

The Horror of Memory: Trauma, Repression, and the Eldritch in *It* (1986)

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Abstract | The purpose of this paper is to analyze how the elements of Lovecraftian horror and human trauma have been combined by Stephen King to create a tale that is eldritch horror at its disturbing best, yet surprisingly humane in its vision. While his fiction as a whole is known for giving memories—particularly, childhood memories—a darker interpretation, in few novels is this prowess for combining the supernatural with the mundane, as pronounced as in the 1986 novel, *IT*. This is a story about the undead past: of coming back home to a place that is swarmed by childhood nightmares. Additionally, King's novel is a stellar homage to H. P. Lovecraft, the father of cosmological horror fiction. Through a close textual reading of *IT*, this study will attempt to understand how the author has closely interwoven eldritch terrors with the traumatic experiences that make up a tangible and inescapable part of human reality. By engaging in a discussion on the antagonist in *IT*, this paper looks at the core memories generated by traumatic childhood experiences: at how realistic issues like violence, hatred, bigotry, internalized fears of societal ostracization and marginalization, and the repetitions of abusive patterns in adulthood, all coalesce to form a feeding pen for King's fictional monster. This reading will further linger on how instances of socio-cultural tensions and frictions—in small-town 1950s America—have acted as enablers in the workings of a trans-dimensional entity equivalent to Lovecraft's outer gods. The conclusion of this paper will try to gauge how the inexplicable anatomy of King's antagonist in *IT* directly calls to mind classic Lovecraftian lore all the while embodying the slippery and complex nature of the human mind and by extension, of trauma and memory itself.

Keywords | Lovecraftian, Eldritch, Horror, Memory, Repression, Trauma, Stephen King, H. P. Lovecraft, *IT*

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One of the primary genres that has relied on and extensively explored the workings of the human mind in response to the traumatic and the traumatizing—in order to weave a fascinating narrative—is horror. While the abhorrent and the inexplicable are inextricable parts of horror, most Modernist and Post-Modernist horror stories have gone a step further by incorporating into the terrifying, the scientific, the psychological, and the medical. For example, Henry James's *The Turn of The Screw* remains one of the most psychologically complicated and convoluted of horror stories, owing to its use of narrative ambiguity through the governess' perspective. By presenting her account of events, the text enables both supernatural and psychological readings. While critics like Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi have proposed the intermingling of horror and repressed desire in the spectral entities of Peter Quinn and Miss Jessel, theorists like Marcus Klein have highlighted the psychological symptoms of neurosis and paranoia the governess exhibits.² James was greatly influenced by the writings of his brother, William. In 1890, William James came up with the term "stream-of-thought" (239) that Henry James later incorporated into his writings on the supernatural. "Stream-of-thought" perceives human consciousness as a continuous flow of ideas, rather than a fragmented series of solitary thoughts: it presents an inner consciousness that is constantly changing, private and even, selective, in its thinking. The way these ideas blend into a single whole is integral to our navigation of reality.

In his novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James utilizes this concept by presenting a subconscious reality that is layered and present: one that we cannot always see, lying just below the surface of what is visible to us, through the character of the governess. Klein's study elaborates on how the governess is a highly unreliable narrator and how her account of events is perhaps the sole horrific element in the story (597). Her perception of the happenings at Bly Manor appear to fluctuate between genuine paranormal experiences and hallucinatory episodes. This creates a liminal space (Turner) within her subconscious itself: a layered ontological site where the visible world and the repressed psychological realm overlap, defying a stabilized interpretation. Horror stories, tales of the occult, the presence of the supernatural have always held an innate attraction for people; Mary Shelley, Edgar Allen Poe, Bram Stoker, Charlotte Bronte, and R. L. Stevenson have inflected from generic horror, often weaving the elements of psychological realism into their plots. The human psyche, its general nature of being completely inaccessible in places, much like a locked room inside a haunted mansion,

²See, Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin. "'The Turn of the Screw' and 'The Exorcist': Demoniactal Possession and Childhood Purity." *American Imago*, vol. 33, no. 3, 1976, pp. 296–303, www.jstor.org/stable/26303140; Klein, Marcus. "Convention and Chaos in 'The Turn of the Screw.'" *The Hudson Review*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2007, pp. 595–613, www.jstor.org/stable/20464639.

evokes in our minds this ultimate question: Does true horror come from within us or is it the work of outer forces?

This is where the true appeal of horror as a genre lies. No exploration of horror is complete without an exploration first of its psychical and psychological effects on the human mind. Vampires, werewolves, ghosts, ghouls, skin walkers, La L'lorna, demons, mummies, and zombies, to name a few, are the familiar hauntings of our childhood and adolescence. From the woman in white to a dark room, horror has worn several faces across Literature. However, it is the fear of the unknown, the faceless, the absolutely incomprehensible, that dredges up in the human mind a paranoia of the terrible and the inhuman. It is in the realm of Eldritch horror that deeply personal experiences are turned into monstrosities that transcend the limits of human comprehension. It defies comprehension and invites chaos, confusion, and unfixity. Eldritch horror falls into the purview of Lovecraft's "weird fiction" (Crowley 1) and deals with cosmic fear, ancient supernatural entities, and horror evoked through corporeal and psychological incomprehensibility. The incomprehensibility associated with Eldritch horror thereby reflects the slippery, inarticulate nature of traumatic memories which defy linguistic coherence (Caruth 18). In his essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," Lovecraft explains cosmic horror: "The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; [...] and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" ("Supernatural Horror in Literature"). Operating through a set of identifiable tropes like cosmic insignificance, ontological instability, linguistic inarticulation, and the fragmentation of rationality, Lovecraftian horror is uniquely suited to representing trauma. Through the entity It—an ancient interdimensional creature similar to Lovecraftian antagonists—King shows how the personal suffering of the entity's victims materializes in the cosmic anatomy of the creature, which can shapeshift into a replica of a person's worst fears. Paradoxically, the known trauma of marginalization, abuse, and terror find monstrous articulation through the incomprehensible corporeality of It. In this way, familiar trauma is represented through a fear of the unknown, showing how Eldritch horror acts as a cosmic framework for exemplifying the horror of psychological wounds.

