

**Gothic Fiction, Liminality, and Popular Culture:
Stephen King's "Grotesque" Social Commentary in 'Salem's Lot**

by
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'Salem's Lot'**

BY

CHRISTINE MAZUR

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which Stephen King's best-selling novel 'Salem's Lot, as an example of popular horror fiction, questions and comments on its contemporary society. The approach is interdisciplinary and is based on Victor Turner's theory of structure, antistructure, and liminality as described in his study The Ritual Process.

Turner's concept of the ritual form is to preliterate society what popular Gothic fiction is to literate society in that both perform the same function as social criticism by isolating and exaggerating parts of "normal" society for the purpose of exposing its weaknesses and promoting openness and change. Linking Turner's theory to literature are Mircea Eliade's analysis of ritual in The Myth of the Eternal Return and Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist study The Fantastic, both of which show the contrast between processual and static structural conceptions of the literary form.

The liminal phase of the ritual process is similar to the state of the vampire as it appears in early vampire fiction including Polidori's Vampyre, LeFanu's "Carmilla," and Stoker's Dracula. In King's novel, the events unfold according to classic Gothic form, demonstrating a ritual process that attempts to balance the forces of structure and antistructure. The vampire takeover of 'Salem's Lot resembles, in many ways, the evolution of political and economic systems in western society, in particular the capitalist system of individual production and gain. The American dilemma of personal versus community success is, in King's novel, the town's downfall.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of carnival and "official culture" in Rabelais and His World are applicable to King's work to demonstrate how society evolves much like the ritual process, where that which is considered "high" becomes "low" and vice versa. The divisions of popular as opposed to official culture are evident throughout the text which also comments self-reflexively on the position of its own genre within the literary canon.

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Think carefully before answering.

Then run.

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INTRODUCTION

In What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society (1984), Leslie Fiedler advocates the creation of a new kind of literary criticism that not only admits the popular arts but finds appropriate ways to deal with them. To accomplish this critical revolution, Fiedler calls for a “generalist” focus instead of the “specialist” criticism which considers only the corpus of the text itself isolated from any social, cultural, or psychological factors that were involved in the creation of it. As Fiedler sees it, “*experienced as images in heads, which exist in society, literature cannot be separated from history and biography, sociology and psychology*” (115). Within the decade following Fiedler's declaration, the old “new criticism” has been for the most part abandoned, and today interdisciplinary approaches and cultural studies have generally become the preferred method of literary analysis.

Several works, moreover, have directly confronted and dealt with the popular arts as Fiedler prescribes, of which two good examples are Harriett Hawkins's study Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres (1990) and James B. Twitchell's analysis Carnival Culture: The Trashing of Taste in America (1992). Both titles suggest a reversal of cultural domination in America in the last part of this century, whereby the former ruling “high” culture has been replaced by popular modern or “trash” culture. The dominant literary form today is the paperback novel, through which inexpensive medium comes the Harlequin romance, science fiction and fantasy, westerns, mysteries, and gothic horror fiction.

Gothic fiction, of course, has been notorious throughout literary history for its appeal to popular culture and for this reason had tended to occupy a marginal position in the realm of criticism. According to Fred Botting in his survey Gothic (1986), it was the popularity of Gothic which relegated

it to positions of "curiosities in the history of literary production and consumption" (17). With the recent increase of interdisciplinary readings of literature, however, the Gothic has become the subject of many critical studies dealing with issues of race, gender, sexuality, and social hierarchy. In The Rise of the Gothic Novel (1995), Maggie Kilgour observes that the study of Gothic fiction in particular has increased as part of "critical interrogations" of the canon and because the genre lends itself so well to "the recent focus on literature as a product of social forces" and to "attempts to theorise the relation between art, politics, history, and sexuality." In Kilgour's view, "our modern mistrust of causality" in effect leaves us in a "gothic world," at a loss to explain the relations between these subjects, and the Gothic provides a way through this critical crisis by offering "itself as a form of 'cultural self-analysis'." Montague Summers, the first critic to examine the Gothic seriously, championed its "autonomy and independence from...reality." Today the reverse tactic is employed and the tendency is to view the Gothic in the context of society (221).

