1997

In Love with the Boogeyman: Compulsion Desire and Heisenbergian Literary Uncertainty in Stephen King's "Pet Cemetary"

Melodi S. Sherman

The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.
Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/9329

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature **

Yes, I grant permission [ ]
No, I do not grant permission [ ]

Author's Signature [ ]

Date 5-14-97

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.
IN LOVE WITH THE BOOGEYMAN:
Compulsion, Desire, and Heisenbergian Literary Uncertainty

In Stephen King's Pet Sematary

by
Melodi S. Sherman
B.A. Rocky Mountain College, 1988

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Art
The University of Montana
1997

Approved by:

Chairperson
Dean, Graduate School

5-15-97
Date
In Love With The Boogeyman: Compulsion, Desire, and Heisenbergian Literary Uncertainty in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (82 pp.)

Chairperson: Gerry Brenner

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle applied to literary criticism justifies a wide variation of possible interpretations. One such possible interpretation of this particular text indicts the central character, Louis Creed, as the cannibalistic antagonist of the novel.

A close reading of the text, combined with a primarily Freudian critical approach, reveals evidence to support the conclusion that this novel meets five stringent criteria as a horror novel. The criteria are as follows: the primary goal of the text is to horrify the reader, the text contains a nightmarish antagonist, dire consequences result from the protagonist's failure to overcome the antagonist, the text directly threatens the reader, and the text exploits cultural taboos to manipulate the reader into feeling the specific emotion of horror.

The text distills several themes common to Stephen King's canon of work into their purest form, resulting in a novel simultaneously representative of King's body of writing, and comparable to other classic fiction of the horror genre. *Pet Sematary*, representative of King's fiction, follows a literary precedent set by works like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Stoker's *Dracula*, Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw."
CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Heisenberg, Text, and Taboos 3
   Part I: History and Background of the Text 3
   Part II: An Overview of Pet Sematary 6
   Part III: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle In a Literary Context 10
   Part IV: A Definition of the Horror Genre 17

Chapter Two: The Text of Nightmares 23

Chapter Three: "God made superfluous by scientific necromancy." 30

Chapter Four: Text Meets Template 41
   Part I: The Primary Goal of the Text 41
   Part II: The Antagonist 44
   Part III: The Consequences 54
   Part IV: Direct Threat to the Reader 60
   Part V: Exploitation of That Which Is Taboo 62

Chapter Five: Pet Sematary as Oral/Anal Exploration 67

Conclusion 73

Notes 79

Works Cited 80

Appendix of Related Works 82
INTRODUCTION:

In the following chapters, I examine *Pet Sematary*, by Stephen King. This novel displays ample literary merit for a reader to approach it as "literature" by virtue of the cultural reflection it provides and the evidence of the intertextual influence of literary works by writers such as Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Edgar Allan Poe—each of whom contributed to the literary template that continues to define contemporary horror fiction in general, and this novel in particular.1 The novel still enjoys enough popularity to suggest that the text remains relevant to its readers. The text's recurring themes of forbidden emotions, death, and resurrection resonate with many readers' experiences, desires, and fears; as a result, reading *Pet Sematary* is a powerful—and horrifying—experience.

My decision to discuss only one novel results from the complexity of the diverse issues and profound implications within this text, which deserve direct and prolonged attention. A perfunctory examination for the purposes of brevity cannot do justice to this novel. Certainly, literary critics have set a precedent justifying this decision: entire books have been written to examine a single novel, play, or other solitary literary work. I will include in my examination of this text cursory mention of other texts for the purpose of illustrating the influence they exert on this particular novel. *Pet Sematary*, however, remains the primary focus of this discussion.

*Pet Sematary* is both profound and interesting, in addition to providing the obligatory sensational gore and obvious departure from realism expected from horror
fiction. While this text is usually classified as "horror fiction," that particular description serves little purpose except to inform a shopper in which section of a bookstore the novel will probably be found. What the word "horror" means in conversation may seem fairly clear, but when used to classify a genre of fiction, the term gains connotations and ambiguities; therefore, I provide a clear definition for the term "horror" as applied to a specific genre of fiction.

To begin with, I introduce the novel and briefly discuss its history. My particular literary approach combines primarily Freudian interpretations with whatever other interpretive strategies seem beneficial, resulting in an unholy polygamy of literary methods. I explicate my rationale for this specific literary method, then provide the reader with a working definition of "horror" as a genre, provide specific criteria within that definition, then demonstrate how Pet Sematary fulfills the requirements for fiction classified as horror, in terms of each of those criterion. Finally, I engage my reader in a discussion of the major themes, symbols, and dynamics among characters, and hopefully reveal the literary value of this text during the course of the entire discussion.
Pet Sematary apparently was originally conceived and developed as a result of several fairly traumatic events that occurred in Stephen King's life. George Beahm, in The Stephen King Story, relates that while writing Pet Sematary, King was living near a road much like that described in the book. King's daughter's cat, Smucky, was killed in the road and buried in an actual pet cemetery maintained by the neighborhood children (spelled "Pets Sematary" on the sign made by the children) behind the house King and his family were occupying at the time. King stated that his instinct was to bury the animal in secret, and not tell his daughter what had happened, but his wife insisted that they should be honest with the child (Beahm 84).

King's concern for his son, who had recently been tentatively diagnosed as hydrocephalic, also appears in Pet Sematary (Winter 130). Douglas Winter, in his book Stephen King: The Art of Darkness notes that King completed his first draft of the novel in 1979, and decided not to publish it, until a later contract dispute with his publisher. King reportedly said of the novel, "[The] first time I had ever been asked the question: 'Did you ever write anything too horrible to be published?' [This] book came immediately to mind . . . I thought it was a nasty book--I still think that it is a nasty book" (Winter 131).

Pet Sematary disturbs readers. Inevitably, during the course of writing this thesis, the subject of the novel would arise in casual conversation, and the universal reaction of
my friends and acquaintances—even the Stephen King enthusiasts—was a shudder, and a
comment to the effect of, "Brrr, Pet Sematary? That's the scariest book I've ever read! (or
scariest movie ever seen)" In fact, the Publishers Weekly review quoted on the back
cover of this paperback edition calls the novel "the most frightening book Stephen King
has ever written."

I discovered that many people who had neither read the novel nor seen the film
were familiar with some of the story, or at least the title. This fact suggests to me that this
book struck a nerve on a deep level within our culture—much like Blatty's The Exorcist,
Shelley's Frankenstein, or Stoker's Dracula. Whether or not this novel will prove as
enduring as either Shelley's or Stoker's works remains to be seen, of course.

Pet Sematary first appeared in 1984, and sold 657,000 copies during the first year
(Beahm 108). I am working from the 32nd printing of the novel. The book is still in
print, in both hardback and paperback, now thirteen years after its original publication.

King reportedly told Winter:

The book started off as a lark, but it didn't finish up that way. It
stopped being a lark when I realized that the kid would have to die. . .
And I have always shied away from the entire funeral process—the
aftermath of death. The funeral parlors, the burial, the grief, and, particu-
larly where you are dealing with the death of a healthy child, the guilt--
the feeling that you are somehow at fault. And for me, it was like looking
through a window into something that could be. . .

So it hurts me to talk about it; it hurts me to think about it. Pet
Sematary is the one book that I haven't reread—I never want to go back there again, because it is a real cemetery. (131-32)

Both Winter and Beahm note that King did not assist the publisher in the promotion of the novel. In spite of King's well-advertised misgivings about the novel—or perhaps because of them—the book sold well. Pet Sematary has developed a reputation as the book that scared even Stephen King. The film version of Pet Sematary was released in April of 1989 with the screenplay credited to King. Apparently, the book was not quite so painful that King refused to sell the movie rights, write the script, and make a cameo appearance as the officiating priest at a funeral.²

Little published criticism on Pet Sematary exists. During my research for this project, I found articles about The Stand, Misery, the film version of The Shining (directed by Stanley Kubrick,) and a rather impressive list of books about King himself, (although there is still no biography of King.) King's canon of fiction seems to present a body of work just recently being explored in an academic context. The criticism that I have found regarding Pet Sematary exists primarily as a single chapter in Douglas Winter's Stephen King: The Art of Darkness, and a few scattered references in George Beahm's The Stephen King Story: A Literary Profile.

Winter's interpretation of the text is decidedly cautious, and seldom probes beyond a paraphrasing of the narrative events. Beahm offers little information besides historical background. King himself has said little about the novel. Therefore, I hope to generate a controversial and interesting interpretation of the text, and engage my own readers in an unprecedented exploration of King's Pet Sematary.
Part II: An Overview of *Pet Sematary*

Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* begins when Louis Creed, his wife Rachel, and their two children, move to Maine from Chicago after Creed accepts a job as a doctor on a local college campus. In the novel's opening scene, Creed and his family are tired and short-tempered with one another after being confined together in the car for several hours. Shortly after the family arrives at the house which Louis Creed has purchased, the text introduces another central character, alluded to in the opening sentence of the text, Jud Crandall. Jud and his wife Norma live across the road from the Creed's new home.

A few weeks after the Creeds' arrival, Jud takes them on a tour of the trail that leads into the woods behind their new home. The trail leads to the "pet sematary" where generations of local children have buried family pets. In fact, Jud tells the Creeds, he once buried a dog there, and he shows them the grave marker he carved and erected, the words now worn away. Louis Creed notices what seems like a barrier constructed of fallen deadwood, between the "pet sematary" and the wilderness that lies beyond it, but at that time does not go beyond the barrier.

The visit to the pet cemetery prompts Creed's daughter, Ellie, to question Creed about death. Ellie frets that Church, her cat, will someday die. Louis Creed's discussion with his daughter infuriates Rachel, who argues that death should be hidden from children. Louis points out that Church might very well die, whether from some feline disease, or because their house sits next to a busy road notorious for the premature death of various pets. The discussion ends bitterly when Rachel storms off to bed. The next several days
are marked with tension between Creed and Rachel, resolved only when Louis finally makes an appointment to have the cat neutered in the hopes that Church will stay closer to the house.

The Creed family settles into their new home, and Creed's new job begins on an ominous note: the first day of the semester, a student is struck by a car and dies in the campus infirmary, after whispering a few cryptic words to Creed regarding the "pet sematary." The corpse of the student appears to Creed that night in what may or may not be a dream. Pascow takes Creed again to the pet cemetery, shows him the deadfall, which Creed sees as bones. Pascow then warns him of tremendous danger beyond the deadfall barrier. Louis Creed wakes the next morning with his feet covered in the mud and pine needles of the trail to the pet cemetery. Creed hides his dream and the evidence of his nocturnal ramble from Rachel. He later returns to the pet cemetery and attempts to climb the deadfall, but he gives up when the uncertain footing makes the climb seem too dangerous to continue.

Creed takes his daughter trick-or-treating on Halloween night, and their first stop is the Crandall house, across the road. Jud confides to Creed that Norma refuses to see her doctor. As if in confirmation of Jud's concern, Ellie screams from the next room that something is wrong with Norma. Jud's wife has fallen, and is apparently having a heart attack. Louis Creed intervenes, performs CPR, and perhaps saves Norma's life. This event earns Jud's gratitude, and he tells Louis, "When you need a favor, Louis, you see me first" (110).

Over Thanksgiving weekend, Jud Crandall finds the Creed family cat dead,
apparently struck by a passing vehicle. Jud leads Creed over the deadfall—with magical ease—to an ancient burial ground beyond the pet cemetery. The burial ground is infamous to a few of the local residents for its inexplicable ability to revivify the dead, but Jud does not explain that fact to Creed until after the two men bury the dead cat, and the next day it returns. Jud tells Louis that he decided to take Creed to the burial ground to inter the cat, because he owed Louis a favor for saving Norma's life. Jud knew about Ellie's anxieties regarding death, and believed that the resurrected cat could somehow let Ellie know that "sometimes dead is better" (166). The resurrected cat seems fundamentally changed: it stinks, it moves awkwardly, it seems more vicious. The family adjusts to the cat's differences, however. The lesson Jud hoped to teach Ellie apparently successful, because Ellie confides to Louis, "if he [Church] died now, I could take it" (200). Life for the Creeds continues uneventfully until Jud's wife, Norma, dies.

Norma's death prompts Rachel to finally confess to Creed the root of her phobia about death: Rachel's sister, Zelda, had spinal meningitis, and died a gruesome death when Rachel was eight years old, and she still feels guilty and responsible. Rachel was alone with her sister—trying to ignore Zelda's constant screams, waiting for the proper time to give her more painkillers—when Zelda choked to death on her tongue. Rachel, as a child, feared that her resentment and hatred of her sister caused her death. She remains convinced of her culpability, on an unconscious level, and believes herself a murderer.