In American fiction, and indeed, in all the popular fiction of our times, one of the greatest, most-prolific horror writers to have exhibited a passion for cosmic horror, similar to Lovecraft, is Stephen King. King's novels have rarely left any horror trope untouched over the course of an exhaustive and extensive career. He has explored hauntings, aliens, apocalyptic pandemics, monsters, cursed objects, occult magic, portals, time loops, and interestingly, more often than not, alternate dimensions ruled by Lovecraftian entities. Parallel to the horrors, nearly all of the fifty-nine novels written by King also deal with human trauma, often as an aftermath or effect of childhood abuse/tragedy, its repressions and re-emergence at various points of human life. Horror remains, of course, the focal point of memories in his narratives. It appears repeatedly as a crucible for fear and trauma, as seen in works like *Pet Sematary*, *The Shining*, *Doctor Sleep*, *From a Buick 8*, and *The Mist*. *The Mist*, for instance, is narrated entirely as a series of flashbacks by the protagonist in the aftermath of an interdimensional alien

invasion in his New England hometown. This narrative technique reinforces how Eldritch horror and human trauma often rely on fragmented modes of recollection to find expression. Memory becomes integral to horror, functioning simultaneously as site and source. Repressed trauma, unresolved tensions, ghosts from the past, all find a conduit in the characters' subconscious history in King's narratives.

The incomprehensibility of King's horror is given shape time and again, albeit rather shakily, through efforts at some semblance of understanding these vastly unnamable horrors. The novel repeatedly describes the eponymous entity's ability to shapeshift, thereby defying a concrete anatomical perception. By relying on the ontological unfixity of the Eldritch being, King is able to narrate the incoherence of human trauma. The use of ambiguity in describing It's cosmic "body" is deliberate. It's unstable corporeality reflects repressed trauma's rejection of verbalization: "But when the dogsbody husband of the girl from before brought the writer's woman, *It had put on no face* — It did not dress when It was at home" (King 631; italics added). In *Black House* too, for instance, "Mr. Munshun," a demon from the court of the Crimson King, is narrated as being "a whirlpool of black, then a splotch of red – an ascot – then the beginnings of an impossibly long, white face, which is dominated by a single black shark's eye. This is the real Mr Munshun, the creature who can only live in Burny's head outside of Black House and its enchanted environs" (King and Straub 707).

The talk of enchanted environs and alternate dimensions brings us also to the concept of "thresholds." Thresholds are a prevalent concept in Lovecraftian fiction and horror fiction of all sorts. What is horror if not the collision, sudden and brutal and terrible, of two worlds that have long coexisted but might fall apart in being introduced to each other? James Kneale discusses the threshold and its importance in Eldritch horror:

Lovecraft's fiction is explicitly concerned with thresholds, with metaphors of contact and transgression. One of his stories is called 'The thing on the doorstep,' after all [...]. In 'From beyond' Crawford Tillinghast boasts, 'Have I not succeeded in breaking down the barrier; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men have seen?' (Kneale 113)

In H. P. Lovecraft, the Eldritch is directly linked to psychological and physical trauma, either preceding or following an encounter with trans-dimensional entities, capable of driving witnesses to insanity. Shapeless, nameless creatures beyond the threshold of human comprehension, cosmic horror, and, at the centre of it all, the struggle of the human mind to make sense of the horrific and nonsensical, make up the heart of Lovecraft's fiction. Kneale examines the Lovecraftian fascination with the "beyond": spaces and entities that are liminal and as a result, far out of the grasp of anything resembling logical or plausible. Of the story, "The Unnamable," he writes:

This kind of denouement is typical of Lovecraft, and the story is something of a textbook example of the fantastic. A highly realistic description is thrown into relief by the irruption of something impossible and this tension is further heightened by the indeterminacy of Lovecraft's description (an unseen entity of undetermined nature, a slime with a thousand shapes, a maelstrom). The

indeterminacy is experienced both by the reader and the narrator. (Kneale 111–112)

In *IT*, human memory, trauma, and the repression of past traumas are elevated to the level of trans-dimensional horror through the eponymous entity that forms the blackened and beating heart of the novel: Pennywise is but a ruse, one among many of the horrors we nurture as children. It, the entity, is utterly and completely indefinable, both in what it literally is and all the nightmares that it metaphorically represents. Set in the fictional town of Derry, Maine, in the summer of 1957, *IT* is about a group of seven preteens who discover that the “horror” that has been gruesomely killing and devouring the town’s children is not a serial killer but rather a real, trans-dimensional “monster.” The children christening this entity “It” is an immediate acknowledgement of It’s several, incomprehensible forms. In *IT*, King explores so much more than the Yin-Yang binaries, typical to horror.³ If we acknowledge *IT* as a classic exploration of horror and psychological realism, it also becomes important to analyze the concept of ghosts, ghouls, demons, and monsters in American literature since its inception. Modernist and Post-Modernist American writings have been drawn to the concepts being explored in Europe, the mother continent.⁴ Take, for example, the strands of Victorianism which trickled into American writings of the age. Victorianism focused deeply on the impulse to unravel, to expose, to “know,” with an intense emphasis on scientific research, psychological studies, and empirical knowledge. However, at the same time, there was a growing interest in the deeply-layered, mysterious human mind. Proponents of The Society of Psychical Research (estd. 1882) were believers of hallucinations, séances, paranormal presences, and the fine, distinctive line between the scientific and the occult. In their studies, they were trying to explore and discover the place where the two points on either side of this line meet, however briefly. Combining the supernatural with the trauma resulting from real life social problems, King creates a world where known, localized trauma becomes a trans-dimensional wound and unravels the mind. Eventually, this unravelling brings one face to face with obscure, incomprehensible abominations.

IT, the novel, is incomplete without It, the terrifying, eponymous entity that is as elusive at the beginning of the novel as it is long after the last page has been turned. Film-makers have had it comparatively easier to depict the horror: from Tim Curry to Bill Skarsgård, Pennywise the Dancing Clown has been immortalized as the face of terror for two different generations. However, King’s prose would not have echoes of Lovecraft if it had reduced the trans-dimensional horror of trauma to one face alone. By using one of

³This refers to the structural dichotomies often found in the horror genre: good/evil, dark/light, human/non-human, or monster. *IT* complicates this by showing the inherent ambiguity of binaries: the monster’s horrific nature is aligned with the small-minded hatefulness of Derry’s townsfolk, preventing us from categorizing anything within the text as pure good or pure evil.

