurs, her disgrace is complete in the face of society. Open-minded and progressive science in the person of Van Helsing – a searcher for truth – assists her to rise after her fall. She is instrumental in the vanquishing of the Count, present at the novel's end prepared to take back her rightful portion as wife, equal, and creator of life in society.[38] The vampire, says the book, is at best only a transitory evil. Lucy regains peace and her soul when dispatched, Mina recovers her freedom from the Count's control by growing psychologically through the experience, while even Dracula, the arch-fiend, returns to a state of nature in balance, when 'killed.'[39] Honour is achieved in the struggle, and nature and society are vindicated as forces for good, working in tandem.

Vampires and Humans Part 2: Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1954)

No such optimism exists in modern versions of the vampire myth, however. Western society has changed: the influences of science and psychiatry have simultaneously lessened the superstitions of religion, making it more attractive and personalised; and have through the cataloguing and explaining of environmental and human nature have made more understood, and therefore forgiven. Superstition still lingers but the vampire is now more metaphor than menace.

The history of Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* has three parts covering a period of massive turbulent change in modern society. Originally a novella published in *Colliers* magazine of 1954, the work was instantly popular, and was filmed by Don Siegel in 1955. The film (considered a horror classic) was remade in 1978 by Phillip Kaufman. In all three versions, the characters' motivations and the basic plot remained the same, but the perception of what the evil represented changed. Other works may better express this modern version of evil, but

[37] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 104.
[38] Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 352; Jonathan Harker writes of 'our boy on [my] knee'.
[39] His corpse spontaneously rots to the state it would be in without the hiatus of 'undead' vampirism.

Finney's basic setting and theme is central to modern macabre fiction, and is closely related to Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* (1975). Society has lost its certainty and now doubts itself, and the individual is depicted as isolated to the point of paranoia. Santa Mira is the archetypal small town in America; waspish, normal, insular, where life is quiet, and the people are content.

> Just a small town with a few stores and a few houses. Some of them were falling down, probably from the weight of snow in winter. Could be any town in the country. Driving through most of them, you wouldn't know if anyone was alive after eight o'clock when they rolled up the sidewalks.[40]

This calm is disturbed when the work's hero, the town doctor, Miles Bennell, comes across what he first takes to be a mild case of mass hysteria: people become convinced for a few days that someone close to them is an imposter; physically identical, habits and behaviour unchanged, but a different person. Soon the complainant's 'delusion' will abate, but they too will be slightly different; more apathetic, distant, and 'greyer'.

The problem is discovered to be caused by alien 'seed pods' taking the form of the inhabitants for their own reasons, as Budlong (replaced by a pod creature) explains, "They have arrived… [here] by pure chance… they have a function to perform as natural to them as yours are to you… the pods must fulfil their function, their reason for being."[41] Humans still exist, but are isolated, outnumbered, and dwindling. Outwardly nothing changes, but the road which services the town slowly becomes less passable, and the spirit (never really apparent) departs the place. Dr Bennell describes the changed town in terms which one can empathise with:

> The look of Throckmorton Street depressed me. It seemed littered and shabby in the morning sun, a city trash basket stood heaped and unemptied from the day before, the globe of an overhead streetlight was broken, and a few doors down… a shop stood empty. The windows were whitened, and a clumsily painted For Rent sign stood leaning against the glass. It didn't say where to apply, though, and I had a feeling no one cared whether the store was ever rented again. A smashed wine bottle lay in the entranceway of my building, and

[40] Stephen King, *'Salem's Lot* (London: New English Library, 1977[1975]), p. 401.
[41] Jack Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1978 [1955]), p. 135.

> the brass nameplate set in the grey stone of the building was mottled and unpolished.[42]

The immediate concern that writers of the 1950s express when examining the depredations of soul stealers appears to be that the human husks will let the neighbourhood become a slum.[43]

This theme is echoed in many other works of the period: the vampires surrounding Robert Neville's house in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) are little better than animals, with no kinship but a community of hunger;[44] the human husks of Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* (1951) are malnourished and lice-ridden, their 'spirit' has diminished to that of badly-treated carthorses. For the writer of the 1950s loss of spirit equals lack of civic pride, lowering the standard of work and a lack of physical hygiene. The vampires, in removing humanness, eliminate "certain states of mind that belong essentially to the good. To wipe from the earth all wonder, joy, deep feeling, the desire to create, to praise life".[45]

In Don Seigel's 1955 film of Finney's novella, the film ends with the hero, still human, shouting at heedlessly passing cars (many carrying more 'pods' out into the country), his voice filled with hysteria: "They're coming! They're coming!"[46] The 1978 version of the film[47] transferred the action to present day Los Angeles, with the pods subverting the entire city, and spreading themselves (still in secrecy) globally.