The narrative events approach a climax when Creed's son, Gage, is killed in the road by a passing truck. Creed decides to bring the child back to life by means of the ancient burial ground, even though the entire family now loathes the cat. Gage, like the
cat, returns not quite himself, but as something loathsome. The reanimated child proceeds to stab his mother to death with a scalpel stolen from Creed’s medical satchel, before Creed dispatches him with two hypodermic syringes full of morphine. Creed then inexplicably decides to take Rachel’s still-warm corpse to the burial ground. Creed buries his wife and the novel ends with Rachel’s return from the grave.
Part III: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle In a Literary Context

For the sake of clarity, a brief discussion of the relationship between ideology and literary criticism is necessary. Literature provides—among other things—vicarious experience, intellectual escapism, esthetic pleasure, emotional entertainment, cathartic release, cultural reflection, and just plain food for thought. The act of reading literature demands a level of involvement and participation from the reader. For a reader to fully experience the text, he or she needs to go beyond the surface of that text. An active, involved reader must "read into" the actual words. The value of the text beneath those words, the subtext, depends upon the reader's own set of experiences and ideologies. Even when the reader does not consciously and deliberately approach a text with an agenda, that reader cannot abandon his or her entire world view when approaching a text. This is not to say that the text cannot affect that reader's world view. In fact, a text offers a window into the experience and world view of the author, or of a cultural milieu or historical period quite different that the reader's own. Reading a text is an experience in itself, then. That experience can potentially alter the reader, even as that reader's imposed beliefs and experiences alter the meaning of the text. The text, then, provides context for a dynamic relationship, shaped by both author and reader. The act of reading can be a fluid and complicated experience. For this purpose, students of literature learn specific critical methods.

Some readers prefer specific critical methods. Once such an individual determines that Freudian criticism works well with the texts he or she reads, for example, that reader
rarely turns to other critical approaches. Similarly, if a reader prefers Jungian criticism, he or she is unlikely to use a Freudian approach, even if the specific text would be better served by such a change. The tendency to favor a specific critical approach, and neglect all other literary traditions, blinds the reader. Ideally, literary criticism provides tools for the reader to use as a frame of reference suited to the text itself, and to the motive for the interpretation, as well as the comfort of that reader.

In 1927 physicist Werner Heisenberg discovered the principle of indeterminism—also called the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. The Oxford Press Dictionary of Physics defines it as "The principle that it is not possible to know with unlimited accuracy both the position and momentum of [an atomic] particle." The same reference source further explains, "An explanation of the uncertainty is that in order to locate a particle exactly, an observer must be able to bounce off it a photon of radiation; this act of location itself alters the position of the particle in an unpredictable way" (446).

A brief mention of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle occurred in a recent comic book. A character in Solar, Man of the Atom explains the application of the uncertainty principle to an entity who observed the beginning of creation at the quantum level, "Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that the act of observance changes the properties of that observed—according to the intentions of the experimenter"(36). The comic-book explanation, while admittedly lacking authoritative technical profundity, implies interesting ramifications: the act of observation skews the results depending on the actions, motives, and ideology of the observer. The observer alters the observed.

Aside from the startling presence of such an esoteric principle of physics finding its
way into a comic book, the more general context into which popular culture has translated Heisenberg's uncertainty principle suggests there is no such thing as complete objectivity—an interesting premise, regardless of its relative validity. Obviously, literary criticism and quantum physics are entirely different disciplines. However, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle translates well into the problem of how to study literature. Beginning with the premise that there is no such thing as objectivity, a discussion of literary criticism might threaten to descend into relativistic chaos. However—even taking for granted that completely objective, uninvolved observation is impossible—to conclude that any observation must by definition be completely subjective would be incorrect. The key premise—that different actions and motives, stemming from the ideology of the observer, affect the results in various ways—indicates that greater and lesser degrees of "truth" may be discerned from those observations, depending on the accepted standards or definition of truth.

Any given critical approach to a text—e.g., Freudian, Deconstructionist, Feminist, etc.—determines, in varying degrees, the resulting interpretation of the text. The reader's understanding of the chosen critical approach largely determines his or her level of ability as a literary critic. If the reader thoroughly understands his or her chosen critical method, then the interpretation of the text reflects that knowledge. If the reader does not thoroughly understand the chosen critical approach, then the rendered interpretation reveals degrees of confusion. Literary criticism provides the reader with tools to disassemble the text, examine its components, and reflect the text against the reader's own experiences, ideologies, knowledge, and training in literary methods. Once the reader
analyzes the text, his or her literary approach provides the vocabulary and the framework to reassemble and then to communicate the resulting interpretation.

Arguably, a reader can understand and appreciate a text without the application of a specific critical method; therefore, any specific critical approach to a text must provide the reader with insight into the text otherwise unavailable to that reader, given his or her individual set of experiences and knowledge. The value of applied literary criticism exists in direct proportion to the reader's ability to use that specific critical method to interpret a text against a frame of reference otherwise outside of that reader's own experience. A specific critical approach to a text provides a template for the reader to follow.

Complications occur in the relationship between the reader and his or her chosen critical approach, because the reader must first interpret that specific critical method. For example, Sigmund Freud generated a number of theories regarding human behavior. Freud's theories have been translated, resulting in greater or lesser degrees of variation from his original meaning. The reader who would apply Freudian theories to literary criticism, assuming that reader cannot translate German, must then interpret a translation of Freud's original theories. The resulting approach, "Freudian criticism," is at least two steps removed from Freud's original text. The first step away from the original writing occurs during the translator's necessary act of interpretation to choose equivalent words and phrases, and the second occurs when the reader then interprets the results of the translator's labors. Translation and interpretation are not synonyms, but the two processes are closely related, interpretation being an integral part of translation. The application of "Freudian criticism" then becomes flavored by individual ideologies and interpretations;
therefore, the results of one reader's application of Freudian criticism on a given text may vary dramatically from another reader's results using the same critical approach to the same text. Subjective observation, then, defines the nature of literary criticism. The relationship between a reader and a pre-defined critical approach exists as a primary but complex relationship between reader and text. The reader reflects his or her interaction with other texts, literary as well as cultural or experiential texts, to his or her primary relationship with that critical method.

If a specific critical approach serves as a useful frame of reference with which to interpret a text, then the reader consciously chooses an approach that will serve most effectively in that capacity. The reader must define the task before he or she can choose the tool most appropriate to that task. To extend the metaphor of criticism as a tool, either a wrench or a hammer may be used to drive a nail—but the hammer will prove more efficient. Different critical methods are appropriate for interpreting different texts, and similarly, different critical methods will result in different interpretations of the same text.

A reader who performs Freudian critical approach to *Pet Sematary*, with a feminist critical agenda for his or her interpretation, will reach an entirely different, although perhaps complementary, set of conclusions about the significance of events in the text than a reader using a Freudian critical approach without that feminist agenda. The two resulting interpretations possess equal validity in terms of "truth"—that is, both are interpretations and neither interpretation is more inherently "true" than the other. The reader must make an arbitrary and subjective choice regarding which critical approach is more valuable—depending upon what the reader desires to learn from the text, or set of texts; what he or
she wishes to communicate; and upon the nature of that text, or set of texts. Choosing a specific critical approach also limits the interpretation. For example, a feminist critical approach to Pet Sematary might result in the Freudian conclusion that the burial ground represents a womb, and Louis Creed simultaneously displays both his longing to return to that womb, as evidenced by his continuing to bury loved ones there, and his misogynistic impulses, as revealed by his murder of anything that emerges from that womb. In contrast, my Freudian interpretation leads me to conclude that Pet Sematary is an oral/anal fantasy—the burial ground represents an externalization of Creed's desire to destroy and devour his family in that it consumes his family members and the next day voids whatever it consumed, transformed into stinking and loathsome feces. Application of a specific critical theory defines what the reader may disregard, as well as what the reader must observe. My Heisenberg motive, as reader and critic, is to reveal that which I find most horrible and fascinating in the text. I find cannibalism more horrible than misogyny, therefore, I choose to limit my interpretation of textual events, and disregard the idea that the burial ground may represent a womb. I interpret the burial ground as a literal "sarcophagus," derived from an ancient term used first by the Greeks, meaning stone that is literally "flesh-eating, feeding on flesh" (OED). The burial ground is a stomach fed by Creed, which transforms flesh into feces.

The interaction between reader and text reveals—or creates—shades of meaning perhaps never intended by the author of that text. King perhaps did not intend for Louis Creed to be read as a cannibal, pedophile, and baby-killer. As the reader, I cannot know exactly what King intended, but King's intentions behind the words he published do not
factor into my interaction with the text. The derogatory expression "reading too much into it" implies a qualitative judgement that has no place in literary criticism except among critical fascists and literary authoritarians desperate to restrict any reading of a text to their own arbitrary boundaries.

If the reader offers sufficient textual evidence to support a coherent and communicable interpretation of the text, then that interpretation is valid—regardless of the author's original intention. A pre-existing frame of reference, which the tools of a specific critical approach can provide, prevents the well-trained reader from descending into a morass of subjective and incoherent interpretations. Literary criticism achieves a degree of stability when the reader chooses a particular frame of reference to begin with.

In a word, there is no one true way to interpret any text. There is no such thing as an objective reader. Some methods of interpretation may yield more helpful results than other methods, however. The informed reader who would use a specific approach to any text must first decide what he or she desires to experience from a text and communicate regarding that text, then choose that critical theory that best serves the reader's motives. To read a text is, in some ways, to change that text. Evidence from the text itself supports my interpretation of *Pet Sematary*. That interpretation changes the text.
Part IV: A Definition of the Horror Genre

Like other kinds of fiction, horror fiction is rife with conflict and resolution. For example, protagonists confront antagonists and either prevail or suffer defeat, resulting in resolution. Anyone approaching the task of defining the genre "horror," first must differentiate this genre from other literary genres. I define the horror genre by five criteria: it is fiction designed to horrify the reader; the antagonist possesses nightmarish qualities; dire consequences result should the protagonist fail to overcome the antagonist; the ramifications of the protagonist’s failure must in some way directly threaten the reader, and so the text demands a higher level of "willing suspension of disbelief" from the reader than does other fiction; and the text manipulates the reader’s emotions by incorporating cultural taboos, without judging the morality of indulgence in those taboos. A careful examination of these criteria will further clarify my definition.

First Criterion—Horror fiction is written to horrify the reader:

Designating a genre "horror" indicates that the stories belonging to the genre must in some way be horrible. The word "horror" is derived from the Latin word horrere, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "to stand on end (as hair), to bristle, to be rough; to shake, tremble, shiver, shudder, quake; to shudder at, dread, loathe." The word "horror" in modern use, according to the OED, indicates a "painful emotion compounded of loathing and fear." The same source indicates that the modern word also possesses connotations that include disgust and revulsion. Fiction that arouses this
particular specific emotion is horror fiction. A quality of horror fiction not revealed by the
Oxford English Dictionary, however, is the peculiarly seductive and addictive appeal it has
for its readers. No other variety of fiction exists for the simple end of arousing horror—a
specifically painful emotion, but also curiously pleasurable—in its reader. Simply
terrifying the reader is not enough. Horror is a complex emotion: fear and revulsion
compounded with (sometimes) unwilling fascination. Horror fiction, then, must somehow
incorporate elements of erotic—but forbidden—pleasure, to simultaneously attract and
repel the reader. The erotic component of horror fiction, then, often consists of taboo
pleasures, arousing both disgust and fascination on the part of the reader.

Second Criterion—Horror fiction contains an overwhelming and nightmarish
antagonist:

As in other kinds of fiction, the antagonist need not be an actual character.
Conflict in the plot can consist of "man versus nature," "man versus machine," "man
versus monster," "man versus evil stepmother," and so on, limited only by the imaginations
of author and reader. The antagonist in horror fiction, however, must be a nightmarish
creature or presence not seen in "realistic" literature. He, she, or it must exist beyond the
pale of simple literary villain. Whatever the protagonist of horror fiction is battling must
horrify both that protagonist and the reader.

The antagonist need not necessarily appear as a specific character, but may be
rendered as an agency of power. The protagonist's adversary may appear in the text as a
"haunted" place; as some formless, nameless "evil"; as an ancient family curse; or even as
an inexplicable and particularly loathsome agency existing inside of (yet apart from) the protagonist or some other sympathetic character. For example, Louis Creed's perverse need to devour his family is externally represented by the narrative device of the magical burial ground, but originates and exists within Louis, himself.