⁴The American literature of the 19th and 20th centuries reveals a deep influence of European literary movements like the Gothic tradition, Victorian realism and the incorporation of psychological theories in horror fiction after the establishment of the American Society for Psychical Research (1884). Writers from the American continent (like HP Lovecraft, Bram Stoker, Henry James, Edgar Allen Poe, and R.W. Chambers, to name a few) started adapting Gothic and psychical frameworks within localized movements such as transcendental approaches. This resulted in hybridized texts that reconfigured Euro-centric literary conventions within an American social context. For further reading, see, Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Vol. 1, Secker & Warburg, 1960 and Alexander, Michael. *A History of English Literature*. 3rd ed., Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

the oldest tricks in the book—a creature that can turn into the things that one fears the most—King brings to life an abomination of the most morbidly fascinating sort. Here is a thing that embodies a paradox: *It* is the juxtaposition of the known beside that which is unknown. The faceless and the multifaceted come together to give shape to what trauma looks like to each of us, individually. Trauma is ever-shifting, changing shape across frontiers. It, the entity, wears numerous other forms—from the Werewolf to the Mummy to the classic horror trope of a swamp monster—changing costumes like a performer at a nightmarish circus. It is similar to an Old God, made more deadly by King’s fertile imagination. Like Lovecraft’s abominations, It is horrifying, and is shown to possess deep cunning and an intrinsic understanding of basic human emotions, most of all, fear. Describing the creature nesting in its lair, King gives readers a glimpse into It’s mind:

The writer’s woman was now with It, alive yet not alive – her mind had been utterly destroyed by her first sight of It as It really was, with all of Its little masks and glammers thrown aside – and all of the glammers were only mirrors, of course, throwing back at the terrified viewer the worst thing in his or her own mind, heliographing images as a mirror may bounce a reflection of the sun into a wide unsuspecting eye and stun it to blindness (1230).

King constructs his antagonist in the typical mode of all Lovecraftian horrors: ancient, cosmic, and ageless, unfathomable to the human eye or mind. Its real form, the “deadlights,” is capable of reducing human beings to insanity, reminiscent of entities like Cthulhu, Shub Niggurath, or Yog Sothoth⁵ In the children’s first collective encounter with It, It describes itself with the words: “I am Eternal. I am the Eater of Worlds” (King 1275). However, what makes It so different from typical Eldritch antagonists is *It*’s exploration and exploitation of human memory, especially repressed memories. King’s setting is Derry, a small town in 1950s, post-war America, rural Maine—a place that is synonymous with conservative, regressive norms that curb individual freedom and create an environment of fear and toxicity. Before they even encounter the cosmic entity, all seven children are victims of social ostracization by peers and adults, in their home town. A sense of failure and insecurity, both self-enforced and societal, creates intense psychological pressure on them. Their status as social misfits makes them viable for It to try and prey on them. Each of the children, in their encounters with It, see it not simply as “faces” or “glammers” that it wears but as their own past trauma. When It comes to one of the children, Michael “Mike” Hanlon, it does so in the form of a gigantic crow:

⁵These entities appear in the fictional world of Lovecraftian literary lore as cosmic deities that belong to a primordial order, existing from a time before the Earth was formed. For instance, Cthulhu, the most well-known of these monsters, is described as a gargantuan humanoid creature, squid-faced and winged. Shub-Niggurath is shown as a fertility goddess, amorphous and faceless. Based on the idea that humanity is a speck in the terrifying unknown of the universe, these entities, also referred to by Lovecraft across his works as the “Great Old Ones” or the “Outer Gods,” are incomprehensible, monstrous beings that defy human understanding and are generally shown as being indifferent to human existence (See, Joshi, S. T. *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos*. Mythos Books, 2008). Metaphorically, the vastness and ontological disorder inflicted by these beings reflect the tendency of Lovecraftian horror to pinpoint the insignificance of human life within the cosmic scale of the universe.

He would not remember, not consciously, but his mother could have told him where the bird he had seen at the Ironworks came from. When he was a baby only six months old, his mother had left him sleeping in his cradle in the side yard while she went around back to hang sheets and diapers on the line. His screams had brought her on the run. A large crow had lighted on the edge of the carriage and was pecking at baby Mikey like an evil creature in a nursery tale. He had been screaming in pain and terror, unable to drive away the crow, which had sensed weak prey. She had struck the bird with her fist and driven it off, seen that it had brought blood in two or three places on baby Mikey's arms [...]. *A part of Mike had remembered that always* – tiny baby, giant bird – and when It came to Mike, Mike had seen the giant bird again (1230–31; italics added).

Each of these encounters is also a deeply personal experience, based on what fear means to them.⁶ Moreover, *IT*, like most Post-Modernist writings, breaks with the conventional linear narrative. It follows a shifting back and forth in time, across the seven protagonists' childhoods and adulthoods, in order to navigate the non-linear flow of human thought. There are a lot of maneuverings and manipulations involved in the narrative. The omission of causality—What exactly is this entity? Why does it stay in Derry and not elsewhere? Where did it come from? How do these seven children overcome their trauma and face it when no one before them did?—enhances the air of absolute incomprehensibility that surrounds *IT*.

In chapter six, Edward “Eddie” Kaspbrak, a hypochondriac with anxiety disorder, has a run-in with a homeless man in the train yards, when playing by himself. He runs into a homeless drug addict who offers him a sexual favour in exchange for money. This encounter is inlaid with subtext hinting at why this incident may have unsettled him so deeply: “‘I...I don't have a dime, either,’ Eddie said, and suddenly thought: Oh my God, he's got leprosy! *If he touches me, I'll catch it too!* His control snapped and he ran” (371; italics added). Eddie is a victim of emotional abuse from an overbearing and manipulative mother. Early on in the book, King reveals how Sonia Kaspbrak, who exhibits symptoms of Munchausen by proxy, has been giving her son placebos full of camphor and tap water in order to make him believe he's asthmatic (279). Eddie's hypochondria is a result of his mother's need to have him constantly dependent on her as a provider. It is a creation of sources that function independently of him.

Additionally, he is also one of the two heavily queer-coded characters in the book.⁷ Eddie's first encounter with the homeless leper, his fear of death and disease, and

⁶Fear and trauma are not mere narrative memories but rather a fragmented dissonance of emotional experiences. Trauma theorists talk about the sudden recurrence of memories that can cause disruptions in one's identity and self, thereby hindering survivors' attempts to return to normalcy. Literature in the field of repressed memory is not restricted to Freud; the nature of these memories and their tendency to resurface has been discussed at length by theorists like Caruth (1996) and van der Kolk (2014). Additionally, studying the gaps left by trauma and their susceptibility to return in a post-traumatic state form an integral and implicit part of the given paper.