This simple story is told differently each time, and each has the overtones of its era imposed on it. The pods do not change, but what they represent does. In 1954, the novella was taken literally as a straight story, which pleased the author who laughed at deeper meanings discerned in his text.[48] The 1956 film, however, inspired controversy; the theme of paranoid mistrust in an American context fuelled assertions that both book and film were anti-Joseph McCarthy (that basically, like Communists, the pods did

---

[42] Finney, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, p. 96.
[43] King, *Danse Macabre*, p. 303.
[44] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: Corgi, 1977 [1954]). In this work the hero is alone fighting for 'humanity'. The vampires become civilised, form a new nocturnal society, and look on him as the monster/vampire. Evolution leaves the hero behind. This has strong thematic connections to King's *'Salem's Lot*.
[45] J. B. Priestley, "The Grey Ones" in *The Other Place* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1953).
[46] Original title of the novella *Sleep No More!*
[47] Philip Kaufman (dir.), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (United Artists, 1978).
[48] King, *Danse Macabre*, p. 289.

not exist, and it was silly to seek them out).[49] Confusion reigned when the director Don Seigel (possibly in fear of being blacklisted) spoke out, arguing that his film *was* about the Red Menace (that the pods did exist—PODS = UNAMERICAN = COMMUNISTS—seek them out).[50]

Communists in the 1950s were a 'threat' onto which mass fears concerning every aspect of American life at the time were projected. America was seen to be threatened by godless hordes in possession of nuclear weapons, who at the same time were working within the plenty of Western Christian society destroying morality, loyalty and tradition. The 'over-threat' of nuclear destruction was underscored by a new mistrust of technology which, through space-related science, had shown how small humanity was in the scale of things,[51] and consequently how much smaller still was America with its democratic ideals. The embodiment of small-town American values, the hero of the novel and film discovers his calm haven of goodness has been subverted by gigantic forces from 'outside', working by stealth within his society. His screamed warning to unheeding countrymen leaves the world with little hope. If other humans listened to his warning society may be saved; the societal spirit/ethics may contrive to win, in spite of the onslaught of THEM, whoever the reader or viewer decides 'they' are.

Evil changes again. In the 1978 film of the same text 'they' are already in power. The film's opening has the hero realising that *all* effective government bodies in the city are already possessed by the grey non-humans; society effectively *is* the menace. In 1955 they control a small town and threaten the state; in 1978 most of the country is possessed and the world is threatened. The fear is the unperson, the grey man, the stranger. In the 1950s society was experienced as being threatened by outside forces; in the 1970s the individual feels alien in their own environment, the cities. The world of George Orwell's *1984* has arrived; what exists is rule by faceless 'phone-tapping voices. The individual is alone and under serious threat, assured again and again that it is all a delusion, by a doctor, who is revealed to be one of THEM.

---

[49] King, *Danse Macabre*, pp. 291-296.
[50] King, *Danse Macabre*, p. 289.
[51] Also, the only country succeeding in space was the USSR. See Asif A. Siddiqui, *Challenge to Apollo: The Soviet Union and the Space Race, 1945-1974* (Washington, DC: NASA History Division, 2000).

Vampires and Humans Part 3: Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* (1975)

Albert Camus' vision has come full circle. *L'Étranger* (1942) is the tale of one 'dead' emotionless, spiritless man in what is basically a living society. Now the roles are reversed; the only positive note being that if the film were factual rather than poetic, it would not exist. *Dracula* was an optimistic endorsement and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is a warning; Stephen King's *'Salem's Lot* is an open attack on the ills of society.

Jerusalem's Lot is the Santa Mira of New England in 1975; an unobtrusive small town with a past, but little future, "a lot of old folks, quite a few poor folks, and a lot of young folks who leave the area with their diplomas under their arms, never to return again."[52] The population is stable or slightly diminishing, with no real industry, the town is basically self-supporting but relies on 'imported' goods. Once a gold town, then an agricultural centre, Jerusalem's Lot is now (bypassed by rail) quieter, relying heavily on highway tourism for economic survival. Unemployment is rife, life is slowing down, and an unnoticeable malaise due to all these factors is sapping the town (and the inhabitants) spirit. Slowly, the town is dying. Gossip and drinking are 'Salem's Lot's only pastimes, when two outside influences simultaneously arrive, personifying the choices the townsfolk must make.

Ben Mears is a novelist, a man who is trying to recapture his childhood in the town for his current work. Creative, vibrant, sensitive, and bearing love,[53] he may be seen as a metaphor for life. His arrival, his love, and his work are greeted with suspicion. Barlow (or Breichen), an Austrian count of doubtful lineage, is the death symbol. Barlow is a vampire, he and his 'front man' Straker establish an antique store in town for the tourist trade and are greeted with as near to enthusiasm as the town can muster (one suspects that thoughts of economic growth have something to do with this).

The town's knowledge of itself is furnished with gossip, a vampiric enjoyment of others' lives via outright voyeurism and salacious interference. Knit tight by an outdated party-line telephone system, the town lives spiritually off itself and slowly festers in nostalgia and vicarious experience. The wires of the telephone system "vibrate… as if souls had

---

[52] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 7.