Yet despite the progress that has been made in the study of Gothic, and especially in the form of marxist-feminist readings of early Gothic texts, little attention has yet been paid to the immediate and intimate influences of the development of society as a whole on the structure and content of contemporary popular Gothic. Nina Auerbach's recent study Our Vampires, Ourselves (1995) comes closest to dealing directly with contemporary culture: rather than limiting her focus strictly to women's and worker's issues in early Gothic texts - which in any case have already become more or less canonised and appear on the reading lists of university courses in Romanticism (Lewis's The Monk, Shelley's Frankenstein, Stoker's Dracula to name but a few), - Auerbach discusses texts from the earliest to the most recent gothic horror best sellers and films in the wider context of censorship,

contemporary political scenes, and attitudes and aspects of sexuality. Moreover, in addition to analysing the societal influences on such texts, in her introduction Auerbach expresses an awareness of how these same forces influenced her own critical approach. She explains, for example, that it was as a result of rising political and social fears in America at the end of the cold war and the Regan administration, that she evolved her specific focus on vampires; she came to see both blood-sucking monsters and American presidents as “personifications of their age,” mutable and dangerously powerful (3).

These recent approaches to reading the Gothic have gained it much recognition as a valuable form of social commentary, but what is still needed is a way of dealing with cultural change and its impact on the popular literary text. As culture changes, so do textual meanings, in the way that such texts address these changes; like the ritual processes of pre-literate tribal cultures which exaggerate cultural changes and thus make them explicit, a similarly structured method of considering literary texts is necessary in order to understand and appreciate more fully the social commentary encoded in the popular works of contemporary authors.

Anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of structure, anti-structure, and liminality in The Ritual Process (1969) adapts quite agreeably to such cultural literary analysis. The rules of ritual which Turner examines are similar to those of the fantastic as they operate in the Gothic context and can be used to give an interdisciplinary slant on the categories and definition discussed by Tzvetan Todorov in his structuralist study The Fantastic (1970). In turn, the similarities between Turner's theories of ritual and Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of carnival culture can be called upon to show how the popular text can be recontextualised in its contemporary social and political scene.

As a way of concretely testing this critical approach, I wish to focus on Stephen King's 1975 vampire novel 'Salem's Lot. Written during a time of political crisis in America, this best-selling horror novel tells the story of a rigidly traditional community invaded, betrayed, and transformed by the force of an immortal and yet mutable and parasitic vampire. As all the townspeople themselves gradually become vampires, a small group of outsiders and community misfits strive to halt the town's complete destruction. If they fail to do so, however, the ultimate reason has largely to do with the extent to which the town had already been dying because of its attempt at trying to remain static and to maintain traditions no longer applicable in the face of outside forces of change. Thus the vampire's arrival acts mainly as a catalyst to speed up the town's death process, and in doing so provides a grotesque mockery of an idyllic immortality: what the town achieves is not permanent tradition but permanent marginality in the vampire state. King's novel is ideal for my purposes because it too is so firmly grounded in tradition in that it functions as a metatextual encyclopedia or guide book of vampire filmic and literary history, and at the same time, King's social criticism emphasises the need for change.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I will focus on the parallels between Turner's theories of structure and anti-structure in the ritual process and Todorov's analysis of the fantastic to see how well the anthropological approach can illuminate a literary as well as a cultural phenomenon. Among the issues I wish to consider here is the question of whether we can envision the ritual process as a living text, and if so how does its purpose compare to the novel's plot. Also, how do the effects of ritual compare with the effects of reading a Gothic horror novel? The participant in each activity theoretically undergoes similar processes, separating from normal society, accepting a new set of rules of existence, and finally re-emerging with new insights on the society he or she left behind. Such a process is

possible with any genre of fiction, so what is it about the Gothic in particular that lends itself to the ritual form?