Third Criterion—Dire consequences result, if the protagonist fails to overcome the antagonist:

The consequences must assume overwhelming and nightmarish proportions, because only then can the story be "horrible." They may range from individual damnation to the complete obliteration of society. Probably, the text will only hint at those consequences—because events shrouded in mystery are more horrifying than a known outcome. The reader faces the same uncertainty as the characters, who know only that if they should fail they face a "fate worse than death"—but not limited to the definition of the Victorian euphemism. The compelling dread and sexual connotations of that particular ambiguity resonate deeply within a reader's unconscious. If the antagonist only kills, maims, or humiliates the protagonist, the reader might feel sympathetic, but the story fails as horror. Moreover, the consequences of the protagonist's defeat must somehow directly threaten the reader. Louis Creed succumbs to his desire to consume his family, no longer able to reconcile his desire with his co-existing fear of being devoured. If Creed—highly educated and intelligent, with a good job, living the "American Dream" in a big house with his beautiful wife, two kids, and a family cat—cannot overcome his destructive impulses, how can the reader hope to do so?
Fourth Criterion—The reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" allows the text to directly threaten the reader:

To be horrified by his actions, the reader must believe in Louis Creed. This genre requires the reader to engage in an unusually high level of "willing suspension of disbelief" to be truly horrifying. Horror fiction may contain supernatural elements: demons, ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and other assorted archetypal monsters, all presented as literally real; or the pseudoscience of the paranormal, with characters who possess "powers" they only dimly understand and cannot control. Horror may present technology as a monster run amok—humanity enslaved by the soulless machines upon which society depends—with no supernatural motif whatsoever. Sometimes horror exists as a completely psychological element, the story consisting entirely of the thoughts, actions, and motivations of the characters—but some of those thoughts, actions, and motivations seem so inherently alien that the reader cannot help but find such characters horrifying. The reader needs to believe in these elements, and identify with the characters involved—improbable as it all might be, at times—to feel not only horrified, but also personally threatened.

Fifth Criterion—Horror fiction manipulates the reader through exploitation of taboos:

This final criterion is perhaps the most important defining element of the genre. As already stated, horror fiction exists to horrify. The genre achieves this end by means of forcing the reader to confront his or her own taboo desires. The text manipulates the
reader into feeling that very specific emotion—horror—by presenting situations, actions, and scenes that appeal to the reader's own most deeply hidden wishes and repressed appetites to simultaneously fascinate and repulse that reader. The scariest horror stories—and the most compelling—play directly into the reader's own nightmares. Although Creed's actions must be defended against with guilt-laden force and punitive measures, evidenced by the Pascow's censure of Creed, the text provides vicarious wish-fulfillment: If Louis Creed copes with his resentment toward his family by killing and eating them, so can the reader, at least for the duration of the text.

The idea of indulging in even vicarious cannibalism likely repulses the reader; however, the text overcomes those inhibitions by seducing the reader into sympathizing—even pitying—Louis Creed. The text offers no judgement about whether Creed's actions are "good" or "evil." Creed's motives are ambiguous, and his acts are sometimes inexplicable. In fact, the text often presents Creed as a sympathetic character, and even offers rationalizations—thin rationalizations, sometimes—for his more violent moments. As a result of that seduction, a surface reading of the text provokes little suspicion regarding the true nature of Louis Creed's desires, and his ultimate culpability in the murder of his son, his surrogate father, and his wife.

Heavy-handed moralizing or didactic advice defeats the purpose of horror, because the hope of some form of salvation is integral to didactic lessons, and salvation is not horrifying. However, the sins that lead to damnation can be horrifying, and the anguish, torture, and agony associated with damnation are horrifying. Consequently, the genre treads a narrow line between dispensing moral lessons, and contemplating chaos,
perversion and existential problems, without judging the actions of the characters, or offering simplistic answers to troubling ethical quandaries.
CHAPTER TWO: The Text of Nightmares

What do nightmares consist of? Rats might horrify one reader, snakes horrify another, and blood and gore horrify yet another. A reader is a partial product one or more cultures, and approaches a text from a viewpoint influenced by his or her cultural ideologies. Those textual elements that horrify a reader, then, must be horrifying in the terms of cultural ideologies. Horror fiction represents the horrors of the society at large. On this level, the question "what is horrifying?" becomes a question regarding the common denominators of the entire culture that determine what is horrifying to its individual members.

Stephen King addresses the question of what is horrifying, both culturally and individually, in his forward to Night Shift:

I think the key to this may lie in a line of movie criticism . . .

The review was of a horror film, not a very good one, and it went something like this: "... a wonderful movie for people who like to slow down and look at car accidents." It's a good snappy line, but when you stop and think about it, it applies to all horror films and stories . . .

The fact is--and most of us know this in our hearts--that very few of us can forgo an uneasy peek at the wreckage bracketed by police cars and road flares on the turnpike at night . . . We feel terror mixed with an odd sort of glee when we hear Paul Harvey on the radio telling us that a woman walked into a propeller blade during a rain squall at a small country
airport or that a man in a giant industrial blender was vaporized immediately when a co-worker stumbled against the controls.

Our interest in these pocket horrors is undeniable, but so is our own revulsion. The two of them mix uneasily, and the by-product of the mix seems to be guilt... a guilt which seems not much different from the guilt that used to accompany sexual awakening...

To King, horror fiction resonates with themes of sex and death. The voyeuristic thrill the audience experiences through the observation of violent death resonates with libidinous pleasure and simultaneous guilt. The audience—or readers—experience pleasure because the horror novel allows the vicarious exploration of aggressive and erotic desires that usually must be controlled and sublimated.

The horror genre manipulates the complexities of human sexual or libidinous gratification, and from a safe distance, allows the contemplation of death—perhaps the two greatest sources of human anxiety, according to Freud (Gay, ed. 755). The simple cessation of life—peacefully, as a result of old age, for instance—does not, however, arouse the level of anxiety associated with the concept of death. Specifically, horror fiction allows the reader the opportunity to view, consider, and perhaps vicariously experience abrupt, premature, violent death, with all the accompanying technicolor gore.

The contemplation and discussion of taboo acts can produce feelings of disgust, revulsion, fear, and shame—and at the same time arouse desire. Every civilization has its taboos, and the breaking of those taboos excites the complex feelings of horror in most members of that society. For various reasons, society imposes prohibitions upon certain
acts, whether those prohibitions exist as actual laws, religious beliefs, or merely as an unspoken, unwritten code of behavior. The imposition of taboos presupposes two assumptions that will later become essential to this discussion of horror: first, a societal taboo suggests that some individuals desire— at least on some level— to engage in the prohibited behavior; and second, that the proscribed behavior is in fact possible, and some individuals continue to indulge in that behavior even after society has prohibited it.

Freud describes the relationship between the individual's desires and society's restrictions as an uneasy truce. While the individual requires civilization for safety and comfort, that same civilization arouses the enmity of the individual because its rules governing that individual's actions thwart his or her desires. "Among these instinctual wishes are those of incest, cannibalism, and lust for killing... Nor is the attitude of civilization to these oldest instinctual wishes by any means uniform" (The Future of an Illusion 13). Horror fiction gives play to these and other repressed and hidden desires condemned by society as perversions, designated as taboo.

Incest, for example, is taboo in American culture. People are not supposed to even want to have sex with their siblings, parents, children, or blood relatives, much less actually indulge in such an act. The existence of the cultural stigma attached to the idea of incest suggests that people do, in fact, feel sexual desire for their family members, and as a result of that human desire, society needs restraints to prevent the occurrence of such relationships. If no one felt incestuous sexual desires, there would be no need for a cultural taboo, because incest would simply never happen. V.C. Andrews' novel Flowers in the Attic explores the possibility of a social microcosm in which incest is not only
justified, but necessary and inevitable. *Flowers in the Attic* reads as a carefully crafted justification for an incestuous relationship between brother and sister.

Horror fiction provides an outlet for the aggressive and erotic drives normally unexplored and unexpressed. Those individual desires society condemns—incest, murder, cannibalism—exist, regardless of the revulsion "civilized" humans are conditioned to feel in connection to such actions. In other words, primitive but natural human urges prohibited by society result in the formation of social taboos. Civilization must control certain human behaviors, in order to effectively function. The majority of individuals living in that society must regard those behaviors and desires as horrifying, in spite of the fact that those desires exist as natural human drives.

The horror genre, then, gives expression to those human urges prohibited by cultural conditioning, and in so doing, provides an outlet for the anxieties surrounding those desires and their denial. Horror fiction concerns itself not simply with lust, murder, hatred and alienation—elements of human behavior central to much literature—but with specific manifestations of those particular human qualities other forms of literature often refer to only obliquely, or as textual events referred to by the narrator or characters after the fact, but not directly portrayed. Horror fiction offers the reader incest, necrophilia and bestiality—not simple genital-focused erotic lust. The fascination and emotional power of the horror genre is that it allows the reader to vicariously experience prohibited sex acts, and observe violent death, according to primitive urges.

Because Freudian psychology so effectively answers the question of why horror fiction exists—and how it horrifies—it seems logical to approach the texts of this genre
from that same frame of reference. *Pet Sematary* provides a window into the experience of Louis Creed, who ultimately destroys his own family through his romantic fascination with his daughter, his simultaneous love and hate for his infant son, and his resentment towards his castrating wife. The text portrays Creed's oral compulsion to bite, chew, grind, expectorate, and vomit everything that goes into his mouth. *Pet Sematary* provides a picture of Creed's co-existent revulsion and attraction to the resulting by-products of his oral habits. He symbolically eats his son and wife, and then cannot resist the urge to play with the processed stinking remains. The text forces the reader to directly confront issues of parricide, fratricide, infanticide, incestuous sexual desire, castration, cannibalism, and necrophilia. To use Stephen King's words--it's a nasty book.

*Pet Sematary* is full of horrors both large and small. The text contains the "pocket horrors" Stephen King refers to, as evidenced by the scene in which Louis Creed disinters his infant son's body, only to discover moss growing on the child's face; or the image of Victor Pascow, dying on the infirmary carpet in the middle of a slowly widening puddle of blood and cranial fluid; or Rachel's ghastly description of Zelda, clawing at the air and turning purple while she chokes to death on her own tongue. As gruesome as these scenes admittedly are, and despite the voyeuristic titillation the text provides, the issues raised by the novel that cause the reader to feel true, profound horror lie much deeper within the subtext than those specific descriptions.

In Douglas Winter's interview, Stephen King, King implies that the real horror of the book is the premature death of a child (131). I contend that the horror of *Pet Sematary* is infinitely more complex than the very real anxiety surrounding the idea of the
death of a healthy child. The accidental death of a child arouses sympathy and fear, but not horror, in the sense that I am defining the term as it applies to this genre of fiction. A child's death may well be the most traumatic event any parent could live through. Gage's return from the grave, however, does arouse that very specific sense of horror. Furthermore, the text offers not just one real horror, but rather, horrors that come in all sizes.

The overall sense of profound horror the novel arouses in the reader develops from his or her forced confrontation with Louis Creed's cannibalistic impulses, and his fascination with his own vomit and excrement. Creed tries to repress his aggressive and erotic compulsions to devour his wife and child, initially. He then indulges these impulses perhaps inadvertently, at first. However, when directly faced with the archetypal lure of the forbidden, Creed cannot resist—like Bluebeard's wife, warned sternly not to open a door; or Pandora her box. Creed's discovery of the power of necromancy contained in the burial ground results in bedlam. The revenant of Victor Pascow clearly tells Creed not to cross the barrier, that dire consequences will result. Creed disregards that warning, and crosses the deadfall anyway, and then finds himself compelled to do so again and again.

As a result of his deliberate foray into the forbidden, Louis Creed's losses are stunning: his son, his surrogate father, and his wife are brutally and prematurely killed. Worse yet, his son and wife both return loathsome, stinking, and violent, after Creed reanimates them. Worst of all, Creed apparently refuses to realize that the burial ground must use him as a point through which to focus and direct its power, which results in the continued deaths and revivifications of those close to him; in fact, by the end of the novel
Creed is deliberately abetting those deaths and revivifications. Once Creed ventures beyond the barrier, he is helpless to restore that barrier.

*Pet Sematary* manipulates the reader into re-examining dearly-held cultural beliefs regarding the nature of familial relationships, and the destructive forces existing inside human beings, barely contained by a veneer of civilization. Finally—and perhaps most profoundly—*Pet Sematary*, described by King as in some ways "very Christian" (Winter 134), challenges the "Christian" sensibilities surrounding the issues of death and resurrection, by its exposure of the idea of resurrection—any resurrection—as actually a really creepy concept.
CHAPTER THREE:

"God made superfluous by scientific necromancy."
("Bloodshot" 1:13 July 1997)

Before any of the characters return from the dead, even before Victor Pascow has been killed, the text reveals Louis Creed's deep anxiety surrounding the issue of resurrection. Louis remembers one of the few times his mother actually told him a difficult truth, upon the accidental death of his cousin:

So they had gotten down on their knees in the kitchen, he and his mother, and they prayed, and it was the praying that finally brought it home to him; if his mother was praying for Ruthie Creed's soul, then it meant that her body was gone. Before his closed eye rose a terrible image of Ruthie coming to his thirteenth birthday party with her decaying eyeballs hanging on her cheeks and blue mould growing in her red hair, and this image provoked not just sickening horror but an awful doomed love. (64)

Creed's mental image of his cousin betrays his conflicting emotions surrounding her death—the paradox of still loving someone who is now dead, wanting that loved one to somehow return, and the horror of the possibility of such a resurrection.