[53] His capacity for love is established early. Mears meets Susan Norton in the park (an image of peace and nature). See King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 21.

been imprisoned in there and were struggling to get out."[54] At the centre of this web is Mabel Werts, an overweight spinster who sees life through a pair of Japanese binoculars. A most assiduous user of the telephone system, she remembers by means of a pile of the "sleaziest scandal tabloids," of which she has many boxes, neatly catalogued. Distanced from the town by physical infirmity, she studies its daily life with interest but draws no conclusions. Merely a spreader of information but knowing as much as it is possible to know, she is shown deference and feared. She gains pleasure and power by invading privacy but adds nothing to the town; her knowledge is never given to those who need it. A mental vampire and a source of oppression, she may be seen as, on a larger scale, a symbol for the privacy-destroying, life-ruling agencies of modern life. She helps make the town what it is, but does nothing to stop the vampirism spread by Barlow. The law man Parkins observes, "I seen Mabel Werts, peekin' out with her glasses, but I don't guess there's much to peek at, today. There'll be more tonight, likely."[55] That night Mabel changes the method of her bloodsucking.

The other members of this community have spirits stunted by their reality. Miss Coogan, the manager of the ice-cream parlour/drugstore, like many of the town residents, lives in a haze of nostalgia for times that were no better. Disliking the youth of the day, she misses her "wholesome" bygone patrons "who, though she had forgotten it, had irritated her just as much."[56] Among the town idlers reminiscing on the great fire of 1951, the static past is dwelt upon, the future not being considered. The populace is either static or wholly negative. Lawrence Crockett, the second-hand selectman and estate agent, is heavily involved in crooked real estate dealing,[57] and is a miser, still wearing the same shiny-seated trousers and sports coat combination of twenty years earlier. He is willing to suppress information on child murders to protect his investments.[58] Dud Rogers, the town's rubbish dump custodian, is an immensely strong hunchback, tormented and turned anti-social by the townsfolk. He lives in a tent at the dump: he enjoys his authority selling usable rubbish (and enjoys cheating

[54] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 115.
[55] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 412.
[56] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 377.
[57] King, *'Salem's Lot*, pp. 68-69.
[58] King, *'Salem's Lot*, pp. 103-104.

his customers); he hoards his profits but gains no particular pleasure from his money.[59] He spends his time shooting the dump's rats (personifying them as people he dislikes) and revelling in violent sexual fantasies. One of Barlow's first victims, he submits to a more specific evil control in exchange for gratification of his misguided vision of the sex act denied him by his deformity.[60]

Rogers' spirit embraces evil for a childish pornographic fantasy of voluptuous innocence, decidedly reminiscent of Dracula's wives' attack on Jonathan Harker:

> Far away he seemed to hear sweet voices singing foul words. Silver chimes… white faces… Ruthie's Crockett's voice. He could almost see her, hands cupping her titties, making them bulge into the V of her cardigan sweater in ripe white half gloves, whispering 'Kiss them, Dud… bite them… suck them.' It was like drowning. Drowning in the old man's red rimmed eyes. As the stranger came closer, Dud *understood everything and welcomed it*, and when the pain came, it was as sweet as silver, as green as still water at dark fathoms.[61]

Sex is important to the book, often used as an illustration of the character's spiritual health and drives. The environment of 'Salem's Lot does not appear particularly healthy: the proprietor of the hardware shop is a closet transvestite;[62] the Protestant pastor is tormented by dreams of sex in Sunday School; no love exists in the union of the "young marrieds";[63] and the description of the motivation for the extramarital affair of Bonnie Sawyer and Corey Bryant, the telephone repairman, borders on idiocy.[64] Lawrence Crockett reads a book entitled *Satan's Sex Slaves*, and Hal Griffin has a collection of 'Hot Books' which he masturbates over at every given opportunity. Only the growing love between Ben Mears and Susan Norton contains any decency. Their first kiss (well into courtship) on the porch, in the sunset, is a conventional romantic image stressing that the positive qualities of union may exist, but only through mutual respect. In this scene the imagery is only of giving.

---

[59] King, *'Salem's Lot*, pp. 63-65.
[60] King, *'Salem's Lot*, pp. 63-65, 159-160.
[61] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 160.
[62] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 223.
[63] King, *'Salem's Lot*, pp. 65, 223.
[64] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 96.

Sex is again the lure of the vampire. King takes the folkloric legend that the vampire must be invited into the house on the first visit to its logical extreme; his victims either consciously choose, or by their lifestyle tacitly accept, vampirism. They either want what is offered or lack the spiritual/moral strength to refuse it. The characters' reactions to the offer of vampirism generally reflect their lives, and the perversion of good into greed is seen as a lack of spirit.[65] Those who lack the spirit to lead good, creative, or giving lives are most at risk. In short, they either want to become vampires or already are. The closet transvestite 'fulfils his darkest dreams' as the vampire does for Dud Rogers. Corey Bryant accepts Barlow for revenge. Father Callahan (otherwise seen as a 'good man') suffers a lack of faith and 'dies', and Hal Griffin also joins the undead, as do Mabel Werts and her cronies.