⁷The book implies Eddie's homosexuality through elements like homophobic bullying (King 370–371), sexual anxiety (372), and a tense relationship with normative masculine expectations. For Richie, it manifests via excessive heterosexual posturing (707) and It's attacks, where It takes the forms of Paul Bunyan (704–707)—considered a traditional model of heteronormative American masculinity—and a werewolf (457)—an anomalous mingling of human and monster—to reveal Richie's traumatized internal

perhaps, internalized homophobia, all become the basis for his later, recurring encounters with It. When It first appears to Eddie as a decaying, rotting leper and asks to perform a sexual favour on the boy in the same way the homeless man had (376), King obliquely covers all the facets of Eddie's trauma: the emotionally abusive relationship with his only living parent, his hypochondria, and the possible unspoken trauma of repressed sexuality due to growing up in an environment hostile to any expressions of the same. The effects of developing internalized homophobia from being gay in small-town America—the novel opens with the brutal assault and murder of an openly-gay man during a carnival in Derry—and the very real threat of risking one's life in order to embrace one's sexual orientation in such an environment are mirrored in Eddie's traumatizing run-in with It. The repeated sexual offers made to a child (pedophilia was and is a common argument used to ostracize queer individuals from mainstream lives) and Eddie's subconscious terror of 'contracting' the flesh-eating disease from the leper, are brought to the fore of the readers' attention and given concrete shape through It. That leprosy and homosexuality are both correlated as "diseases," particularly ones that can spread through touch, are made clear in Eddie's internal response to this encounter, and right before it, a discussion on syphilis that he has with his friends:

'A guy can get it from a woman—'

'Or another g-guy if they're kwuh-kwuh-queer,' Bill added.

'Right. The important thing is you get the Syph from screwing someone who's already got it.'

'What does it do?,' Eddie asked.

'Makes you rot,' Richie said simply.

Eddie stared at him, horrified. (373)

Later, when he encounters It as the leper, Eddie's terror of disease, of sexuality, and of the two somehow being related to decay, is brought up front and centre: "Its hand reached out again, and in some corner of his panic-maddened, screaming mind, Eddie was suddenly, coldly sure that if the thing touched his bare skin, he would begin to *rot*, too" (377; italics added).

The mention of leprosy in the purview of sexual propositioning might be a probable reference to the AIDS Epidemic of the 1980s, which took the lives of several closeted gay men, due to a lack of open discussions on safe sex for homosexual individuals. When It approaches Eddie as the leper, It is wearing the face of not one but two nameless traumas: his abuse at the hands of his mother and his own repressed sexuality, both of which he is oblivious of as a child. These fears are rooted in Eddie's subconscious mind. Through It, King depicts a vital trope of horror: the constant

perception of himself. The werewolf, especially, is a major symbolic manifestation of how he associates his latent sexuality with perversion owing to the homophobic atmosphere of Derry. In the 2017 and 2019 film adaptations (directed by Andy Muschietti), the queer subtext of the novel is made explicit, with Richie's romantic feelings for Eddie being openly addressed at the film's climax.

projection of one's fears, guilt, anxieties, and the weight of social expectations, onto one's demons. It, the entity, exploits this projection and turns it into cosmic horror.

King explores the societal reinforcement of childhood abuse and the comfort patterns that abused individuals subconsciously seek out. This idea first originates in Freud's 1920 work on "repetition compulsion": the psychological urge that causes individuals to fall back into self-destructive patterns owing to the warped sense of control they appear to provide (*Beyond The Pleasure Principle* 282–283). In a 2023 study, Gewirtz-Meydan and Godbout observed these patterns via displays of hyper/compulsive sexuality among child abuse survivors (1–16). Though conducted on sexual abuse survivors, the study offers a compelling idea of how relapsing into repetitive patterns of toxic behavior may provide a false sense of security to survivors. The bathroom scene in *IT*, which focuses entirely on the sole female protagonist of the novel, is a fine example of this. Beverly Marsh's father is a perpetrator of domestic violence. Further, it's heavily implied that he may have also abused/wanted to abuse her sexually. The 2017 film adaptation goes a step further in showcasing Beverly's ordeal in the bathroom. Tendrils of hair seep out of the mouth of the drain and hold her in place as she's doused in blood from the mouth of the sink (*It* 00:39:40–00:41:50). In both the literary and cinematic versions, when Beverly's father stands in the same bloody bathroom after her, he neither sees nor smells the blood: "There was blood...blood everywhere...and her father didn't see it" (King 477; italics in original).

The use of blood as a source of trauma for a girl on the cusp of adolescence is an obvious reference to the taboo and silence surrounding menstruation and the reaching of sexual maturity for women. Her father's inability to see the blood is not only a result of It's supernatural abilities but it reflects the societal erasure of menstruation and the stigma attached to periods, as well as the resultant anxiety and trauma caused to young girls experiencing their first menstrual cycles because of such prejudice. In *Carrie*, King first addresses this concept in the shower room scene where vicious school bullies throw discarded tampons at the titular protagonist when she starts menstruating and later, douse her with a bucket of pig's blood on prom night. As a man who frequently abuses his daughter, Beverly's father, Al Marsh, exhibits a moral and psychological blindness to her pain and fear. In the end, Al sees only what he wants to see.⁸

As a victim of domestic violence, Beverly is objectified and imprisoned inside her own body. The contrast between viewing oneself through one's own eyes and that of seeing oneself through the expectations of the male gaze destabilizes her sense of self-perception and gives concrete shape to Beverly's traumatic childhood. She is a woman first, a human being second. When she sees herself, alone, in the mirror, her reaction is very different. It embodies a fascination with the self that Lacan discusses in his study on the mirror-stage and ego formations that influence latter-life perceptions of identity and

⁸The 50s, with its blatantly sexist propaganda aimed at the concept of the 'happy family' and an excessive focus on typecasting genders into stereotypes, perceived women as keepers of domestic harmony, as sub-human entities solely meant to bear children and maintain homes, thus keeping social "expectations" in balance. In such an environment of repression and subjugation, the approach of womanhood automatically becomes a source of fear for the preteen girl. The female body, ever-changing, becomes the seat of fascination and horror alike, especially for Beverly, who is constantly forced to see it through the eyes of the men in her life: nearly all of whom are also abusive.