The issue of resurrection from actual, physical death resonates strongly within Judeo-Christian, western culture (not to imply that the issue does not resonate with beliefs held by other cultures—I simply do not know enough about cultures besides my own to venture an informed opinion.) The implications of the subversion of this particular hopeful belief into such a horrifying concept are crucial to this discussion, both in the general
terms of horror fiction as a genre—the motif of resurrection-as-horrible appears over and over—and in the specific context of my analysis of Pet Sematary. In fact, the issue of resurrection is central to Christianity—if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, then he is not a god, but just another political agitator, who antagonized the establishment one time too many. Medieval tradition suggests that during his three-day hiatus in the tomb, Jesus journeyed to the underworld to free those souls belonging to heaven, but trapped in purgatory.

In contrast, the Christian Bible's Old Testament pronounces dread consequences to those unfortunate persons apprehended in the act of communing with the dead: "A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them" (Leviticus 20.27). The same chapter pronounces a sentence of death for the offenses of adultery and incest. The implication follows that necromancy seemed as real a threat as incest, to that contemporary audience. There are other references to characters in the old testament who indulge in consulting mediums to consort with the dead. King Saul, in the First book of Samuel, contacts the witch of Endor to summon Samuel the prophet, who is dead. The Old Testament blithely reports the supposed ensuing conversation between Saul and Samuel.

While the reference certainly cannot be construed in any way as actual evidence for the legitimate, literal reality of such "spirits," the implication seems to be that in that particular place and time, that particular culture accepted the possibility. Of equal significance to the belief in the possibility of engaging in a dialogue with the spirits of the dead, the spirit summoned by the Witch of Endor is reportedly Samuel himself, not some
evil nether-being who deceives Saul.

For whatever reasons, Judeo-Christianity imposed prohibitions upon such necromancy. The concept of resurrection does not seem so horrible to pre-Christian societies. In The Odyssey, Odysseus journeys to the underworld and speaks with the dead, but he must offer the dead souls he encounters a libation of blood to empower them to speak to him. To the pre-Christian Greeks, Odysseus' journey and blood offering were acceptable, if slightly unusual, following a precedent set by other epic heroes, like Orestes.

By the late nineteenth century, when Bram Stoker wrote Dracula, the dead could steal that needed blood from the living to obtain a measure of power, but that act was loathsome (although sexually titillating.) Stoker did not invent the concept of vampirism. He borrowed from existing novels and folklore for his creation of the character Dracula. Resurrected beings appear within the Bible as miracles, but throughout folklore and horror fiction and film as vampires, zombies, dybbuks, mummies, and other assorted horrors. Resurrected beings appear within contemporary popular culture, showing up in comic books, (as revealed by the quotation beginning this section); television characters; and the never-ending versions of films like "Dracula" and "Frankenstein." The ethical considerations presented in opposition to the idea of cloning human beings have, at their base, a superstitious dread of human beings attempting to resurrect the deceased. Non-Christian resurrection has been effectively tabooed, while simultaneously, resurrection performed by an avatar of God deemed miraculous by Judeo-Christian tradition.

At the narrative point in Pet Sematary between Gage's death and Creed's
revivification of his son, Louis Creed's grieving daughter Ellie tells him, "God can take it back if he wants to. ... In Sunday School the teacher told us about this guy Lazarus. He was dead, and Jesus brought him back to life. He said 'Lazarus, come forth,' and the teacher said if he'd just said 'Come forth,' probably everybody in that graveyard would have come out. ..."(250).

I remember a Sunday School teacher telling me that exact same thing (Sunday School teachers must share the curriculum) and the idea kept me awake at night for weeks. I formed a mental picture of a graveyard suddenly erupting with shambling, decomposing bodies, some of which have been entombed for years--and the idea still raises the hairs on the back of my neck. Lazarus alone emerging from the grave still raises troubling questions, because what Stephen King never divulges in his epigraphs paraphrased from the Gospel of John, is that by the time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, his body was rotting:

> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days" ... he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (John 11.38-44, New Oxford Annotated Bible)

The gospel according to John neglects to tell the reader just what Lazarus looked like
when they unwrapped his face. My Sunday School teacher tried to reassure me that part of the miracle of his resurrection was that he was, of course, completely restored and cleaned up. I was, however, afflicted with the growing conviction that if Lazarus exited his tomb wrapped in a burial shroud he had been moldering in, that shroud still stank of his body's decomposition. The resurrection of Lazarus poses a paradox about miracles: a miracle, by its very nature, is wondrous—but simultaneously horrible, because the existence of such a miracle suggests that reality is both chaotic and capricious.

The traditional Christian defense, of course, is that the nature of the reality is not chaotic, but controlled by "God," and God supersedes natural law, at will. The logical flaw in that defense is that it simply re-names reality "God" and God himself, then, is chaotic and capricious—which I still fail to find reassuring. Human beings are, at times, irrational, primitive, and superstitious. King slices open that shared cultural vein of superstitious fear, and exposes the irrationality of any belief in resurrection, while simultaneously exploiting the reader's underlying dread that such a thing could possibly be true.

What did Lazarus' sister find when she unwrapped that shroud?

An interesting implication of societal prohibitions, as already discussed, is that the necessity for such prohibitions betrays a pre-existing urge to indulge in the forbidden behavior. In terms of resurrection, people want to talk to the dead. People want to bring their loved ones back, and love them again. They want to bring enemies back, if only to kill them again. Foremost, people want to believe that they can go to the place of being dead, overcome death itself, and return. It is not about a desire for simple immortality,
there are no prohibitions about that—the desire to return is a desire to conquer death itself, to be dead and then become not-dead.

Another interesting thing about societal prohibitions is that they suggest a belief that such things are, in fact, possible—and have been practiced. That fact contains a staggering implication: if we, as a culture, must prohibit necromancy—then on some level we believe in it; similarly, if we regard resurrection as loathsome without the intervention of a divine agent such as Christ, then on some level, we think such a thing could really happen. So when Stephen King tells Douglas Winter, "for me, it was like looking though a window into something that could be" the horrifying ramification is that not only is the death of the child possible, but that his parent could also somehow return that child to life (131).

Because we, as a "Christian" society—and whether as individuals we choose to profess Christianity or not, there is no denying the influence of Judeo-Christian tradition and belief on our culture—believe life to be sacrosanct, granted only by the divine intervention of a creative force beyond human capabilities, a deliberate human act resulting in the revivification of a corpse horrifies us. That resurrected corpse can only be comprehended as a perversion of the natural order, a monstrosity. Such an act serves to devalue life, itself. If death is simply a state of being, from which one can return, more or less at will, then salvation is unnecessary.

A situation where a scientist recreates the supposedly divine act of producing life—revivification—appears in another classic horror novel, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. In fact, King specifically alludes to Shelley's work. Louis Creed, contemplating the
reanimation of his son, considers the family cat, which has already undergone the
transformation from death back to animation. "The idea had a deadly attraction. It made
a balance of logic which was impossible to deny. Church [the cat] had been killed in the
road; Gage had been killed in the road. Here was Church--changed of course, distasteful
in some ways--but here. . . . Church had by no means turned into Frankencat" (254).

In her introduction to Frankenstein, critic Diane Johnson concludes that Victor
Frankenstein's creation represents man in a "natural" state, uncorrupted by society--at least
at first. The monster, representing natural man, cannot function as a civilized being, and
becomes antagonistic as a result of the demands and simultaneous neglect, both of that
society and of his creator, or parent. Finally, the responsibility for the peril the monster
represents to the civilized beings surrounding him rests more on the creator, Victor
Frankenstein, than on the "natural man" himself, the monster (xv).

Church returns from the burial ground stinking of earth, with a penchant for
dismembering small animals in a particularly gruesome fashion, "but killing small animals
was a cat thing to do" (254), Creed observes. The resurrected Church manifests the
natural instincts of a cat, without the refinements to his urges provided by domestication.
That creatures who return from burial in the ancient cemetery smell like dirt once
resurrected, and that their primitive, hostile instincts then control their behavior, both
indicate a connection between the resurrected beings and a "natural state." Louis Creed
deceives himself. Church has, in fact, turned into "Frankencat."

Creed has created a monster that both mutilates and devours smaller beings. That
the cat's name is "Church" and Louis' name is "Creed" indicates an allegorical element
working throughout the text, a perverted Pilgrim's Progress. The irony of the names "creed" and "church" suggests a rather skeptical perception of traditional religion that further reinforces the subversion of idealist and gullible belief in Christian "miracle" of resurrection. In fact, the events in the text propose to the reader that religion--(the) "church"--is a monster resulting from human arrogance--a "creed" or dogmatic belief: the church is a cannibal that devours anything or anyone it can overpower.

While King relies on the supernatural device of the primitive magic contained by the old burial ground, rather than pure science, to account for the resurrection of the dead in his novel, Louis Creed is a doctor--a man of science. Creed faces the same ethical dilemma in Pet Sematary that Shelley's Victor Frankenstein must resolve in Frankenstein: If "life" is in some way sacrosanct, and becomes perverted by human intervention through the revivification of that which has already died, then is the act of killing the resurrected object an act equal to murder?

Creed accepts that responsibility, and considers his options should the resurrection of Gage fail:

*I will make a diagnosis.*

Yes. That is what he would do.

*I will make a diagnosis, not only of his body but of his spirit. I will make allowances for the trauma of the accident itself, which he may or may not remember. . . .* I will judge our ability to reintegrate Gage into our family on the basis of what I see over a period of from twenty-four to seventy-two hours. And if the loss is too great--or if he comes back . . . as
a thing of evil—I will kill him.

As a doctor, he felt he could kill Gage, if Gage was only the vessel containing some other being, quite easily. . . . He would kill it as he would kill a rat carrying bubonic plague. (310)

Louis Creed considers himself a man of science, and plans the resurrection of Gage as carefully as he would plot a laboratory experiment. Winter, in *The Art of Darkness*, quotes King as commenting "[Creed] never ceases to be the rational man. Everything is plotted out—this is what can happen, this is what can't happen. But nothing that he thinks can happen is eventually what does happen" (134). King's observation is either placed out of context by Winter, or simply inaccurate. Creed does know, in fact, that if he buries Gage then Gage will be revivified. Creed ends up killing the resurrected child a second time, again, just as planned. Louis perhaps does not anticipate that Gage will kill both Jud and Rachel before Creed can dispatch him with the syringes of morphine, but nonetheless, much of what Louis Creed anticipates does occur.

*Pet Sematary* alludes several times to the biblical tale of Jesus resurrecting Lazarus, further reinforcing the judgement of differences between a divine act granting life, and the human attempt to imitate god-like behavior. However, by the end of the novel, the idea of Lazarus' stinking body being revivified seems rather horrible, as well. The text reveals the act of resurrection, whether performed by God or man, as an act that challenges any human concept of a rational universe, by serving to undermine the value of existence. The implications of such a revelation challenge cliched pieties, and question theological assumptions about "omnipotence."
Jud tells Louis Creed, point blank, "bringing the dead back to life . . . that's about as close to playing God as you can get, ain't it?" (168). Louis Creed, like Victor Frankenstein, is unable to resist the temptation to assume god-like powers. As a doctor, restoring life to the dead is the ultimate act of healing, but Louis Creed has no such altruistic motives for his actions. Creed attaches no divine attributes to life, he believes life and death to be products entirely of nature. The text tells readers that Creed "had pronounced two dozen people dead in his career and had never once felt the passage of a soul" (36). Creed considers himself a pragmatist, and views the resurrection of his son in practical terms. He considers the likelihood that Gage will return from the magical burial ground as no more than a "piece of breathing meat" (289). Creed's desire to revivify his son overcomes his misgivings about the possible consequences.

Winter characterizes the novel as "a conscious retelling of W.W. Jacobs' 'The Monkey's Paw' (1902), that enduring short story about parents who literally wish their son back from the dead . . ." (130). Jud Crandall expresses to Creed, upon the reanimation of Church, that Ellie needs to learn that "sometimes, dead is better," the same lesson belatedly learned in "The Monkey's Paw." Creed, however, cannot seem to learn that lesson. The father in Jacobs' story realize the horror of wishing his son back just in time to prevent having to confront his re-animated corpse, but Creed not only must confront the revivified Gage, he proceeds to resurrect his wife, afterwards. King directly alludes to "The Monkey's Paw" in the text of Pet Sematary: Louis Creed, upon the realization that the resurrected Gage has stolen a scalpel from his bag, thinks, "What comes when you're too slow wishing away the thing that knocks on your door in the middle of the night is
simple enough: total darkness" (395). Creed refuses to wish away the "thing that knocks on his door."