Susan Norton, a creative positive female torn between metaphysics and materialism, screams in Barlow' trap but her mother, an opinionated domineering woman, accepts a new form of vampirism willingly.[66] It may be argued that King's thesis in *'Salem's Lot* is that Barlow merely precipitates a crisis point in the evolution of the town: the populace in its insular environment is already effectively dead. Doing nothing new, feeling no great emotions, vampiric by nature they and their town are doomed. Becoming undead is for them merely a small step; a coming out of the closet in their spiritual evolution. Identified throughout closely with the town, now they match it perfectly.

The all-encompassing symbol of the novel is the Marsten House "like an idol, squatting there on top out its hill."[67] A place where evil things once happened, it attracts evil people (Barlow and Straker move in); the house is a conventional gothic image, a castle on a hill, its influence overlooks the town. The second symbol is that of a "glass paperweight, the kind that will make a tiny blizzard when you shake it."[68] Owned by Mears, this object may be seen as the town itself, the influences of the three strangers cause a violent flurry of events, but when the storm of violence settles down nothing has discernibly changed; the townsfolk have made

---

[65] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 221.
[66] The waking slave and helper of Barlow, she attempts to murder on his behalf. See King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 369.
[67] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 170.
[68] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 11.

their choice. During the novel's epilogue Mears smashes the paperweight in a rage, leaving "without waiting to see what might leak out of it."[69] The snow has settled; the creative man cannot understand the people's choice of "an endless fantasy land of false snow, where time was a myth."[70]

Mears, the creative man of spirit, survives and rejects the society of 'Salem's Lot, which chooses apathy and vampirism.[71] The society also rejects him since his leadership in the struggle against this death is heeded only by a few. The human individual is now isolated, Mears *cares* about the fate of the town whilst its people do not. The people make the town by their behaviour, the town (their environment) strengthens their attitude in a vicious circle of growing negativism; only those who can break the hold of modern society and thought survive. "The world is dying and you're sticking at a few vampires."[72] Moreover, this town must be understood as an intentional metaphor for society at large, since the demise of the town excites no exterior interest (bar two articles in a small circulation newspaper). 'Salem's Lot is apathetic, uninterested: society at large is no better. The message is clear.

Twenty years separate two events: in 1954-1955 the novella and film of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and, in 1975-1978, *'Salem's Lot* and the remake of the film of Finney's book. In these twenty years, a clear evolution in the perception of evil may be discerned. In 1954 the alien seed pods *take* spirit by stealth during the 'little death' of sleep, the warning being that society is in danger, 'They're coming!' and that public apathy (sleep) makes the problem worse. In 1975-1978 the evil is perceived differently (to quote *Poltergeist* 'They're here!').[73] Now this lack of spirit has made society the menace destroying individuality, to the point where what was once taken by force in *Dracula*, is now consciously given away. In twenty years, society as 'gone bad,' people now *want* sleep, where wakefulness was stolen in 1955 and rape forced in 1897.

---

[69] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 428.
[70] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 428.
[71] See Sean Eads, "The Vampire George Middler: Selling the Monstrous in *'Salem's Lot*'," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2010), pp. 78-96.
[72] Modern thought consigns vampires to superstition. Susan Norton is skeptical. "The greatest strength of the vampire is that no-one will believe in him," says Van Helsing. See Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 151.
[73] Tobe Hooper (dir.), *Poltergeist* (MGM, 1982).

H. P. Lovecraft: The Monstrous is Within Us

The change from evil being outside to it being innate took place over time; yet one writer may be seen as bridging the change between the two views.

> I am, you see, a sort of hybrid betwixt the past and the future – archaic in my personal tastes, emotions, and interests, but so much of a scientific realist in philosophy that I cannot abide any intellectual point of view short of the most advanced.[74]

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) of Providence, Rhode Island was a man of contradictions: a lover of antique architecture of the area of his birth, he apprenticed himself to the classics, yet found his true expression as an author writing for pulp magazines, peopling the beauty of his childhood New England with monsters. He lived as a recluse, but his stories are of far-away fantastic realms, half-understood, of great beauty but teeming with horrific a-human beings. A hater of change, his stories reiterate the rottenness of society; a materialistic atheist, he invented many new gods. Unknown at his death, his works now sell in the hundreds of thousands; 'writing for his own satisfaction,' he has been the subject of innumerable masters and doctoral theses and multiple biographies.[75]

As Dracula's arrival in London is first sensed by the psychically aware, the power of the alien god Cthulhu causes mental unrest worldwide:

> The press cuttings… touched on cases of panic, mania and eccentricity during the given period. Professor Angell must have employed a cutting bureau for the number of extracts was tremendous. Here… the nocturnal suicide of London… in South America, a fanatic deduces a fire future from visions… California… a theosophical colony donning white robes… for some 'glorious fulfilment' which never arrived… India… serious native unrest… Voodoo orgies multiply in Haiti… African outposts… Philippines… New York… west of Ireland… Paris… troubles in insane asylums.[76]