the way we are conditioned to perceive ourselves through the societal expectations placed on us (96). Lacan's study primarily focused on the way infants and children react to their own reflection in the mirror. The reflection symbolizes a unified self, which the child yearns for, and creates an anxiety about the prior self, which the child perceives of as fragmented. When Beverly looks at herself in the mirror, she is engaging with the imaginary, unified Other self, causing happiness and wonder: "She paused (as she now almost always did) to look at her chest in the mirror, trying to decide if her breasts had gotten any bigger in the night [...]. // She smiled at her reflection and put a hand behind her head, pushing her hair up and sticking her chest out. She giggled, a little girl's unaffected giggle..." (King 481–482). This scene marks the Lacanian transition where Beverly goes from the perfect Imaginary state to the Symbolic self that exists in the world of social impositions and gendered expectations. Whereas the Imaginary state is one that we visualize ourselves to be during early infancy and childhood, the Symbolic self is constructed by societal expectations and places social norms, rules, and stereotypes above individual autonomy (Lacan 75–81). Beverly's unfiltered and childlike joy at her reflection in the mirror changes into a deeply subdued reaction after the encounter with It: "... and suddenly remembered the blood spewing out of the bathroom drain the night before. The giggles stopped abruptly" (King 482). Since the blood is the result of an attack by It, its presence lacks any sense of wonder. Instead, it becomes a catalyst for anxiety and shame.

The antagonist in *IT* is a synchronized repetition of the horrors already present in the societies and communities one lives in. Derry as it is, hateful and small-minded, is a perfect catalyst for It. Derry creates the traumas that It can then wear for its diversely horrifying faces. There is nothing supernatural about child abuse, homophobia, racism, sexism, ableism, body-shaming, domestic violence, and hate crimes. Yet, each of these emerge as otherworldly manifestations of the "glamours" that It wears, exploiting repressed fears to either kill the victim or drive them to a state of complete mental collapse. King explores how the cyclical nature of abuse affects the relationship between victims and their abusers. This is revealed in Beverly's thoughts after she's just been hit by her father: "She felt her love for him. I never hit you when you didn't deserve it, Beverly, he told her once when she had cried out that some punishment had been unfair" (479). Children who grow up in an abusive household are twice as likely to end up in abusive relationships themselves, in adulthood (Widom 160–66).⁹ In "The Neurobiology of Child Abuse," Martin H. Teicher discusses how this reinforcement of abuse is far more likely to occur when the victim was abused in the tender years of childhood: "Those

⁹While Widom's theory remains foundational in the field, contemporary researchers have also conducted extensive work in the area of trauma, abuse, repetitive patterns and the aftermath of abuse survival and its recovery. Abusers almost always resort to manipulating children, and even adults, into a sense of misplaced and false security, correlating physical/verbal/emotional violence to acts of love. As a result, victims of past abuse, whose self-esteem is also severely impacted during these relationships, often end up craving a similar experience in their pursuit of love. The lack of healthy relationship markers and untreated past trauma might end up influencing decisions about future relationships as well. See, Ehrensaft, Miriam K., et al. "Intergenerational Transmission of Partner Violence: A 20-year Prospective Study." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 71, no. 4, 2003, pp. 741–753, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.71.4.741>; Slavin, Melissa N., et al. "Child Sexual Abuse and Compulsive Sexual Behavior: An Updated Systematic Review of Key Findings and Moderators." *Current Addiction Reports*, vol. 12, no. 1, 52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-025-00658-3>.

afflicted [...] typically have a history of intense, unstable relationships, feel empty or unsure of their identity, commonly try to escape through substance abuse, and experience self-destructive or suicidal impulses” (Teicher 70). Both Eddie and Beverly, despite the repression of their childhood trauma, fall back into similar abusive relationships by choice. Eddie marries a woman who mirrors his mother in both physique and actions, and enforces on him the same abuse by enabling his hypochondria and anxiety. Beverly, who grows up to become a remarkably successful woman, ends up married to Tom Rogan: a violent, erratic wife-beater who was, ironically, abused by his own mother. The societies that one inhabits are either conducive to these abusive environments or conducive to the security and safety of children. Teicher points out how societal conditions are major determining factors as far as abuse, especially of children, is concerned:

Society reaps what it sows in the way it nurtures its children. Stress sculpts the brain to exhibit various antisocial, though adaptive, behaviors. Whether it comes in the form of physical, emotional or sexual trauma or through exposure to warfare, famine or pestilence, stress can set off a ripple of hormonal changes that permanently wire a child’s brain to cope with a malevolent world. Through this chain of events, violence and abuse pass from generation to generation as well as from one society to the next. (75)

In the case of this novel, Derry is already rife with such instances of violence, human hatred, and bigotry—the perfect setting for King’s malevolent Eldritch brainchild.

While exploring the town’s recorded history to find leads on what exactly It is, Mike finds records of horrific accidents that sporadically wiped out large amounts of the town’s population. These accidents—ranging from a freak explosion at the Ironworks, a group of people being burnt alive at a black club as a hate crime, to a shootout that killed all members of a highway gang—occur at intervals of twenty-seven years. Each such senseless accident marks the beginning and end of the creature’s feeding cycle. However, in spite of the records of these traumatic incidents in the town’s histories, there is no actual bibliographic record of their source, that is, of It itself. It, the entity, remains hidden, lurking for centuries in the catacombic sewer systems under Derry: a clear parallel to the trauma that is always present in our subconscious minds, even with no recorded recollection of it. Mike writes of Derry, and subsequently, of memory: “To know what a place *is*, I really do believe one has to know what it *was*” (181; italics in original).

The aspect of resurfacing memory is introduced into the plot through the element of the supernatural. After their first collective encounter with and apparent defeat of It, each of the children slowly begin to lose the memories of their time in Derry and with each other. It is not a complete erasure of their consciousness. Rather, it is the slow, methodical process of burying their childhood trauma to shield their adult selves. *IT* uses magic-realism to mirror psychological repression. The children lose all memories of their childhood, of It, even of each other, once they leave Derry behind. King explicitly mentions that this is a result of their encounter with an entity beyond their perception of space and reality:

All of that helped, but mostly it was just forgetting Derry and everything that happened there. Because that's when the forgetting happened [...]. [L]ooking back now I'd have to say it happened over a remarkably short period of time. Maybe no more than four months [...]. *Someone washed the blackboard and all the old equations went away.* (167; italics added)

This cosmic erasure of their trauma not only separates them, but the terrible and sudden resurfacing of their memories twenty-seven years later has tragic consequences for all of them. By robbing the children of their memories, good and bad, the cosmic powers of *It* play a major role in depriving them of the support system that they had built around each other. As a result, the adult Losers fall back into familiar and destructive patterns of abuse and isolation. All of them go on to lead lives that are economically successful, but emotionally empty and fractured.¹⁰