King has not simply retold "The Monkey's Paw" he pushes the horror to the furthest possible extreme, metaphorically opening the door that remains closed between the parents and their resurrected son in Jacobs' short story.

King forces the reader to unwind that shroud from the face of Lazarus, look long and hard beneath it, and smell the stench.
CHAPTER FOUR: Text Meets Template

Part I: The Primary Goal of the Text

*Pet Sematary* actually exceeds my criteria for "horror" fiction. The first criterion of the genre states that a horror text must exist for the primary purpose of arousing horror in its readers. Stephen King, the author, makes no pretense about being anything other than a writer of horror fiction. In fact, he regards horror as something of an art form. In *Danse Macabre*, his manifesto of the horror genre, King writes:

> . . . the work of horror really is a dance—a moving rhythmic search.

> and what it's looking for is the place where you, the viewer or the reader,

> live at your most primitive level . . . .

> Is horror art? On this [level], the work of horror can be nothing else;

> it achieves the level of art simply because it is looking for something

> beyond art, something that predates art . . . phobic pressure points. (4)

In several passages from the same text, King calls himself a horror writer, and apparently takes great pride in his profession. George Beahm's discussion of *Pet Sematary* reveals King's own horror regarding the death of a child as integral to the novel, a fear shared by most parents (85-6).

The text finds what King calls "phobic pressure points." The graphic description of Creed—at the mercy of his compulsion—digging up his son's grave and opening the coffin, invokes the same atavistic fascination with graveyards and coffins responsible for
the undying appeal of campfire ghost stories. The scene unfolds in vivid detail: Creed climbs the cemetery fence with his graverobbing tools, crouches behind a headstone to avoid being seen, finds the fresh grave of his infant son, and begins to dig. Creed knows he is a ghoul, he ponders just how simple it seemed to cross the line into his present condition. Questions about the philosophy that creates ghoulishness seem moot, however, when Creed opens that coffin: "The smell hit him first, and Creed recoiled, gagging. He hung on the edge of the grave, breathing hard, and just when he thought he had his gorge under control, his entire big, tasteless meal came up in a spurt" (341). Horror follows horror, during the scene. Creed recovers himself enough to shine his hooded flashlight into the coffin, to examine his son's corpse, and sees "Gage's head was gone." Creed manages to maintain enough composure to look again. Gage's head is not really missing, but damp, dark moss covers his face."The moss was damp, but no more than a scum. He should have expected it; there had been rain . . . looking at his son was like looking at a badly made doll. Gage's head bulged in strange directions. His eyes had sunken deep . . . Something white protruded from his mouth like an albino tongue" (342). When Creed realizes the white object is cotton, and removes it, "Gage's lips, oddly lax and seeming somehow too dark and too wide, closed with a faint but audible plip!" This is the monstrosity Louis Creed intends to reanimate.

Creed talks to Gage's corpse as if it were alive. "Gage," Creed tells his son's corpse, "going to take you out now, okay?" He lifts the child's body, afraid it will come apart in his arms. Creed sits on the side of the grave, with his son's corpse in his lap, and rocks the child as if he were only asleep. Louis Creed promises Gage, "This will end.
This is just the night" (343). Unfortunately for Gage, it only ends when his father kills him again.

The scene invokes images of other notorious horrors: vampire hunters digging up a grave to drive a stake through an undead heart, the superstitious dread of being buried alive, and the narrator of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" shining a single focused ray from his hooded lantern onto the blind eye of the old man, like Creed shines a single ray from his hooded flashlight into the coffin of his son. The text acquires emotional resonance from these juxtaposed images, but avoids seeming contrived or derivational. The final picture burned into the reader's imagination is Louis Creed, legs hanging into the open grave, rocking his son's stinking, mangled, mossy corpse, promising "Daddy loves you"(343).

King is a horror writer. *Pet Sematary* openly and deliberately draws from anxieties and fears shared by a large percentage of its audience. Doubleday, the original publisher, promoted the novel as frightening even to Stephen King (Winter 132). *Pet Sematary* is a text with every intention of horrifying its reader, and so completely fulfills the first requirement for horror.
Part II: The Antagonist

In my interpretation of this text, Louis Creed is the antagonist of *Pet Sematary*. The distinction between this particular reworking of the "man versus himself" plot construction and a more traditional approach arises because Louis Creed's cannibalistic impulses empower the supernatural agent of the burial ground to act. Louis Creed, then, must confront his own dark urges, but externalized. The resulting story is a "bleak tale of a good man's ruin as his 'lesser nature' gains the upper hand"--Stephen King's description of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

When Victor Pascow's discorporated revenant visits Louis Creed, the apparition compels Creed to follow it to the pet cemetery, where it pronounces, "The door must not be opened." Pascow gestures to the barrier of fallen deadwood, and continues, "Don't go beyond, no matter how much you feel you need to, Doctor. The barrier was not made to be broken. Remember this: there is more power here than you know" (87). Pascow's warning provokes from the reader associations with a culturally significant stories concerning doors best left unopened: Bluebeard's stern warning to his young wife not to look behind a certain door, and the narrator of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" who spends nearly half of the brief story opening his elderly benefactor's door.

Pascow's revelation regarding great power beyond the forbidden barrier also echoes the devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness, and the serpent's promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden: this act is forbidden, this act is wrong, but there is enormous power to be gained by overcoming the scruples imposed by morality. The irresistible lure
of the promise of forbidden power is an archetypal event in our culture. Eve, of course, succumbs to the temptation, being only human. So does Louis Creed.

Beyond the pastoral, tame façade of the "pet sematary" lies the magical burial ground, accessible only by the path through the wilderness, to which Jud guides Creed after the death of the cat. Jud summarizes the nature of the path through the wilderness when he tells Creed, "I think it's a dangerous place" 138). The wilderness itself is not so dangerous as the uncivilized, unconscious side of human--Creed's--nature that it represents.

The explanation offered for the ability of the burial ground to reanimate dead bodies centers on the figure of the "wendigo," a mythical creature described in various dictionaries of folklore as a personification of the unforgiving nature of northern wildlands. The wendigo is reputed to cause cannibalism in the human beings it encounters. Creed's neighbor Jud explains:

The Wendigo story, now, that was something you could hear in those days all over the north country. . . . Sometimes, if the winter was long and hard and the food was short, there were north country Indians who would finally get down to the bad place where it was starve . . . or do something else . . .

Maybe they'd pick out someone who was old and used up, and then there would be stew for a while. And the story they worked out would be that the Wendigo had walked through their village or encampment while they were sleepin and touched them. And the Wendigo
was supposed to give those it touched a taste for the flesh of their own kind. . . . (156)

While the text refers directly to cannibalism, the resurrected Gage is the only character who literally devours the flesh of other characters. However, because both Jud and Creed have been close to the wendigo, and the text so specifically mentions cannibalism as a direct result of that proximity, the image of humans consuming humans demands attention. Specifically, both Jud and Creed display symbolic cannibalism, consuming other characters within the text, the burial ground externalizing that act by literally devouring, processing, then voiding whatever anyone buries there.

The dualism represented by the two different burial grounds, with their differing accompanying traditions, suggest two different kinds of possible deaths, and by extension, two different kinds of "life." The ancient pagan burial ground, where one must dig the grave alone, represents the primitive and suppressed side of human nature, the little-understood unconscious and emotional side that nonetheless influences more rational, deliberate, "civilized" behavior. Consequently, the text suggests the opposition of pagan, uncivilized nature to Judeo-Christian, rational civilization. Louis Creed, through the act of embracing the pagan, the irrational, the unconscious and emotional urges he cannot control--by forging beyond the barrier Pascow reveals to him--renounces the rational, civilized part of himself, in return for ultimate power over his family.

Jud, Creed's surrogate father, leads Louis to the burial ground, precipitating the chain of events that will destroy Louis Creed's family and sanity. The text leads me to conclude that Jud completely understood the nature of the burial ground, and has even
witnessed the results when a human being is buried there. This makes Jud's decision to lead Louis to the burial grounds a deeply hostile act. After the death of Gage, Jud confesses to Louis the possibility that the burial ground caused the accident.

Jud warns Louis Creed that the burial ground has a strange ability to manipulate the people who use its powers of revivification: "You do it because it gets hold of you... You make up reasons... they seem like good reasons... but mostly you do it because you want to. Or because you have to" (168). After Creed buries Church, Jud informs Louis Creed that the act of burying a body in the ancient burial ground, forges a connection: the burial ground now belongs to Creed in a unique way, and by extension, its power belongs to Creed, as well. The negative aspect of that power is that Creed is also responsible for the results of the use of it.

Creed, despite the remonstrations of Victor Pascow, proceeds to bury first the cat, then his son, then his wife in the burial grounds. Even more horribly, Creed's hostility towards his wife and son perhaps accounts for both of their original deaths, the burial ground influencing the events that culminate in Gage's "accidental" death, Rachel's murder by the revenant Zelda/Gage, and the destruction of Jud Crandall, Creed's father-figure.

Throughout the text, Gage competes directly with Louis for Rachel's attention. The text makes references to Rachel's relationship to Gage with the use of sexual terms and imagery. Rachel "offered him [Gage] the breast even though it was off his schedule... and he promptly bit her with his new teeth" (15). Whenever Louis and Rachel fight, Gage displaces Creed in bed with Rachel. Louis anticipates this situation when he and Rachel argue regarding Ellie's questions concerning death: "he knew that she would
already be in bed, Gage sleeping with her more than likely, the two of them so far over to her side that the baby would be in danger of falling off" (57. Rachel sleeping with Gage, rather than with Louis, is apparently a common occurrence, and occurs several more times in the text. For example, when Gage comes back from Thanksgiving in Chicago with a virus, even though Rachel and Louis have been separated all weekend, Rachel relegates Louis to the couch. "Rachel was in bed, the covers pulled up to her chin, and Gage was tucked in neatly beside her. She looked at Louis apologetically. 'Would you mind, hon? Just for tonight? I'd feel better having him with me. He's so hot" (179). Creed is cuckolded by his son, even without the unintentional double entendre "he's so hot." Louis enters his own bedroom to find his wife in bed with Gage. Rachel in completely covered "up to her chin" but Gage is beneath those covers. Gage shares the intimate confines of the bed with Rachel, and Creed's view of his wife's body, obscured.

Creed's subsequent murder of his resurrected two-year-old son is pure wish-fulfillment for Louis Creed. The reanimated child, in spite of the changes wrought by the burial ground, is still Creed's son. The text deliberately reveals that fact to the reader. "Gage looked up at him and for a moment Louis saw his son--his real son--his face unhappy and filled with pain" (402).

Louis Creed's actions result in a being that cannot integrate with civilization--represented by the Creed family--because of uncontrolled aggressive and erotic drives. A society cannot cope with the presence of such a being, because the members of that society have become too distanced from their own drives to even comprehend the acts of which the "monster" proves capable. Both Frankenstein and Pet Sematary judge those
natural drives as horrible, and define as "monsters" those characters who act out those impulses. The resurrected child's actions directly result from those human drives discussed in chapter 1, defined by Freud as hostile but natural human desires resulting in acts prohibited by society because of their antisocial nature. However, those uncontrolled desires belong to Louis Creed, not to Gage. Louis Creed, then, is the real "monster" in the text.

Gage returns as an externalization of Creed's cannibalistic and violent urges, first stabbing (symbolically raping) then actually devouring the flesh of Rachel, his mother, an act eerily reminiscent of a scene in the opening chapter when Rachel attempts to breast feed him, only to have him bite her breast. Moreover, the revivified being acts as a direct agent of Louis Creed. The resurrected child is actually a literal product of Creed's own body, as well as metaphorical excrement. He steals an instrument from Creed's bag--a scalpel--symbolic of Creed's profession, and by extension, symbolic of Creed himself. He uses that scalpel to stab Rachel to death, an action representative of Creed's own penetration of her as a sexual act, as well as symbolic of Creed's desire to "bite" Rachel, in revenge for the way she "chews him up and spits him out" whenever they argue.

After the disastrous return of Gage from the dead, why would Creed then take Rachel's body to the burial ground, if not to act out the fantasy of murdering his wife? Creed acts because he is compelled to do so by the burial ground--an externalization of his own sublimated hostile and erotic drives.