Evil for Lovecraft was a pantheon of gods (designated the Cthulhu Mythos), a tribe of immeasurably old factionally warring alien beings, using humanity as both pawns for their own amusement and as their servants. These beings were not omnipotent, but had effectively ruled humanity since the beginning, and the marks of their handiwork still exist in the dark places of the world. Their power is worshipped and served by

---

[74] H. P. Lovecraft to W. Harris, 1929.
[75] See the bibliography in Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography*.
[76] H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Tales of Terror* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), p. 112.

myriad 'obscene cults' in the backward and lonely areas of all societies. The town of Salem, Massachusetts remained predominantly evil in its cellars, even after the 'abortive cleansing' of the witch burning. The fictitious town of Innsmouth was wholly owned by the physically degraded fishlike minions of Cthulhu, while the Antarctic wastes housed an immense derelict city of death.[77] Atlantis was destroyed by the mighty Azathoth, the stirring in his sleep of Cthulhu causes the worldwide unrest (as above quoted), in the evil old places of the earth "out of ten surviving houses built before 1700… I'll wager that in eight I can show you something queer in the cellar."[78] The evil is outside, but its grip on humanity is total and entirely secretive.

These gods for Lovecraft were not evil, merely alien and self-interested with little concern for man, a species raised by them s servants and largely abandoned. Their presence in the first stages of evolution of the race was tempered with such horror that their images form a sort of template for race memory, ineradicable, that causes fear and loathing such that to see them *naturally* causes hysterical horror and, quite often, mental damage to all save those close to them in kind – those who by being in tune with them are 'christened' by normal people – evil. 'Normal man's' hatred of these evil ones is largely caused by the promptings of the subconscious and drives these groups underground, never acknowledging their existence[79] and attempting to blot out all memory of their actions. In "The Shadow over Innsmouth" the activities of the racially degraded inhabitants (the entire population) causes the American government to arrest all 'offenders' for the alleged crime of bootlegging, confining them incommunicado in isolated prison camps; to destroy large sections of the town by declaring them a 'health risk', and to depth charge the reef (four miles off shore) for no discernible reason.[80] If this had occurred in the 1950s doubtless the author would have found a different crime for this town to commit.

---

[77] H. P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Tales of Terror* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).
[78] H. P. Lovecraft, "Pickman's Model," in *Weird Tales* (October 1927).
[79] Lovecraft's stories place heavy stress on false 'documentation'; much information is suppressed.
[80] Rebecca Janicker, "New England Narratives: Space and Place in the Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft," *Extrapolation*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2006), pp. 54-70.

While the reaction of the vast majority of the population to the physical form and works of the 'Great Old Ones' is *instinctive* horror and revulsion, for some Lovecraft states the opposite is true. These people are evil largely because their ancestry is tainted with some connection to this alien race. "Arthur Jermyn" (1920) and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927, published 1943) both deal with the discovery by the protagonist that 'he' is not (or is only half) human. This discovery causes initial revulsion at his ancestry, then whole-hearted approval and 'turning' to a new (societal evil) polarity.[81] This trend is echoed in many of the author's works; in "The Dunwich Horror" the horror is effectively the twin of the human,[82] while Samuel Derby Pickman, the portrait artist of several of the less human individuals who live under Arkham, makes pictorial reference to his ancestry and subversive evil within society. The central figure of "The Rats in the Walls" (1923) returns to his ancestral home and discovers that his family since the time of the Roman invasion have been non-humans concealed within society. A member of the landed gentry, de la Poer both identifies with and *becomes* his ancestors – and a cannibal – and like many of Lovecraft's 'heroes' he ends his story confined to an institution.

Perhaps Lovecraft's best story is "The Outsider" (1921), a tale of a man living in an immeasurably old castle, totally alone. He is confined within this "dead stairless cylinder of rock" by his fear of the outside, the "twilight groves of grotesque, gigantic and vine-encumbered trees that silently wave twisted branches far aloft." He cannot remember his birth or how he came to be there; he recalls nothing except his hated lonely existence. Being unable to see the sky, he climbs the tower of the castle above the trees, and exits onto solid ground in a churchyard. Memories of his life return as he finds his descendants in a nearby great house; they flee in terror at his appearance, and seeing himself in a mirror he is horror-struck at the realisation that he is long dead, but alive. He abandons mankind and becomes a ghoul.

> Yet in my new wildness and freedom I almost welcome the bitterness of alienage.
>
> For although nepenthe has calmed me, I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men. This I have known ever since I stretched out my fingers to the

[81] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).
[82] Narrator/scholar. Most stories told in the first person by an individual of some erudition.