It is only Mike who, by choosing to remain at the birth site of the horror, keeps himself forcibly tethered to and aware of his trauma. The removal of themselves from the place of their memories provides a sense of false security to the Losers. However, they remain constantly, if unconsciously, aware of their susceptibility to fall back into that abyss at any time: "How it came back, how all of it came back ... and now he stood here in his den shivering as helplessly as a homeless mutt caught in a thunderstorm, shivering because the guys he had run with weren't all he remembered. *There were other things, things he hadn't thought of in years, trembling just below the surface*" (82; italics added). They are aware, most of all, of the presence of this abyss, of *It*, wounded but alive, in Derry and in the depths of their minds. It is only at the climax of the novel that the meddling of cosmic powers takes on the element of healing. Once *It* has been killed by the adult Losers, they begin to experience the same cycle of forgetting:

'It's going to happen again, I think.'

'The forgetting?'

'Yes. In fact, I think it's already started. Just little things so far. Details. But I think it's going to spread.'

'Maybe that's best.' (1325)

In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Sigmund Freud states the deliberation allegedly involved in the repression of human memories, that is, the possibility of human beings being capable of forgetting what we do not want to remember. This, he describes as follows: "I must recognize in this process the influence of a *motive*. There were

¹⁰R. L. Stevenson was one of the first to utilize the concept of a fractured mental state in horror. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, this is used to explore the vast possibility of the psychological landscape of the mind and the trauma sustained within it as a theatre of the supernatural. See, Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. 1992. Project Gutenberg, May 2023. www.gutenberg.org/files/43/43-h/43-h.htm.

Given much before King's novel was completed, William James's observation that if "devils" truly exist, it is a "cracked and fragmented self" that lets them in (W. James 110), resonates with how the children grow up and are made to forget *It* but are never truly able to let go of their trauma and shared experience of the awful and inexplicable.

motives which actuated the interruption in the communication of my thoughts [...] and which later influenced me to exclude from my consciousness the thought connected with them [...]—that is, I wanted to forget something, I *repressed* something” (8; italics added). In *IT*, the protagonists reject the trauma of their childhood through repression¹¹ and magic realism. The supernatural powers of It prevent them from being able to recollect anything about the years that are so formative to one’s existence. Stanley, who is one of the only characters, besides Mike, to show any remembrance of the past trauma shared by the Losers, says: “I wake up from these dreams and think, ‘My whole pleasant life has been nothing but the eye of some storm I don’t understand.’ I’m afraid. But then it just ... fades. The way dreams do” (King 61). In his paper discussing the relevance of the past in *IT* and the other works of Stephen King, Leonard G. Heldreth writes: “Any escape from the past in King’s fiction provides only a temporary respite. Events, experiences, and guilts reappear” (6). The past remains a tangible presence in his fiction:

The past is the centerpiece of King’s horror: In this novel and many of his previous works, King has tapped into a fear that haunts every person, the dread of living again through the confusion and traumas of his past. King forces us back to the insanity we experienced as children and starts up the cycle of fear and confusion that we always knew was there. In his fiction we experience the true horror of time when the inescapable past blights and usurps the future. (Heldreth 6)¹²

It is a creature of primordial chaos. With the return of his memories and faced by the daunting prospect of having to return to Derry to face his childhood demons, Stanley abandons his friends and a seemingly-perfect life in Atlanta. He kills himself in the bath rather than returning to the site of the horror again. Psychoanalysts Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière use the term “cut-out unconscious” to define this ‘site’: “a history not so much censured as erased, reduced to nothing, yet inevitably still existing” (47). Later, Robert Vork, in his analysis of post-war trauma in Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*, elaborates on the cut-out unconscious as: “a kind of non-memory or non-emotion – an emptiness in the place where feelings and thoughts should be, but instead were annihilated, wiped clean by an act of such terrible violence that all substantive experience was precluded” (Vork 38).¹³

¹¹In “The Unified Theory of Repression,” Matthew Erdelyi reinstates how Freud perceived of repression as a defense mechanism: “When defining repression, Freud stated, ‘The essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness’ [...]. However, he eventually began to discuss repression in two distinct contexts: a narrow context, referring to this specific act of rejecting memories from consciousness, and a broad context, where repression functions as an umbrella term for all possible defense mechanisms” (qtd. in “Debating the Deep Subconscious”).

¹²Further exploration on King and his writings include his own critical essays on the art of writing, horror fiction as well as existing discourse. See, King, Stephen. *Danse Macabre*. Simon and Schuster, 2011; Napier, Will. *The Haunted House of Memory in the Fiction of Stephen King*. 2008. U of Glasgow, PhD dissertation.

¹³In the play, it is a second assault on Katrin that reinforces her prior trauma with much more force than the first time around: “Katrin returns to the canteen with a horrible, disfiguring wound across her face” (Vork 42). This forces her, as well as those around her, to acknowledge the reality of her trauma. Similarly, in *IT*, it is a second slew of brutal murders heralds the awakening of It. The phone calls made by Mike act

The wound as a site for unspoken, repressed memories, and trauma is utilized by King in *IT*. At the conclusion of the first part of the novel, the seven children make a blood pact to come back to Derry if It should ever return. While he confesses to never having “thought of Derry itself in twenty years,” Bill Denbrough shows his wife the re-emergence of the trauma he has lived through the re-emergence of that old wound where he had, as a child, cut open his palm for the blood oath: “He held his palms out to her, and in the centre of each she could see a close-set ladder of white lines that could have been scar-tissue” (163–164). King connects the cosmic with the surfacing of repressed trauma by relating it with the beginning of It’s new feeding cycle. In *IT*, the real-life trauma arising from societal abuse and the trans-dimensional trauma attained through the encounter with the Eldritch entity come together to create a new, fresh wound: one that can no longer be repressed. In conversation with counseling psychologist, S. L. Parween, Parthavee Singh discusses how repressed trauma is “Never really forgotten”; instead it:

stay(s) hidden from our conscious awareness, but intrude(s) upon our daily life in fragments, dreams, triggers, and flashbacks.