The hostility present in Louis Creed's relationship with his wife exists because Rachel completely controls Louis. She tells him what to do. Creed metaphorically tiptoes
around uncomfortable topics, avoids confrontation, and when Rachel directly challenges
him, he concedes. She literally has him by the penis, illustrated in the first sexual
encounter in the narrative. She dominates him mercilessly. The lies and misinformation
she wants Louis to give Ellie regarding death remind Louis of the lies told him by his
mother. Louis Creed's mother, remember, was his sole parent, and so also dominated him
completely, as a child. Creed's relationship with Rachel, then, is a reconfigured
(incestuous) relationship with his mother. The horror of the nature of his relationship with
Rachel is further confounded by his feelings of helplessness and castration, externalized by
his adamant proposal to allow Church to be neutered, until Jud convinces him otherwise.
Jud, then, contributes to the symbolic castration of Louis Creed.

Louis Creed 's cannibalistic urges betray his fear of being devoured by his family.
Creed's aversion/compulsion reveals itself upon finding Rachel's body:

Hello, darling, he thought, you came home.

Blood had splashed the wallpaper in idiot shapes. She had
been stabbed a dozen times, two dozen, who knew? His scalpel had done
this work.

Suddenly he saw her, really saw her, and Louis Creed began to
scream. . . .

Rachel had not just been killed.

Something had been . . . something had been at her. (400-01)

Louis Creed's response to his discovery of Rachel's body is not one of horror, or even
surprise, until he realizes that she has been partially eaten. He regards her corpse with the
endearment, "darling." In fact, Creed enters Jud Crandall's house fully expecting to
discover both Jud and Rachel have been killed. He even acknowledges his own
culpability, when he fears his "hands are filthy with [Rachel's] blood" (393). His deliberate
contemplation that his own scalpel--like a giant tooth--carved Rachel to be eaten, reveals
his desire for recognition and acknowledgement as the perpetrator of this violence. His
simultaneous aversion to that act of cannibalism--performed by the resurrected Gage, as
an extension of Louis himself--is Creed's desire to deny his own hidden wishes. Yet that
act is Creed's own, just as the responsibility for Rachel's death belongs to Creed.

The text reveals that Louis, when he sneaks into the graveyard to disinter Gage's
body, asks himself, "Is the line so thin, then? . . . So thin you can simply step over it with
this little fuss, muss, and bother?" (333). Creed considers the line between his respectable
position in the community as a doctor, and his current intentions to rob a grave, but also a
line between sanity and insanity. The line Louis Creed steps over, in actuality, is
delineated by the barrier Pascow warned him about, in the beginning of the novel, the
barrier between the pet cemetery and the ancient burial ground--the barrier that controls
Louis Creed's deeply hidden desire to devour.

When Creed takes his son's body to the burial ground, his choice is tantamount to
embracing those hidden, horrible desires that he has previously repressed. During his trek
along the path over the barrier and into the wilderness of the unconscious that lays behind
that barrier, Louis Creed glimpses himself as adversary:

Something was coming.

It was a sound like nothing he had ever heard in his life--a living sound,
a big sound. . . . He became aware that he was moaning

(oh my God oh my dear God what is that what is coming through this fog?)

. . . he became aware that the wet, damp air had taken on an eldritch, sickening smell like warm, spoiled pork.

Whatever it was, it was huge. . .

Louis saw something.

. . . It was no shade, no insubstantial ghost; he could feel the displaced air of its passage, could hear the mammoth thud of its feet coming down, the suck of mud as it moved on.

For a moment he believed he saw twin yellow-orange sparks high above him.

Sparks like eyes. (363-4)

The magnitude of the horror of Creed's cannibalism and aggression finally becomes clear. The stench in the air from the decomposing corpse that Creed carries in his arms—Gage. As the reader, I know what dead bodies smell like, because we learned early in the text—just after Pascow's death—that rotting bodies smell like spoiled pork. When Creed calls to verify the location of Pascow's body, the pathology clerk relates a horrible story about a coffin that got lost during a luggage transfer. The clerk laughs, and tells Louis that when the coffin was finally located "The guy was totally black and smelled like a spoiled pork roast" (97). The sound of the creature's passage, and the sparks Louis "believes" he sees, exist in Creed's mind. No one else ever sees the "wendigo" because only Louis can see it.
Louis Creed is the wendigo.
Part III: The Consequences

The body-count in *Pet Sematary* never reaches the fantastic numbers of the average "splatter" movie. The text does not rely solely on gore and death in order to horrify the reader; although most of the main characters either die or are murdered by the end. The horrific consequences of Louis Creed's failure include the resurrections of first the cat, then Gage, and finally Rachel. Those deaths are not the focus of the horror associated with the consequences of Louis Creed's cannibalism, but Creed's (and the reader's) forced confrontation with his cannibalism, his obsession with feces, and his tendency to swallow his own vomit. The real consequences are the returns of Church, Rachel, Gage, and even Zelda as a perversion of the familiar and once-loved, transformed into Creed's own excrement.

Victor Pascow dies an early and gruesome accidental death in the narrative, foreshadowing Gage's death as a result of being struck by an automobile. Jud's wife Norma dies of presumably natural causes, the Orinco truck runs over Gage, then the resurrected Gage murders first Jud then Rachel. There are five deaths in the text, six including Rachel's related flashback to her sister Zelda's death. Of those six deaths, only four occur as a result of the wendigo-soured burial ground. Creed's daughter Ellie certainly survives, and the text hints that Louis Creed survives, as well.

The text of *Pet Sematary* reveals complex dynamics at work between Louis Creed, his immediate family, and Jud Crandall (Creed's surrogate father), all within the first chapter. Creed's ambivalence towards his family is demonstrated within the first scene of
the novel. He entertains a fantasy of abandoning them in Bangor, Maine, where none of
them have ever been, and where they are as a result of their willingness to follow Creed in
the pursuit of his career. "When his three hostages to fortune got out," Creed thinks, "he
would floor the accelerator and drive away without so much as a look back . . . He would
drive south, all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as
a medic, under a new name . . . But before he hit the turnpike . . . he would stop by the
side of the road and put the fucking cat out too" (16). Creed and his family are exhausted
and irritable, having just driven from Chicago, but when they reach their destination,
Rachel is still patient with the two children. Creed, in contrast, threatens violence. Creed
tells Ellie when she cuts herself and cries, "'You want to stop that or your ass will sting,' . . .
His hand itched to slap her and he grabbed his leg hard" (18-19).

Ellie treats Louis like a god, however, and her infatuation with her father saves her
life. When she asks important questions, she asks Louis, not Rachel. Ellie listens to the
advice and information he dispenses with complete trust and belief. When other
characters offer information or directions to Ellie, she looks to Louis for confirmation.
Louis looks in on Ellie sleeping, notices how much she is growing up, and spends a large
amount of time holding her in his lap—in direct contrast to his relationship with Gage,
whom Creed can express affection toward only when unobserved. Ellie's survival in the
text illustrates Creed's ultimate infatuation with her. Ellie provides Louis with a
relationship antithetical to his relationship with Rachel, who is slowly and inexorably
devouring him. In return, Creed's uncontrolled aggression destroys Jud, Rachel and Gage,
but spares Ellie.
The first sentence of the text informs me that Jud's relationship to Louis is that of father to son. Louis Creed's biological father died when Louis was three, and Creed has known no father since. Jud's first appearance in the text establishes his greater power and experience, relative to Creed. Louis, in spite of his medical knowledge, seems overwhelmed and helpless when confronted with his son, Gage, who has been stung by a bee. Louis fails to act when his wife thrusts Gage into his arms. "I'm going crazy," he thinks, but does not say aloud. Jud appears, effortlessly takes command of the situation, and dispenses sound advice, "Get the stinger out and put some baking soda on it" (19). He then disarms Louis with a smile and recognizes Creed's medical knowledge, "Not to tell you y'business, Doc" (20). Creed's indeciveness when faced with this small emergency demonstrates his inability to cope with any events beyond his immediate control—a facet of Creed's character that proves to be a tragic flaw later in the text.

Jud further demonstrates his superiority to Creed when the moving van arrives, and Creed has lost the keys to the new house. Jud produces his own set of keys to the house. The symbolic implication of Jud both possessing a copy of Creed's key's, and knowing exactly where those keys are located—when Creed does not—underscores Jud's phallic superiority to Creed. From the first page of the novel, the associations between characters resonate with the loaded emotions that exist between family members. The nature of these familial dynamics sets the stage for the horror that fills the text. Creed's hostility towards his family, his infatuation with his young daughter, his competition with his infant son for the attention of his wife, his resentment of Rachel, and his inferiority to Jud—his "father"—provide Louis Creed with ample motive for his violence later in the text.
The reader is informed almost two hundred pages before Gage's first death that Creed eventually considers his inexorable descent into the morass of the subsequent chain of events as beginning with Victor Pascow: "Looking back on it, Louis would think--when he could bear to think about it at all--that the nightmare really began when they brought the dying boy, Victor Pascow, into the infirmary around ten that morning" (70). At no time throughout the remainder of the text does Louis exhibit the contemplation that would suggest that he grasps any existing connection between the sequence of events. The implication, then, is that at some point beyond the end of the narrative, Creed regains enough sanity that he becomes able to examine the circumstances leading to the deaths of Gage, Rachel, and Jud, at which time, he perceives those event as somehow connected to the death of Pascow, whose ghost first points out the path beyond the fallen deadwood behind the "pet sematary."

When Creed chooses to follow Jud beyond the barrier, and disregard Pascow's warning, Creed himself sets that chain of events in motion. Creed buries Church, and Church returns. Creed accepts that Church has become a product of his body, when he takes responsibility for disposing of the small tattered corpses Church deposits in the garage and on the doorstep after the cat's resurrection. "I've just got this little mess to clean up... Because it's my mess" (191). That first resurrection results in Creed's decision to resurrect Gage, as well. Gage's return results in the deaths of Rachel and Jud--again, Creed's "messes"--and finally the return of Rachel.

The first words of Pet Sematary are "Louis Creed," and the last word of the novel is uttered by Rachel, Creed's resurrected wife. She calls him "darling." Louis Creed is the
darling of the text. The entire story is told from third-person perspective, but Creed's thoughts and emotions are revealed to the reader, but not those of the other characters. Part of the horror of the text then, is that the utterly plausible contemplations of Creed—which the reader is privy to—mask more complex, disturbing, mental and emotional processes. The narrative point-of-view, then, defends the incestuous, cannibalistic, feces-obsessed impulses and behavior of Louis Creed, the protagonist. Edgar Allan Poe uses much the same narrative strategy to induce reader empathy with many of his characters: The narrators of "The Cask of Amontillado," and a number of Poe's other stories, for example, perform abominable acts, while practically demanding the reader's understanding and sympathy.

When the reader first meets Louis Creed, he is lacking the keys that Jud offers him, keys not only to his house, but the key to the puzzle of how to deal with his family. Jud takes Louis to the wendigo-touched burial grounds, giving Creed the power to overcome the obstacle presented to his relationship with Ellie by the existence of Rachel and Gage. The consequences of Louis choosing to pursue the options offered him by the power of the burial ground are not so simple as the deaths (and subsequent resurrections) of Rachel and Gage, however. The implication that Creed's choice must result in a "fate worse than death" to be truly horrible, demands harsher judgement on Louis Creed than simple guilt.

An important key to the further consequences Louis must face recurs often throughout the narrative. The first appearance of this narrative thread occurs early in the novel. "The soil of a man's heart is stonier, Louis," Pascow whispers to Louis as he dies, "A man grows what he can ... and tends it" (74). Louis, unable to interpret Pascow's
sybilic proclamation at this point, dismisses the words as an auditory hallucination. Jud
Crandall repeats them after guiding Louis to the burial ground however, and then
elaborates: "And the things that are in a man's heart--it don't do him much good to talk
about those things, does it?" (141). Jud further points out that the soil of the burial
ground is seeded with stones, close to the bedrock. Louis still finds himself unable to
grasp the connection between the secrets he holds in his heart, and the bodies he plants in
the ancient burial ground.

Perhaps the most horrible thing about the resurrected beings that return from the
burial ground is their ability to expose dreadful, hidden secrets. Jud informs Louis that
Timmy Baterman's resurrected body taunted the townsmen who confronted it with ugly
secrets about themselves and their loved ones. Louis asks, "The thing this Timmy
Baterman told you . . . was it true?" (272). Jud confirms that Timmy Baterman's
accusations were indeed grounded in fact.

The ultimate consequences of Creed's pursuit of the power offered by the magical
burial ground are that Creed must face the secrets he has long buried in his own heart:
Louis Creed must confront himself as a murderer and a cannibal, and bear the
responsibility for his own actions.
Part IV: Direct Threat to the Reader

The violent acts of the characters stem from their familial relationships, both literal and symbolic. The text's treatment of the psychosexual dynamics between each of the prominent characters--Jud, Norma, Louis Creed, Rachel, Gage, and Ellie--as well as the specific references to the dynamics previous to the story between the members of Rachel's family, offers a subtle but damning indictment of social construct of "family." The failure of Creed's rational beliefs to overcome his aggression and hostility suggest that the reader, by extension, faces the same dangers. The text exploits taboos associated with cannibalism, incest, necrophilia, and infanticide, to horrify the reader. Then, however, the text reaches beyond cultural taboos, and horrifies on philosophical level, as well. The text closely examines notions of Christian versus pagan, civilized versus natural, but in the end, arrives at no conclusive judgement.