> abomination within that great gilded frame; stretched out my fingers and touched a *cold and unyielding surface of polished glass*.[83]

This story (which loses much in the re-telling) is an expressionistic reversal of viewpoint on Lovecraft's main theme. The internalised terror of the narrator, realising his true form, is communicated to the reader through the dreamlike movement toward the moment of revelation. The narrator is a figure of pathos and loneliness: desperately seeking knowledge of his true self; hated, feared, and abandoned by mankind because he is ugly and different. In retaliation he rejects normality, acquiring the vestments and behaviour of evil. The work's message is clearly that hatred causes more hatred, the evil is both metaphysical and personal. It is easy to see why the author held this story in little regard;[84] its parallels with his life are clear. Shy and feeling himself to be different due to his unfashionable art, Lovecraft's own rejection of society took the form of seclusion.[85]

Bram Stoker takes society as an accepted good and posits interference by outside forces that are evil due to their form. Jack Finney sees society as being in great danger because of a lack of spirit, made worse by 'evil' outside interference that is part-accepted by the populace at large. Stephen King shows that the evil is inside us, that society is in serious doubt and that the slightest push will cause both the individual and society to change in a degenerative fashion. H. P. Lovecraft bridges the gap between society being good and evil being alien, and the later view that society is ambivalent, and the evil exists in humanity and culture equally. History changes the perceptions of artists: Bram Stoker wrote at the height of 'Victorian civilisation'; H. P. Lovecraft wrote after the collective insanity of World War I and during the Great Depression. Thus, Lovecraft's evil is huge, incomprehensible and yet human, he sees 'wrongness' in *both* society and people. King and Finney see the same problems in a more tolerant and considered fashion. Both the individual *and* society are seen to contain evil that can and will destroy both; the shortcomings of the species are being defined. Whilst the evils of society may be presented in the form of a parable, the evils inside the individual need a more intimate treatment; nothing is real until it can be felt. Stephen

---

[83] H. P. Lovecraft, "The Outsider," in *Weird Tales* (April 1926).
[84] De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography*, p. 150.
[85] James Kneale, "From Beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the Place of Horror," *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13 (2006), p. 109.

King's *The Shining* (1977) documents the destruction of a character from within as the erosion of the façade of a husband and father.

Evil in Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977)

The Shining concerns a family of three; Jack Torrance, Wendy his wife, and their five-year-old son Danny. The family is to spend five months as caretakers in the snow-bound Overlook resort hotel in the Rocky Mountains. The isolation of the family is as total as environment can make it, forty miles off blizzard-covered roads to the nearest town, with the only communication a citizen's band radio. The hotel is a reworking of the image of the Marsten House in *'Salem's Lot*: vast and brooding, an evil place; it is alone, and its influence is thus turned inward upon itself; and onto the archetypal family unit. The hotel for half the year is expensive, densely populated and normal; during its six-month winter/night period the thought emanations of its 'day' have free reign. The lingering emotions, thoughts and behaviour of its guests and staff coalesce, forming over the sixty years of history, to make first an ambiance then a sentient force, a *gestalt* of the total thoughts of its past occupants. The hotel's history is filled with the evils of humanity. Once evil starts, it attracts greater evil, till the hotel has only a veneer of respectability. The driving power of the guests it attracts is purely self-interested, egoistic and greedy; the sentience the hotel becomes is therefore malevolent.[86] The image King uses to describe the place is that of a wasps' nest, a hollow papery construction of hundreds of little chambers, which when shaken causes a drift of tiny dead bodies to falls out. Yet when the nest is alive all the little evils (pains) act in collusion. The power of the hotel is almost entirely telepathic: the power to destroy a character through interfering with its thoughts. Its wrongness effectively drives people mad by magnifying the evil parts of a mind. "This inhuman place makes human monsters."[87] Total egotism and alienation makes of the individual a terror.

The spirit of humanity is represented by King as a 'shining'; a form of telepathic empathy with one's fellow creatures. Mothers always have a 'shine' towards their children, and in some people this connection is stronger than in others. Jack Torrance, a mildly successful author, has a

[86] Sara Martin Alegre, "Nightmares of Childhood: The Child and the Monster in Four Novels by Stephen King," *Atlantis*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2001), p. 108.
[87] Stephen King, *The Shining* (London: New English Library, 1978), p. 137.

shine which he communicates by empathy with his story characters. His son Danny has this power, but immeasurably stronger; at only five he can 'read' stray thoughts, 'see' the past and has a childlike understanding of the future. The hotel wants Danny's spirit so that its power will be increased, so, within this wasps' nest, the hotel sets out to destroy Jack's character to the point where he will kill his loved son.

Stream of consciousness technique is constantly employed to force the reader to identify the least rational word-association of the characters, so that gradually, as though the reader were participating in the 'shining,' underlying patterns emerge. Jack the artist is formed by the pain and sickness of his childhood, goodness and honour make him a complete man. Yet he is a blend of good and evil; the hotel destroys him by changing his attitude to his past formative influences.