‘Often the memories do not come back as verbal narratives but as symptoms such as dissociative episodes. Once a person gains access to these memories, they relive the event as though it is happening in real time.’ (Parween, in conversation with Singh)

It, the creature, becomes the vehicle carrying all these memories. It imitates the worst of human experiences, turning them into a twisted psychological bear-trap. Parween goes on to say that while repression is a “survival tool,” it also causes more hindrances in later life: “All through this, the traumatic memories also find ways of intruding upon consciousness. The almost opposing ways in which trauma shows up for us may lead to what many called ‘psychic numbing,’ ‘paralysis of the mind,’ and what we now call and understand as ‘dissociation’” (Parween, in conversation with Singh).

For It, ‘dissociation’ becomes the greatest asset. *IT* works on the dissociation and apathy of the Derry residents towards racial discrimination, sexual assault, murder, and hate crimes, to find easy prey. Eventually, the presence of It, like the hypnotic effect of Lovecraftian outer gods and entities like Cthulhu, becomes a major desensitizing factor. It strips the adults of the town of what little clarity they possess and makes them willfully blind to the presence of a monster living among them. The vulnerability of a child’s mind to being imprinted upon by trauma, makes them the most easy prey for It—a fact the creature readily acknowledges: “It had always fed well on children. Many adults could be used without knowing they had been used, and It had even fed on a few of the older ones over the years – adults had their own terrors [...]. But their fears were mostly too complex. The fears of children were simpler and usually more powerful” (King 1231–32).

In incorporating the ambiguity of horror with the complex human psyche, King, like Henry James before him, relies on the study of psychical phenomenon combined

as the trigger for the onset of these repressed memories resurfacing and draws five of the six adult protagonists back to Derry to confront the horrors of their childhood again.

with folklore, legend, and mythos. In the first half of the novel, the children conduct the Ritual of Chüd in order to find out more about the origins of their adversary (King 901–906). Mike and Richie, in a smoke-induced hallucinatory vision, witness the arrival of It into what was then a thriving prehistoric landscape, long before the advent of humanity (912–913). They are also introduced to Maturin, a giant intergalactic turtle that is as primordial as It and the opposing creative force to Its destructive nature (1275–1277). Both the Turtle and It are described as being similar kinds of outer gods, and both are creations of Gan, the ultimate creator/Supreme Being of all things in King’s eldritch multiverse (Martin). Although there is no mention of Gan by name in *IT*, there is a reference to it at the climax of the novel as a nameless “Other,” a force greater than these cosmic entities: “And clearly, he heard the Voice of the Other; the Turtle might be dead, but whatever had invested it was not. // ‘Son, you did real good’” (King 1324; italics in original).

The Ritual of Chüd is explained by King as the only way to defeat an entity like It: a being whose “physical body” exists in another dimension and is inaccessible to the humans residing in this one (1270). The ritual is described as an intense psychological battle of wills where the challenger must maintain their sense of self while facing an entity that destabilizes and consumes human identity (1271). Rather than a physical battle with It, the ritual relies on a psychological confrontation of wills, consciousness, and perception. This can be read as a parallel to the experience of trauma recovery, which often involves the confrontation of painful memories in order to overcome them.¹⁴ Moreover, as an act of mental warfare, Chüd is reminiscent of the use of medication, communal support and therapeutic intervention in trauma recovery. Not only medication, but empathetic communities and family support are integral factors in trauma recovery. This is exemplified when Bill initiates the ritual, but all of the Losers must participate in it to keep him from being killed (1273). In utilizing séances, mediumistic visions, and the widely popular concept of multiple, alternative dimensions, King creates a horror story which possesses all the classical jump scares that would characterize one, while also adhering to a deeply psychological analysis of trauma, repressed memories, and the possibility of healing by working through one’s problems.

The jarring and terrible experience of the moment when a repressed memory or trauma is finally unlocked, years later, is likewise captured by King through similar incomprehensibility and absolute confusion. When he finally lets readers witness It in its own den, letting us see through the eyes of the protagonists, the complete horror is laid bare before us:

[Ben] cried out, staggering back, one hand going to his head, and his first incoherent thought was, *No wonder Stan committed suicide! Oh God, I wish I*

¹⁴For instance, Bill’s struggle against It leads to him directly having to overcome his stutter (1279), which worsened after the death of his brother. Richie, on the other hand, can “wound” the mortal shell of It by doing his “Voices” (455) and Eddie’s inhaler, a medical placebo imposed on him by his mother, is shown to be poisonous to the “Eye” (1244), one of Its several forms. The Ritual thereby relies not just on defeating an external threat, but on retaking personal agency from an invasive force: In the Losers’ case, it requires them to confront the realistic trauma they have faced in real life. Their collective strength emphasizes emotional connection as integral to healing. The Ritual of Chüd becomes a symbol for trauma negotiation and healing.

had! He saw the same expressions of stunned horror and dawning realization on the faces of the others as the last key turned in the last lock.

Then Beverly was shrieking, clinging to Bill, as It raced down the gossamer curtain of Its webbing, a nightmare Spider from beyond time and space, a Spider from beyond the fevered imaginings of whatever inmates may live in the deepest depths of hell. (1269)

The choice of a spider as the closest physical embodiment of the shape-shifter that the human mind can fathom is deliberate. Across folklore, spiders have long been associated with myths relating to creation, which ties in with King's depiction of the creature as an ancient, almost god-like entity, and its ability to influence and manipulate time, space, memory, and minds.¹⁵ The spider's unnerving physical anatomy—eight-eyed, eight limbed, eerily dexterous—makes it easier to link it with the vast, unsettling incomprehensibility of the Lovecraftian beings: like Cthulhu, a gigantic cephalopod sleeping underwater for eons, or Yog Sothoth, who appears as a gargantuan mass of writhing tentacles in deep space. Moreover, the web is an important symbol. Webs are usually a mark of the spider's patience as a predator and its craftsmanship. Here, the web becomes similar to the webbed insides of the human mind, with each neuron branching off to form a fascinating, often baffling maze of experiences and untapped possibilities. Lovecraftian deities are usually associated with cult worship. Similar to the fanatical zealot Mrs. Carmody in *The Mist* or the Boon cult of The Worm in "Jerusalem's Lot," the townsfolk of Derry are an unwitting cult, acting like worshippers of this entity, and enabling It simply through their own hatefulness and an ingrained apathy towards the town's horrors.

