

Gothic Elements in Stephan King's *Pet Semetary*

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Abstract

Supernatural horror evokes dead and cosmic fear in readers, and they are the main features of gothic tradition. In the novel *Pet Semetary* there are characters which seeks for eternal happiness, having an urge for revengeand split personality. Throughout the novel, what he thinks in his mind often contradicts with what he does. In the case of *PS*, it is a story of a couple who moves to a new home in Maine, looking for a perfect oppportunity to start their life and to raise their children. Maine is the home of Stephen King and also setting for much of his fiction, including *PS*. Most of the aspects present in the novel whether it evokes horror or terror is actually based on real events. King is not using Native American theme as a device to introduce the supernatural, but he brings Native American Land into the narrative. The desire to create something concrete and unchanging is seen in *Pet Semetary*.

Stephen King's novel *Pet Semetary* is considered as one of the best horror novels.

Some of the features of Gothic tradition are a construction like a cathedral that has a style of building design,a concept that deals with horror and terror, and a style of writing where letters are very ornate.The setting also contributes to the emotional stimuli required to achieve the sublime effect.According to Carole Oates, "Gothicism, whatever it is, is not a literary tradition so much as a fairly realistic assessment of modern life"(43).

The emotions depression and sadness represent gothic the best. Generally, gothic can be considered as an exaggeration of death and acknowledgement about darker side of life. Suspense becomes a powerful tactic in gothic stories as well as with many other kinds of literature. The tension that we feel when the character goes into the attic, down into the basement, or just into the abandoned house is partially as a result of suspense.

In the novel, *Pet Semetary (PS)* King introduces a series of characters whose action and eventual fate are truly horrifying, but they are placed in a logically conflicting fictional world, a universe so supernaturally overbearing that they have no choice in the matter. Most of the gothic text seems to question the central idea of the society, its rules and laws. What we witness in the works of King is not the real world issues, but the imaginary, popular tradition over that of scientific rationalism.

When *PS* is read, people are pulled deep in the midst of a gothic universe, wherein the premonition is excelled over reason, where the drama should be taken seriously and where ghosts claim more authority than scientists. The death of Victor Pascow at Louis medical office becomes the ignition for the series of events that interviews his life and makes it a living hell:

He was a young man approximately twenty, and it took Louis less than three seconds to make the only diagnosis that mattered: the young man was going to die. Half of his head was crushed. His neck had been broken. One collarbone jutted from his swelled and twisted right shoulder. From his head, blood and a yellow pussy fluid seeped sluggishly into the carpet. Louis could see the man's brain, whitish gray and pulsing through a shattered section of the skull. It was like

looking through a broken window. The incursion was perhaps five centimetres wide; if he had a baby in his skull, he could have almost birthed it, like Zeus delivering from his forehead. (King 70)

Victor Pascow becomes an active dead voice in the novel as he surfaces many times in the dreams of Louis and Ellie. Before he dies, he issues a warning. “in the sematary”. He begins but falters and then eventually says “it’s not the real sematary” (King 73-74). Later that night, Pascow visited Louis again

Something woke him up much later, a crash in bed, Loud enough to cause him to stir up wondering if Ellie had fallen on the floor. Then the moon sailed out from behind the cloud, flooding the room with cold white light and he saw victor Pascow standing in the doorway, he stood there with his head grotesquely bashed in behind the left temple. The blood had dried oh his face in maroon strips like Indian War-paints. His collarbone jutted whitely. He was grinning. ‘Come on Doctor’, Pascow said. ‘We got places to go’. The dream had been a remarkable reality. It was so real that he would not follow Pascow until Pascow had turned and begun to go back down the stairs. Louis followed the jogging shorts, as maroon in the light as the dried blood on Pascow’s face(King 85).

His appearance is noteworthy, the readers are tempted to think of him as a representative of obsolete form of religion. Inside his new house, creed experiences a “premonition of horror”(King 35).