> They had been at the supper table. The cane had been standing by his chair. It was a Sunday night, the end of a three-day weekend for Daddy, a weekend which he had boozed away in his usual inimitable style. Roast chicken. Peas. Mashed potatoes. Daddy at the head of the table, his plate heaped high, snoozing or nearly snoozing. His mother passing plates. And suddenly Daddy had been wide awake, his eyes set deeply into their fat eye-sockets, glittering with a kind of stupid, evil petulance. They flickered from one member of the family to the next, and the vein in the centre of his forehead was standing out prominently, always a bad sign. One of his large freckled hands had dropped to the gold knob of his cane, caressing it. He said something about coffee—to this day Jack was sure it had been 'coffee' that his father said. Momma had opened her mouth to answer and then the cane was whickering through the air, smashing against her face. Blood spurted from her nose. Becky screamed. Momma's spectacles dropped into her gravy. The cane had been drawn back, had come down again, this time on top of her head, splitting the scalp. Momma had dropped to the floor. He had been out of his chair and around to where she lay dazed on the carpet, brandishing the cane, moving with a fat man's grotesque speed and agility, little eyes flashing, jowls quivering as he spoke to her just as he had always spoken to his children during outbursts. 'Now. Now by Christ. I guess you'll take your medicine now. Goddam puppy. Whelp. Come on and take your medicine.' The cane had gone up and down on her seven more times before Brett and Mike got hold of him, dragged him away, wrestled the cane out of his hand. Jack (little Jacky now he was little Jacky now dozing and mumbling on a cobwebby camp chair while the furnace roared into hollow life behind him) knew exactly how many blows it had been because every soft *whump* against his mother's body had been

engraved on his memory like the irrational swipe of a chisel on stone. Seven *whumps*. No more, no less. He and Becky crying, unbelieving, looking at their mother's spectacles lying in her mashed potatoes, one cracked lens smeared with gravy. Brett shouting at Daddy from the back hall, telling him he'd kill him if he moved. And Daddy saying over and over: 'Damn little puppy. Damn little whelp. Give me my cane, you damn little pup. Give it to me.' Brett brandishing it hysterically, saying yes, yes, I'll give it to you, just you move a little bit and I'll give you *plenty*. Momma getting slowly to her feet, dazed, her face already puffed and swelling like an old tire with too much air in it, bleeding in four or five different places, and she had said a terrible thing, perhaps the only thing Momma had ever said which Jacky could recall word for word: 'Who's got the newspaper? Your daddy wants the funnies. Is it raining yet?' And then she sank to her knees again, her hair hanging in her puffed and bleeding face. Mike calling the doctor, babbling into the phone. Could he come right away? It was their mother. No, he couldn't say what the trouble was, not over a party line he couldn't. Just *come*. The doctor came and took Momma away to the hospital where Daddy had worked all his adult life. Daddy, sobered up some (or perhaps only with the stupid cunning of any hard-pressed animal), told the doctor she had fallen downstairs. There was blood on the tablecloth because he had tried to wipe her dear face with it. Had her glasses flown all the way through the living room into the dining room to land in her mashed potatoes and gravy? The doctor asked with a kind of horrid, grinning sarcasm. Is that what happened Mark? I have heard of folks who can get a radio station on their gold fillings and I have seen a man get shot between the eyes and live to tell about it, but that is a new one on me … Four days later Brett quit his job in the mill and joined the Army, Jack had always felt it was not just the sudden and irrational beating his father had administered at the dinner table but the fact that, in the hospital, their mother had corroborated their father's story while holding the hand of the parish priest. Revolted, Brett had left them to whatever might come. He had been killed in Dong Ho province in 1965, the year when Jack Torrance, undergraduate, had joined the active college agitation to end the war. He had waved his brother's bloody shirt at rallies that were increasingly well attended, but it was not Brett's face that hung before his eyes when he spoke—it was the face of his mother's dazed, uncomprehending face, his mother saying: 'Who's for the newspaper?'[88]

[88] King, *The Shining*, pp. 212-213.

As Jack grows up his relationship to horror is expressed through a drinking problem (now given up but still painful) and his writing. The hotel destroys his relationship to his past, until eventually the hotel's view of reality is superimposed upon his own. His relationship with his parents is projected into his own future, destroying his love for his wife and son. Jack is forced into a (heavily biased) reappraisal of himself.

When other people are viewed as worthless, when the ego is questioned man becomes, slowly, a monster. Jack starts to come adrift. His self-interest is becoming extreme, he now re-enacts the sins of his father on his own family, the horror is self-perpetuating.

> 'Now. Now, by Christ,' he said, grinning. He kicked the hassock out of the way. 'I guess you'll take your medicine now.'
>
> The mallet whickered down. Wendy rolled to her left, her robe tangling above her knees… 'Bitch,' he said through his grin, and began to come after her. 'You stinking bitch, I guess you'll get what's coming to you. I guess you will.'
>
> She heard the mallet whistle through the air and then agony exploded on her right side as the mallet-head took her just below the line of her breasts, breaking two ribs. She fell forward on the steps and new agony ripped her as she struck on the wounded side.[89]

Recent studies in social psychology showing that mistreated children tend to repeat upon their families the worst features of their upbringing are here given credence. Jack's father is 'strong' and violence, his mother 'weak' and quiet, and in his own mind Jack sees himself as having emulated his father in a choice of mate; he should therefore mimic his father's ideals of familial discipline. He in his egotistical appraisal of the situation miscalculates badly, as he forgets the power of good.