The setting of the story is integral to the nature of the trauma King is trying to depict. In *IT*, the climactic battle of wills culminates with Bill and Richie witnessing a gigantic "wall" in the middle of an intergalactic wasteland of nothingness. Behind this wall is the dimension where It's true form resides, but King limits our perception of It to the "deadlights": writhing and pulsating "orange" lights seen from the gaps in the "colossal gray wall made of fossilized wooden stakes [...] like the bars of a cage" (1290). The light that Richie sees is described as:

¹⁵The spider's web and the act of weaving, which is complex, painstaking, and self-originating, can be read as apt metaphors for creation and/or, in this case, cosmic interference and manipulation. The web may also be read as a motif for how reality in Derry is woven and warped by It. Moreover, the spider itself holds great creative and cosmological symbolism across multicultural mythos. In Chinese mythology, for instance, spiders symbolize both luck as well as danger: On the one hand, they are perceived as "*ximu*" (trans. "happy insects") which bring good fortune; on the other, they also take the form of demons, or *yaoguai* in Chinese folklore. Similarly, Japanese folktales feature the "*tsuchigumo*," an earthly spider-demon. In Ghanian myth, the trickster/divine entity, *Anansi*, is a spider. These conflicting representations of spiders in mythical and artistic contexts are discussed by Bobby McGee in "Arachnophilia: Spiders in Art and Folklore." Additionally, the spider-like, many-limbed anatomy is a popular feature of Lovecraftian monsters, as has already been mentioned. See, McGee, Bobby. "Arachnophilia: Spiders in Art and Folklore." *Sotheby's*, 22 Apr. 2022, www.sothebys.com/en/articles/arachnophilia-spiders-in-art-and-folklore.

And from between them shone a great blind light. It glared and moved, smiled and snarled. The light was alive [...]. He could feel the light moving eagerly over his face ... and the light was *thinking*.

This is It, this is It, the rest of It. (1290; italics in original)

This concept of a “wall” calls to mind again the threshold in Lovecraftian fiction: the existence of a veil or a space that separates dimensions from each other.¹⁶ A similar idea is evoked in Ted Hughes’s “Wodwo,” in terms of the human mind and the complexity of psychological identity. While there may not be an immediately-visible link between King’s depiction of It’s true form and Hughes’s poem, there is a stark ontological chaos common to both. This chaos manifests as a dissonance of identity, form, and boundaries. For instance, in the poem, the speaker’s constant questioning of reality, identity, and boundaries results in a fragmentation of the self into the conscious and subconscious, thereby defying ontological positioning. The poem delves into how the outer identity touches only “one wall” of the consciousness and vice versa, depicting the various compartments of the mind, identity, and the physical form that try, and eventually fail, to represent all three of these aspects holistically:

But what shall I be called am I the first
have I an owner *what shape am I* what
shape am I am I huge if I go
to the end on this way past these trees and past these trees
till I get tired that’s *touching one wall of me*
for the moment if I sit still how everything
stops to watch me I suppose I am the exact centre (Hughes; italics added)

This ontological confusion is reflected in *IT*, where the creature’s identity is split between a tangible corporeality—the gigantic spider in Derry—and its “true” Eldritch body which simultaneously exists in an alternate dimension, resisting ontological fixity and stable definition. In fact, It’s ability to destroy the human consciousness through a glimpse of its real corporeality reveals the Lovecraftian, incomprehensible vastness of It as a primordial entity beyond the reach of time and space. Wodwo’s emphasis on shifting forms and incomplete self-awareness mirrors the ontological instability of both Lovecraftian chaos and human trauma. Likewise, the creature’s underground lair, deep inside the intricate, maze-like catacombs of Derry’s sewer system, is another parallel with the human psyche and those inaccessible corners where we store our worst fears. Through its enforcement of rigid racial, casteist, religious, sexual, and gender stereotypes, the town of Derry is the first creator of such trauma. As an environment of hate, discrimination,

¹⁶Thresholds form an integral part of Lovecraftian and cosmic horror, by presenting human reality as a fragile veneer susceptible to interruption by cosmic forces beyond our comprehension and understanding. In *The Mist*, the experiments of the US Military accidentally open a gateway to another dimension; the mist allows monstrous abominations from beyond our space and time to infiltrate into our world. Similarly, in *From a Buick 8*, the Buick is a doorway between our reality and the Todash spaces, a nightmarish alternative dimension full of monsters and demons. In *The Mist*, it is scientific hubris that causes a rupture in the boundary between our dimension and that of the monsters while in both *From a Buick 8* and *IT*, it is the Eldritch that intrudes upon human reality. In Lovecraftian mythos, these threshold spaces are where humanity is exposed to the multi-dimensional, incomprehensible beings characteristic to cosmic horror.

and social boycotting of anyone who does not fit into the compartmentalized definitions of who or what is acceptable, it is the perfect habitat for It.

In *IT*, the antagonistic entity embodies an infinite cycle of trauma and repressed memories, across dimensions, through which It terrorizes and hunts the children of Derry. By combining trauma and trans-dimensional horror, Stephen King provides a ghost story that stays socially and psychologically relevant long after the last page is turned and It has been reduced to a “huge bundle of steaming alien meat” (1329). The realism in the novel is layered with interdimensional magic and not all of these layers are easily discernible. *IT* explores the societal creation of trauma and the supernatural reinforcement of it on multiple levels. Incorporating the most unsavory, dubious, and problematic situations of human social life, the importance of *IT* is undeniable even today. The social relevance of the novel cannot be relegated to a bygone era when we live in an age of increasing insensitivity, intolerance, and apathy.

Stephen King, in *IT*, creates a Lovecraftian antagonist not only through the element of the supernatural, but through his depiction of childhood traumas, its causes, the mark they leave on the subconscious mind, the hideous return of our abandoned pasts, and how repression is often as detrimental to the human psyche as it is a coping mechanism. In *IT*, time is not a healer. It is a trigger point for repressed memories. It is a house swarmed by the ghost of the past. It is capable of shattering the fragile structures that the mind has built to keep one safe from what was done to one. With the return of the scars on the hands of the Losers, that entry point of trauma, that first wound, Stephen King makes It one of the most memorable and unforgettable antagonists within the domain of Eldritch horror. *IT* is the closest to a physical definition of a traumatic memory as one can ever get, and a chilling storehouse of trans-dimensional lore and origin, watched over by a thing without any explicable shape or form. The mind, King writes, never forgets the things it shields us from. It, the entity, can be defeated, perhaps, but It as the site holding all repressed trauma always remains susceptible for a return. It is simply biding time across that wall in an inconceivable dimension of the mind and reality as we know it. Its awakening, the novel seems to be saying, is only a matter of time.

Therein lies the real horror.



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