*Pet Sematary*’s revelations concerning the dynamics between family members presents the reader with a quandary: nature, and the natural and uncivilized state of being is hostile, brutal and frightening; however, the civilized state of being, represented by the social structure of the family, is equally terrifying. Creed's failure in his social role as father and husband, his murder of the resurrected Gage, and his callous medical detachment from the suffering of the human beings that surround him, indicate this text's suspicion regarding the reality of the protection afforded by a veneer of civilization. If society creates a melee in which the hostile desires of human beings are subverted into psycho-sexual violence, and not in fact sublimated harmlessly, then the reasons previously
expressed to justify the existence of that society are inadequate.

As simply as that, the threat of Pet Sematary applies directly to any reader, external from the text itself. The text's threat transcends the reader's empathy with Louis Creed, transcends the reader's belief or disbelief in the device of a magical burial ground and a wendigo, and becomes an existential threat.

However, on a more primal level, the threat is less definable. My partner, in a show of support, decided to read Pet Sematary because I was talking about the novel so much while working on this project. After she read the book, she would not let the cat into our bedroom at night, for over a week. It was two or three days before she allowed the poor cat to even sit on her lap. The text temporarily transformed her perceptions of her own cat into a reflection of Church, from the text. The text threatens a reader with the perversion of the familiar and loved, into the same abominations that Creed transforms his familiar and beloved.

The theme music to the film version of Pet Sematary contains a lyric that clearly articulates the nature of yet another threat. The lyric continually repeats, "I don't want to be buried / In the Pet Sematary" (during end credits). The threat to the reader is that of resurrection: the resurrection of friends, family, pets, or the reader herself. The threat implies that the mysteries surrounding death are society's thin mental barrier between normalcy and horror.
Part V: Exploitation of That Which Is Taboo

The final criterion of the horror genre suggests that true feelings of horror are aroused in the reader only by the exploitation of his or her anxieties surrounding the simultaneous feelings of fascination and aversion resulting from forced confrontation with culturally taboo actions and desires. I have incorporated a continuing examination of the societal prohibitions the reader must confront in *Pet Sematary*. This novel offers an assortment of taboos, designed to probe at least one and perhaps many of any individual reader's particular horrors.

The text raises the issue of parricide when the revivified Gage, acting as an extension of Louis himself, murders Creed's surrogate father, Jud Crandall. Creed's transparent and remorseless hatred of Rachel's parents, especially her father, further underscores his hostility to parental figures. Creed's long-dead biological father seems to have had little influence on Louis. However, whenever Creed remembers his mother, the memory carries with it either an association with the various unnecessary lies she told him, or brutal truths she failed to soften. The fact that Creed remembers his mother with nothing but anger and resentment becomes especially significant when reflected against his interaction with Norma Crandall, Jud's wife, and so Creed's designated surrogate mother.

Creed directly interacts with Norma on only a few occasions, most of those quite brief. He voluntarily performs a medical examination, in spite of the fact that he loathes dispensing free advice, but fails to detect any problems her own doctor has overlooked. The longest and most detailed interaction the reader observes between Creed and Norma
occurs Halloween night, when Norma apparently has a heart attack. Creed seizes the opportunity to prove himself to his father-figure, Jud, by saving Norma's life. The strange conglomeration of Dr. Creed administering CPR to the unconscious Norma, juxtaposed with simultaneous sexually suggestive images, all taking place on Halloween night—a night of masks and disguises, when reality seems skewed by surface illusion—all demand the reader's attention. "[Creed] opened her dress, exposing a creamy yellow slip. Moving with his own rhythm now, he turned her head to one side . . . Keep it firm, but let's take it easy on the old ribs . . . " Louis sends Jud out of the house, at this point in the narrative. "Jud went. Louis heard the screen door bang. He was alone with Norma Crandall and the smell of apples . . . Louis was breathing hard now and sweating . . . It occurred to him that once she had been seventeen, her breasts eyed with great interest by the young men of the neighborhood . . ." (107-8). The scene suggests sexual intercourse, concurrent to the surface description of CPR. Jud grimly informs Creed that he "owes" Louis a favor in return. Significantly, the return favor is Creed's introduction to the magical burial ground, Creed's own destruction. When Creed demonstrates his prowess to Jud/father by his actions towards Norma/mother, he seals his own fate. The struggle for supremacy between Jud and Louis, however, is finally settled when Gage returns from the dead, takes Louis' scalpel, and slashes Jud to death. Jud claims to be responsible for Gage's original death in the road. Louis, then, is responsible for Jud's subsequent murder.

Similarly, the guilt and terror Rachel associates with her sister Zelda implicate Rachel as at least partially responsible for Zelda's death. Rachel confesses her loathing and resentment of Zelda, and remembers running down the street laughing, immediately
after her sister's demise (207). Further suggestive of Rachel's culpability is her very real fear of Zelda herself. She tells Louis, "I do think she hated me. I don't really think she would have killed me, but if she could have taken over my body some way . . . turned me out of it like in a fairy story . . . I think she would have done that" (205).

Creed's readily apparent preoccupation with his genitals configures his ultimate decision that results in the deaths of Rachel, Gage, and Jud, who seemingly conspire to castrate Louis. When Louis first examines the barrier of fallen trees bounding the pet cemetery, he thinks, "A man trying to pick his way through that or to climb over it would do well to put on a steel jock" (42). The same sentiment applies to Creed trying to pick his way through Rachel's individual set of beliefs and attitudes. Louis resists the castration of Church the cat, but tells himself, "It wasn't anything as simple or as stupid as equating his masculinity with that of his daughter's tom . . . [but that] it would destroy something in Church that he himself valued--that it would put out the go-to-hell look in the cat's green eyes" (29). Creed does, of course, equate his own masculinity with that of the cat. The "go-to-hell look" he fears losing is his own resistance to Rachel's authority. When Jud joins the argument on Rachel's side, opposing Creed's objections, Louis capitulates, and makes the arrangements for the cat to be neutered. In so doing, he again submits to Rachel's will. The adversarial nature of Creed's relationship with Rachel further manifests itself by Creed's readiness to hide his "dream" the night of Pascow's death. Louis Creed does not trust his wife, perhaps with good reason. Rachel continually "castrates" or disempowers Louis, effectively undermining his relationship with Ellie with her demands that Creed lie to his daughter, and rejecting Louis sexually in favor of Gage. When Rachel
tells Louis, while they are engaged in sex, "But I promise you you don't have to eat anything you don't like" the reference to oral sex reinforces the suspicion of Louis' desire to "eat" Rachel--but in fact, Louis wants to actually devour his wife in a manner much more violent than what she intends to allow (81).

Rachel's death provokes serious contemplation of the topic of necrophilia--foreshadowed earlier in the novel by Creed's vision of his dead cousin Ruthie, which invokes "an awful doomed love" (64). The novel ends with the animated corpse of Rachel calling Louis "Darling," a word which implies a romantic, sexual relationship (411). The film version--with a screenplay written by King--pushes the concept of necrophilia even further: Louis stands and passionately kisses the revivified Rachel, covered in blood spatters and clots of muck from the grave.

The multitude of taboo desires the reader must confront in Pet Sematary include the incest, castration, murder, and necrophilia briefly examined in this section, as well as the issue of resurrection previously analyzed. Like the topic of resurrection, however, the taboo subjects that provide the primary emotional impact of this text deserve a more detailed investigation. In my reading of the text, the primary emotional impact of Pet Sematary, or the primary horror, results from the novel's incorporation of anal/oral fascination and revulsion. Implicit in a product of the magical burial ground referring to Louis Creed as "Darling" is a sort of autoeroticism, in that the products of the burial ground are representative of Creed himself. To push the ramifications even further, if the products of the magical burial ground are actually symbolic excrement, a result of Louis Creed's cannibalistic actions, then his romantic connection with the reanimated corpse of
his wife is really an erotic fixation with his own feces.
The text of Pet Sematary reveals Creed's fascination with matters both oral and anal. Creed's cannibalistic desires result from his fear of being devoured. Oral images appear thick and fast within the text: Rachel offering her breast to Gage, Jud's frequent cigarettes, the gratification of Creed's first swallow of beer on Jud's porch accompanied by his refusal of food, Rachel savoring the new pronunciations of familiar words in the context of the unfamiliar Maine dialect, Louis kissing his own fingers to press against Gage's cheek when no one is watching, Rachel demanding to leave the pet cemetery because Gage is hungry (Gage is almost always either hungry, biting, swearing, or vomiting.) Creed's specific recognition that anorexia is one of the health problems he will face at his new job—all within the first 30 pages of the text. Jud smokes, Rachel both feeds and tastes, Gage eats and eats, and Louis starves.

Ordinary food fails to satisfy Louis Creed's hunger, throughout the text, with the exception of the apple he devours with great relish immediately after his Halloween resuscitation of Norma—a post-coitus meal that summons associations of Adam's and Eve's decision to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Ironically, moments before he devours the apple, Creed places a pill beneath Norma's tongue, warning her, "it's going to taste a little bitter, but never mind that" (109). Louis Creed knows all about swallowing "bitter pills." Creed seldom eats, but he swallows down much bile, even as everyone around him regurgitates everything in their stomachs.
The first graphic example of Creed's gorge-swallowing occurs during the death of Pascow. Creed's nurse informs two candy-stripe ers that she hopes neither of them is "allergic to shit or puke" as they can expect to see "a lot of both" and moments later a group of students carry in Pascow's shattered body, and one of the candy-stripe rs promptly soils her apron with vomit (70-76). Louis, however, stifles his own impulse to vomit, in his desire to appear professional. He swallows it back down, instead. The next morning, following Pascow's appearance and Creed's trip to the pet cemetery, Creed again must stifle the impulse to vomit, upon discovering his feet covered with muck and pine needles that belie his belief that Pascow's appearance was simply a dream. Ironically, upon Creed's arrival at the campus infirmary, another doctor relates that, during Creed's absence, a drunk girl vomited directly on the head of the doctor on duty.

After the resurrection of the cat, Creed finds himself fighting "the sort of feeling he could remember from the bitter end of long drunks, just before the puking started." He is repulsed by the cat's eating habits. "He could hear him smacking—had Church ever smacked over his food that way before? . . . it was a disgusting sound" (151). Later, when Creed awakens to find the revivified cat perched on his chest, he thinks it more loathsome than if he woke to discover "a spider in his mouth. For a moment he thought he was going to throw up" (181). Immediately after fighting down his gorge yet again, Creed responds to Rachel's cry for help, because Gage is asphyxiating on his own vomit. Louis throws the child over his shoulder, so that Gage ejects the prodigious amount of vomit that blocked his airway. The next morning, Gage's health has returned almost to normal, and Ellie teaches him the words "shit" and "farts" over their breakfast cereal,
which Gage then regurgitates into his cereal bowl (183).

Louis Creed's characterization of Rachel's revelations about the death of Zelda as a "grotesque and stinking rotten tooth, its crown black, its nerves infected, its roots fetid" further suggests his oral preoccupation (207). His considerable amusement when Rachel, laughing at a wry observation he offers, breaks "explosive wind" reveals his similar fascination with anal issues (33), as does his attention to the large blue marble he finds in Gage's "enormous bowel movement" upon changing the child's diaper (220). Louis Creed gave Gage's excrement more than a cursory glance, to find that marble and identify it as belonging to Ellie. The text presents numerous such orally and anally evocative scenes.

Louis himself finally starts throwing up the morning of his son's funeral. His body rejects the copious beer he consumed the night before, just as his mind rejects Jud's desperate pleas that Creed reject the notion of taking Gage to the magical burial ground. After Gage's funeral, Louis drives to the cemetery to ponder the resurrection of his son. He orders a pizza (later discarded, uneaten) as a pretext for his excursion. Once Creed chooses to take Gage's corpse to the burial ground, his body rejects normal food entirely. Creed makes one more attempt to satisfy his hunger by more prosaic means, eating a large meal before he goes to the graveyard. His attempt fails, and he vomits the meal immediately upon opening Gage's casket. Louis Creed's decision to finally embrace his cannibalism to sate his hunger is irrevocable. His choice is further emphasized by the text's reference to Dracula, when Louis goes to the cemetery to disinter the body of his son: "In the words of some Victorian novel or other, there was wild work ahead of him
tonight—enough wild work to last a lifetime" (309).