He has missed the fact that his wife and child not only love him but are people in their own right, and not his possessions. His 'weak' mate fights back, crippling him, his son delays him long enough for the hotel's boiler to explode, and cleanse the building by fire. Jack's hatred is powerful and destructive, but it fails: Danny and Wendy survive to live without his spurious 'discipline', to make their own decisions. Jack's alcoholic father produced a son capable of love and happiness, as well as hatred. While Danny will undoubtedly be affected by his experience, he must live his own life with responsibility.[90] King's message may be seen at base as

[89] King, *The Shining*, p. 371.

optimistic; 'the shine' Danny has lets him see good as well as bad. As Jack made his decisions, so must Danny, who *knows* that his father was effectively forced into hatred by the hotel. The image the hotel keeps implanting in the minds of both father and son is spurious: the clock where little doll figures circuit on the hour, trapped on steel rails is compelling; time repeats, but dolls are dolls, where people have the ability to change their own destinies. Jack almost succeeded, by abandoning drinking and finding love. It is up to Danny to cast off the influence of evil.

King shows us the battle with evil on the part of the individual from the inside. Jack and Wendy Torrance have much in common with the ideal of 'everyman'; they are human. The hotel plays the role of a greedy, amoral society, a place where many choose to abrogate feelings, to live without love, to hurt, to cheat and kill. The hotel's old guests have made their choice. Their attempts to ensnare the Torrances fail, since it is an individual decision to choose how to live. The wasps' nest of the Overlook destroys itself in fire, simply because it was paying too much attention to its ambition (Jack killing Danny), and not enough to its own foundations. Jack, too, chooses ambition and dies. To live within society, love for one's fellow human is essential; individualistic cheating and self-serving 'for society' results in doom. King's final message is clear. Evil is within us, about us, and around us, but so is good. Evil will destroy us at our foundations—if allowed to—it is our decision. That is why we are human.

Conclusion

The concept of 'evil' is used to describe much of life: that which kills us, saps our lives, destroys the places we live, that which takes love from us. In history evil has been seen as totally outside a society in another area of the globe. *Dracula* frightened the Victorians. This fear has been understood and catalogued as xenophobia, to quote *'Salem's Lot's* Susan Norton:

> She had always consciously or unconsciously formed fear into a simple equation; fears = unknown. And to solve the equation, one simply reduced the problem to algebraic terms, this; unknown = creaky board (or whatever), creaky board = nothing to be afraid of. In the modern world all terrors could be gutted by the simply use of the transitive axiom of equality.[91]

---

[90] Danny's adult life is the subject of a later novel by Stephen King, *Doctor Sleep* (New York: Scribner, 2013).

Once understood the fear becomes less horrible. But the seeds of doubt as to whether *all* the evil is outside society is present in *Dracula*.

The world in which Lovecraft wrote was immeasurably older in woes, the nature of man doubted in 'rightness' of his society. His small place in the cosmos is seen and "some fears were larger than comprehension, apocalyptic and nearly paralyzing. This equation was insoluble. The act of moving forward at all became heroism."[92] The horror Lovecraft saw in the individual, the heavens, and human culture is twenty years more ingrained into common thought in the Santa Mira of Jack Finney. Yet in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* the worry is that humans are apathetic in their state of luxury: not conscious enough of their own uniqueness to fight for those things that are precious.

This terror grows for another twenty years; Stephen King then intimates that humanity is so individually wrapped up in itself that nothing else matters. He shows that now people are so actively apathetic they seek the loss of spirit, since this death is less hard and less painful than 'normal existence.' Yet he also shows that the evil inside the individual, the evil he or she is born with, can be avoided by the individual and consequently the society. He shows that all is not hopeless. We must lay ourselves open to terrors in order to understand them; without harm. We must grow up, and face our fears, which are not really so frightening:

> Before drifting away entirely, he found himself reflecting-not for the first time-on the peculiarity of adults. They took laxatives, liquor, or sleeping pills to drive away their terrors so that sleep would come, and their terrors were so tame and domestic: the job, the money, what the teacher will think if I can't get Jennie nicer clothes, does my wife still love me, who are my friends. They were pallid compared to the fears every child lies cheek and jowl within his dark bed, with no one to confess to in hope of perfect understanding but another child. There is no group therapy or psychiatry or community social services for the child who must cope with the thing under the bed or in the cellar every night, the thing which leers and capers and threatens just beyond the point where vision will reach. The same lonely battle must be fought night after night and the only cure is the eventual ossification of the imaginary faculties, and this is called adulthood.[93]

---

[91] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 293.
[92] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 293
[93] King, *'Salem's Lot*, p. 253.