Louis Creed being a doctor, was also a family man which forced him to become more exposed to the evil forces around him. Likewise Stephen King set his stories on the contemporary society twisting the normal into abnormal, thus displacing the principal motifs of horror so as to adapt them to the present scenario. There most of his stories are stationed in American Middle class outskirts and portrayed the common everyday life of a family.

In *PS* ancient supernatural forces toy with the Creeds family, together with the old family of the Crandall's. Throughout the novel the readers are made to confront various unreal, ghostly characters which creates horror and make us believe that they are also roaming around us and also to the fact that they are real. Before Pascoe's death he utters that "It's not the real Sematary" (King 73) thus the sematary becomes a real symbol of fear in the novel. The misspelled 'Sematary' for 'Cemetery' itself created deadly atmosphere. The description of the sematary and the path made the readers mind filled with a sense of suspense.

The Crandall's play is an important part in the novel as to Jud and Norma his wife is considered as a social misfit, he gets started as a father- figure to Dr. Louis Creed, but he ends up teaching him that kind of forbidden knowledge, the mysteries of the occult. It is Jud who takes them on the walk in the woods behind their home to the sematary and thus opens the door to the nefarious secret in the first place. When Jud asks "Do you know where you are?" (King 33) the readers are felt as though they are standing with them in the sematary. Jud, being a father figure can also be treated as a bad omen as he is the one who sow seeds of destruction into the Creeds family. The author discloses the mysteries behind the 'Micmac Burial Ground' through the words of Jud.

Jud smiled a little. The Micmacs believed this hill was a magic place, and they buried their dead here, away from everything else other tribes stayed clear of it- the Penobscots said these woods were full of ghosts. Later on the fur trappers started saying pretty much the same thing. I suppose some of them saw the foo-fire in the Little God Swamp and thought they were seeing ghosts. Later on, not even the Micmac's themselves would not come here. One of them claimed he saw a wendigo.(King 44)

Louis Creed who was a responsible family man in the beginning of the novel turned to be a man full of secrets. In the opening chapters we see him sharing even little secrets with his wife and telling her all about his days in the college, but as time passes he becomes more and more introvert by planning on resurrected first his pet cat, then his son and wife.

When the family cat was killed by one of the trucks, creed responds irrationally. The speeding sound of the truck itself creates a blazing sound of horror and people are convinced of the upcoming events of catastrophe that's going to strike the family. Ignoring the real warning he considers resurrecting Church. The death of Pascow, his dreams, Pascow's warning about sematary, Jud's explanation of burial ground, the death of church all leads his rational mind to dive deep into darkness.Creed buries him in the Micmac burial ground and the cat does indeed comes back alive next day.

It was around one o'clock that afternoon when Church came back like the cat in the nursery rhyme. Louis went to church and picked the cat up. He probed gently into the heavy ruft of fur at Church's neck,

remembering the sick, boneless way church's head had swiveled on his broken neck the night before. He felt nothing now but good muscles and tendon. What he saw there caused him to drop the cat on the grass quickly and to cover his face with one hand, his eyes shut. There were dried blood caked on Church's muzzle and caught in his ling whiskers were two tiny shreds of green plastics. Bits of Hefty Bag.(King 162)

Unlike the real Church who was a very calm and lovable cat, the resurrected one starts to cause problems, moreover he was loathsome and stinks of sour earth, and made disgusting sound. The resurrected Church took up the hobby of killing with much delight than he had ever done before, but Louis makes sure than nobody ever saw this murders.

The entire second half of the novel, after Gage's death started with the sentence, "It's probably wrong to believe there can be any limit to the horror which human mind can experience"(King 225), which gives the readers the hint that events are turning from bad to worse. King explicitly discusses the consequences of people's refusal to take responsibility for their actions. Creed as a representative of medicine has acquired the ultimate skill that is infusing life on dead material and is not afraid to use it, thus he transforms from rationalist to madman.