The reference alludes to the words of Professor Van Helsing, at the end of Dracula. Van Helsing tells Jonathan Harker, "There is work—wild work—to be done..." (359). The professor, of course, intends to eradicate vampirism, which is after all simply cannibalism performed by a person who is "undead." Creed, in contrast, intends to fully embrace his cannibalism, put his son's body in the stomach represented by the burial ground, and excrete him—by which means he will revivify his son, or create a being who is "undead." One of the superstitions surrounding vampires is that they can no longer consume anything but blood. Anne Rice, in Interview With the Vampire, includes a detailed description of a character violently voiding his body of everything he has consumed, upon his transformation into a vampire. Louis Creed, when he embraces his cannibalism, undergoes a similar process.

When Ellie Creed first boards the school bus that will bear her away to her first day of kindergarten, Creed perceives the bus doors closing behind his daughter "with a gasp of dragon's breath" (33). Immediately following Creed's observation that the bus has swallowed his daughter is his realization that Gage is complacent because he no longer must share his parents with his sister. The obvious parallel is that Creed must somehow allow Gage to be similarly devoured by a metaphorical dragon to solve the dilemma of Gage's interloping presence between Louis and Rachel. Which is exactly what happens, of course. Creed discovers the power that awaits him in the magical burial ground—power that enables him to ultimately subdue and consume Gage.

The beast that symbolically devours Gage is a ten-wheeled Orinco truck, "and the
truck had been thunder, the truck had been sunlight on high chrome, the truck had been
the deep-throated, shrieking bellow of an air-horn . . . " (233). The truck hits the child,
drags him beneath, and then Gage passes through, deposited in the road like a squashed
chipmunk . . . or a pile of so much meat, either vomited or defecated. Gage is literally
chewed to bits by the accident, ripped out of his sneakers, his jumper turned inside out by
the impact.

Creed's compulsion to examine the disgusting products of his own body is so
overpowering that he finds himself groping under the canvas when he places Gage's
corpse in the car, to ascertain which direction the body is facing (350-1). Creed disinters
Gage's body and then carries it to the burial ground, where he digs a hole in the shallow
and stony soil--so like Creed's own heart--and buries it, much the same way he would dig
a hole, squat, defecate, then cover the stinking pile with earth and stones. Creed performs
this act knowing full well that he cannot now bear to touch Church the cat.

As already mentioned, the burial ground influences the actions of those connected
to it. Jud informs Creed, "the place might have made Gage die because I introduced you
to the power in the place" (275). But Jud has no knowledge of Pascow's warning to
Creed, months before Gage's death, and weeks before Church's death. Jud is not culpable
for Gage's death, Louis Creed is. Likewise, Creed is responsible for the series of brutal
deaths that occur in the wake of his decision to revivify Gage. Creed finds himself
completely in the grip of his aversion/compulsion. After dispatching the resurrected Gage,
Creed promptly buries Rachel, as well, even though she has been stabbed multiple times,
even though parts of her body are presumably missing. Creed resurrects Rachel to act out
his compulsion yet again.

However sympathetically the text may treat Louis Creed, that treatment is misleading. Creed's actions are indefensible from either the perspective of subconscious emotional desires, or from the perspective of the rational, educated being Creed purportedly is. Creed fails miserably in this text. Creed fails as a father, as a friend, as a husband, and as a doctor. Like the infamous Dr. Frankenstein and the pathetic Dr. Jekyll, Dr. Creed's aggression and his inability to resist his baser drives leads to his ultimate downfall.
CONCLUSION:

Although this discussion focuses on a single text, this process of interpretation can apply to other texts of the horror genre, and to horrific elements of texts not traditionally associated with horror. The interpretation of a horror story plot as protagonist versus a manifestation of his or her own repressed, taboo yearnings seems obvious, as Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde illustrates so well. In the words of Henry Jekyll: "I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life... I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest... of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both" (54-5). Dr. Jekyll literally splits himself into two entities, and creates Mr. Hyde—a manifestation of Jekyll's own suppressed desires. Similarly, the vampire Dracula represents Mina Harker's suppressed homoerotic aggression, Jonathan Harker's disguised urge to rape and kill, Van Helsing's rage regarding his own sexual impotence—or all of those combined deepest, darkest desires hidden within the protagonists.

King pays homage to the classic novels of the horror genre, but at the same time, adds a fresh twist. The text of Pet Sematary serves to horrify on any level the reader can imagine. Some scenes in the text seem to be constructed solely to provoke nausea. Indeed, in Danse Macabre, King freely admits "On top is the 'gross-out' level... [it] can be done with varying degrees of artistic finesse, but it's always there" (4). The text
relentlessly pounds the reader with taboo upon taboo, until he or she can no longer be certain about the morality of any action, and the supposed safety of the ideal American nuclear family seems completely illusory. The text challenges the notion that religion, family, society or any other such artificial construct can protect the reader from him/herself. *Pet Sematary* is a prolonged study of the consequences of denying the existence of hidden desires, no matter how repulsive and destructive those desires might be. The text forces the reader into a confrontation with some of those desires. This confrontation appears in other literature, as well.

*Lestat*, in *Interview With the Vampire* reflects Louis du Lac's decadence and masochism. Mad Bertha, who so terrifies the innocent Jane Eyre, is an external representation of Jane's own sexual desire for Rochester--a desire so destructive and threatening it must be locked in the "attic" of Jane's mind, where it proceeds to set fire to the house--Jane's body. Poe's raven gives voice to the narrator's guilt and fear. The representation of hidden desire as antagonist also appears in literature not traditionally classified as "horror" or "gothic." "Big Brother" in Orwell's *1984* reflects Winston Smith's brutal repression of self; the corpse handcuffed to McTeague, at the end of the Frank Norris novel, symbolizes the dead weight of unbridled greed; Henry James' character Daisy Miller develops a killing fever representative of her deliberate sexual manipulation of Winterbourne and Giovanelli; Grendel in *Beowulf* offers the reader an objective view of the power and destruction of uncontrolled violence--the same violence that makes Beowulf simultaneously a hero and a monster.

Similarly, *Pet Sematary* illustrates themes common to Stephen King's entire body
of writing. Obsession with oral and anal processes marks King's canon, in text after text.

King's short story, "Survivor Type," concerns a surgeon marooned on a small island with no food. He grew up impoverished, in an Italian neighborhood in New York, and starved through medical school to become a surgeon, only to end up losing his license for selling prescriptions to support his "patient's" drug habits. After being arrested for his involvement in a kickback scheme with several pharmaceutical houses, he gets involved in a drug-smuggling operation, only to end up shipwrecked on the island. Throughout the story, like a mantra, he repeats, "Christ, I'm hungry" (Skeleton Crew, 412). Then he breaks his ankle. Succumbing to his overwhelming hunger, he amputates his foot, and eats it. He continues to devour himself, bit by bit, until the process finally kills him. In fact, he has spent his entire life consuming himself, because of his figurative hunger for something more than he grew up having.

In Carrie, King's first published novel, the title character Carrie White, ostracized by her classmates, becomes the victim of a typical teenage practical joke. The antagonism toward Carrie is summed up early in the novel, in the words of graffiti scratched into a school desk: "Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet, but Carrie White eats shit" (21). Carrie does indeed consume all the figurative excrement her mother force feeds her, throughout the novel. Carrie's mother, Margaret White, is a fanatical religious fundamentalist. She thoroughly indoctrinates Carrie with her bizarre ideas. Mrs. White tells her daughter, for example, that if she is a "good girl" she will never develop breasts. "Momma says good girls don't," three-year-old Carrie confides to a neighbor girl (34). The resulting stigma of religious fanaticism that attaches to Carrie creates an increasing
state of tension between her and her classmates. The situation culminates when Carrie is sixteen, and some of those classmates play a particularly cruel practical joke on her, during the prom. Carrie's rage then explodes, and she burns the entire town down, in a pyrotechnic display reminiscent of a medieval dragon.

Another title character, Delores Claiborne, tricks her abusive husband, Joe, into falling through the rotten wooden cover of a dry well, where he dies, the splintered teeth of the cover holding him in the metaphorical mouth of the well. The entire event takes place during a solar eclipse, which Delores remembers as looking like "a fifty cent piece on fire, with a dark curve bit into one side of it" (233). The bitten out chunk of the sun represents the portion of their daughter's college savings, her future, that Joe consumes after he steals it to drink and gamble. Delores, in retaliation for Joe's unbridled devouring of her children's lives and futures, murders him.

In Gerald's Game a woman left handcuffed to a bed is terrorized by a man later discovered to be a serial killer, graverobber, necrophile, and cannibal. When she finally escapes, the police are sympathetic regarding her ordeal, but dismiss the man as a figment of her imagination. Indeed, during the days the woman is trapped alone with her husband's corpse, in their summer house, she experiences a rush of memories she has long-repressed, regarding her father's sexual molestation. She finally begins to piece together the influence of her father's abuse on her life: she was as effectively trapped by her failure to remember as she now finds herself trapped by the handcuffs. The man who sneaks into the house to terrorize her is the specter of her own denial and repression. When she ceases her denial, and directly confronts those repressed memories, she frees herself. After the man is
captured, the police discover a sandwich laying on the front seat of his van. "The thing poking out from between the two slices of Wonder Bread was pretty clearly a human tongue. It had been slathered with that bright yellow mustard kids like" (425). The ghoulish eating the sandwich represents her memories stealing her voice, symbolized by the human tongue the sandwich contains between two slices of Wonder Bread, symbolic of the idealized, sanitized version of her childhood she tries to cling to, until she gains the courage to abandon that unconscious lie.

The same story occurs over and over--that denied and repressed pieces of "self" will return, and destroy the repressor. The horror in each of these examples is the return of those repressed drives buried so deeply in the character's unconscious that the existence of such desires goes completely unacknowledged until the emergence of the full-blown personification--the horrific antagonist. But aside from all the academic discussion of taboos and dynamics and themes and literary allusions, what makes this text really horrible--and simultaneously defines it as art, at least by King's own reckoning--is that the text pushes remorselessly on what King refers to in Danse Macabre as cultural "phobic pressure points" (4). In order to find those pressure points, King opens one of his own veins of fear to feed his readers, through this text. Those readers drink greedily. The text, then, places the reader in the position of the cannibal touched by the Wendigo. The resulting experience disgusts and horrifies that reader, as the author says it disgusted and horrified him--but at the same time, that experience completely fascinates the reader. Horror fiction contains a broad scope of those disguised desires, those "phobic pressure points."
In a roundabout way, the whole discussion leads back to Heisenberg. The only way to locate a sub-atomic particle and observe its behavior is to bounce other particles off of it, which changes the direction of the original particle. The observer changes the behavior of the observed. Similarly, a reader—especially of horror—locates his or her own phobic places—hidden desires, disguised as aversions—within a text. The reader reveals the applicable text, and in the process, changes it from static into dynamic.
NOTES

1. I am not going to attempt a definition of "literature" as such a task seems both overwhelming and unnecessary. I am using the word to loosely include the traditionally accepted academic canon. The works by those authors I suggest have defined the genre of "horror fiction" usually appear at one point or another in most secondary and post-secondary literature curriculums.

2. The film version of *Pet Sematary* is really pretty dreadful, and I cannot recommend taking the time to view it, except for the delightfully gruesome appearances of Victor Pascow, and the particularly disgusting scene at the very end, when Louis Creed embraces the blood-streaked, mud-smeared reanimated corpse of his wife, and kisses it passionately. Just go easy on the popcorn.

3. My complete surprise at finding Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle so beautifully articulated in a comic book results from the fact that I had hunted for the name of this rather esoteric principle of physics unsuccessfully for a matter of weeks. I remembered the gist of the principle from an interdisciplinary course for which I served as a teaching assistant, as an undergraduate. However, I could not recall the specific name of the principle itself. In vain, I approached most of my acquaintances, embarrassed by my forgetfulness, but hopeful of their assistance. Each and every person I queried responded with a blank stare. One woman suggested that I must be mistaken, because she suspected that such a principle—if it even existed—must be from a field related to history or psychology, because a "hard" science like physics could never deal with the implications of such an assertion as that which Heisenberg put forth. I was about to give up, and attempt to define my critical approach without it, when I happened to pick up an interesting-looking comic book off the rack in the store where I work, and there it was. Providence.

4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge first coined the phrase "willing suspension of disbelief." The idea, basically, is that a reader (or audience member of a theatrical performance) tacitly agrees to put aside his or her skepticism during the course of the text or performance, and willingly overlooks the minor inconsistencies, incongruities, and anachronisms that might flaw the experience, as well as temporarily accepting the assertion that what are clearly fictional characters are actually "real" to some degree.
WORKS CITED


Appendix of Related Works:


Schneider, Kirk J. *Horror and the Holy: Wisdom-Teachings of the Monster Tale.* Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co, 1993. *(I actually was unable to obtain a copy of this, but the description sounds fascinating.)*