As a father Gage's death is a sign of failure to protect his son from harm. But it leads him to think whether he will be able to protect his family away from harm. Louis' insane behaviour springs from his mental distress because he cares about his family. But king's constant references to Louis's patience with the children's whims and Rachel's depressive mind shows that the life of this sensible, sensitive man might be easier if only the children are less difficult to handle or he is less caring. Louis

deeply felt grief throws him off balance, because he is already too stressed by the daily difficulties of family life. The reader feels compelled to sympathise with Louis in his bereavement and to forgive him for the horrific manipulation of Gage's and Rachel's bodies.

King tries to evoke the deep fears on the mind of readers when Louis was encountered by the mythical creature Wendigo. Louis mind becomes more and more irrational. Gage's death alone was horrible enough of its own but ends up triggering disasters both supernatural and mundane. While in Chicago visiting her grandparents and presumably under influence of pascow, Ellie dreams the truth about Church that he had been killed. Back in Ludlow, after Gage's death, she dreams that Creed too will die. On the plane trip back to her grandparents after the funeral, she dreams of Gage coming back and retrieving a scalpel from his father's medicine bag. Pascow personally visits her in dreams to warn her that her father is in danger. But pascow's warnings have a tragic consequence. Because of Ellie's dreams, Rachel decides to make a trip to Ludlow to check on her husband. Ellie and Pascow send Rachel to a rather gruesome death. Ellie starts having premonitions and Rachel believes her which makes her go back to Maine. "Ellie cried over and over again: it's Gage! Mommy! It's Gage! It's Gage! It's Gage! It's Gage! Gage is alive! Gage has got a knife from Daddy's Bag! Don't let him get me! Don't let him get daddy!" (King 350)

The burying ground resurrects Gage but in a new form Gage is controlled by the Wendigo's evil spirit. Gage goes on a killing spree, committing the ultimate atrocity, killing and cannibalising his own mother and their neighbour Jud Crandall. He returns as a demonic shadow of his former self, able to talk like an adult. Gage kills Jud first by using the scapel down his throat.

Gage Creed came in, dressed in his burial suit. Moss was growing on the shoulders and on lapels. Gage Creed came in, dressed in his burial suit. Moss was growing on the shoulders and on lapels. Moss has fouled his white shirt. One eye had gone to the wall; it stared off into space with a terrible concentration. The other was fixed on Jud with glittery, blank intensity. 'Hello Jud'; Gage piped in a babyish but perfectly understandable voice. 'I've come to send your rotten, sinking old soul straight to hell'. The Scapel came down again. And again. And again. (King 433)

One of the things that ties tighter families, King tells us in *PS*, is nothing other than fear and avoidance of death. However in the flash of the novel, the true horror of death, its tedious character and its ordinariness, is lost, and that defeats King's stated purpose in writing the novel. He tells Douglas Winter that he "had never had to deal with the consequences of death on a rational level"(King 10). The novel was meant to be such a piece, but very quickly the novel ceased to be an investigation of death and funerals. King's novel does not deal with death. It deals with a fear which replaces the fear of death. Such a replacement is a defence mechanism, and that is probably why King's novel is so popular and why the ideas that form the basis for that novel are so persistent in folk and popular culture.

When taking into account the novel *PS*, is a horror thriller where supernatural forces plays an important part. The strongest and inmate human emotion is horror, fear that leads to the formation of God, Faith and Religion.

Pet Sematary operates in the Gothic level in order to create horror in the minds of the reader. The horror does not always allow a happy ending, where the good conquers evil, but it gives us an insight into what could happen if the control was taken by negative forces. We all read horror novels for different reasons, some want to experience what they are not allowed in real life, some want to escape from reality, some may be testing their mind and character, some may be trying to increase their tolerance to fright and fear to avoid panic in real situations. However there will be a reason, horror helps us to discover what might be hidden in the deepest corners of our soul and mind which are hard to understand.

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