To answer in part, the second chapter will focus on the middle, liminal phase of the ritual process and consider the ways that the vampire is to the Gothic text what liminality is to ritual. During the liminal phase rules of normal society are reversed and taboos and boundaries are made invalid; things usually kept separate blend together into a state of indefiniteness. The vampire, one of the most classical components of Gothic horror, exists in a permanent state of liminality, being neither dead nor living. In ritual, however, the liminal phase is only transitory; otherwise it evolves into another form of structure. Thus the vampire state becomes a parallel version of the society it replaces. The only way to bring an end to the vampiric liminal phase is for an exterior force to destroy the monster, thus forcing it back to the human state, albeit also to a state of absolute death. As in the liminal phase, where all objects and invocations symbolise something from the outer world, the vampire story holds some meaning relevant to its contemporary audience. King's novel documents Western culture's long-time fascination with the vampire by amalgamating in his characters features of the monster from Stoker to its variations in Hollywood and Hammer studio films, and E. C. comics.

In the third chapter, I will make use of Bakhtin's notion of carnival to show how its function in popular culture compares to the Gothic in popular literature, as part of the ongoing process of cultural evolution. Much like Turner's anti-structure that examines, reveals, and attempts to correct the flaws in structure, carnival has its own set of rules beneath the seeming chaos of its surface whereby it offers critical commentary on society by exaggerating reality into the grotesque forms. 'Salem's Lot, of course, offers a somewhat darker humour than the wild revelry Bakhtin discusses in Rabelais, but the

principles of curing the problem with the popular-festive forms of reversal (ie. healing with pain, praising with curses) are still comparable.

Overall, my purpose in this thesis is to argue that while works like 'Salem's Lot may initially have appeal as entertaining horror fiction, this by no means detracts from their ability to provide insightful social, cultural and political commentary. Such fiction is "popular" precisely because it contains elements to which the populous can relate and take seriously. Authors like King, moreover, use this medium because it enables them to express their opinions of and to comment on the society in which they live, and so strongly are contemporary issues encoded in their works that an interdisciplinary or "generalized" reading like that which Fiedler calls for is necessary to discover the full value of these texts.

CHAPTER ONE

Ritual and The Fantastic

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars - on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

Desert Places

Robert Frost

In a 1952 essay entitled "Archetype and Signature," Leslie Fiedler argued for the importance of popular literature on the grounds that in "fantasy and terror, we can return to our common source" (547). As one of the key ingredients of this literature, archetype for him connotes "any of the immemorial patterns of response to the human situation in its most permanent aspects," but equally important is signature which means the ways that these universal elements are played out in a specific culture and time (537). Thus for Fiedler, the "critic in pursuit of the Archetype finds himself involved in anthropology and depth psychology" and "discovers that he has come upon a way of binding together our fractured world, of uniting literature and nonliterature" (541). In the case of the Gothic, the immemorial pattern is fright, and for Stephen King its signature today takes the form of "political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural fears" (Danse Macabre 5). In a pre-literate society, as Victor Turner's The Ritual Process reveals, these fears and other crisis-causing threats and

societal ailments are examined and dealt with through ritual which mediates the way its members question and comment on the status quo; the same purpose is served by the Gothic.

The Gothic is a particularly suitable analogue to ritual because the structure and substance of each are not to be found in the "real" world. Persons, places, objects, and actions occupying these literary and nonliterary "texts" are often metaphorical or symbolic of concepts or problems in the real world, though when they are taken out of the ritual or literary Gothic context, they seem absurd. In the case of both ritual and Gothic forms, the various components and structuring are closely allied with the effect that they are designed to achieve.

According to Turner, in tribal cultures ritual is a process designed to question, challenge, and thereby strengthen the status quo of society: paradoxically, the act of criticizing culture is necessary for a culture's survival, for such subversion promotes the possibility for openness and change. Ritual is an enacted commentary on the official system of pre-literate societies. In this sense, ritual functions as an unwritten text and the participants, or "victims" to be cured, play the role of the main characters.

Turner sees human society as being organized and maintained through a three-part ritual process: first, separation from everyday life; next, a liminal period which involves mimetic enactment of the crisis that caused the separation, during which enactment "the structures of everyday life are both elaborated and challenged" (Abrahams ix). The last phase is "reentry into the everyday world," thus closing the process of separation/ liminality/ reintegration (ix). For Turner, this process also operates in contemporary society, and this adaptability is part of the universality of ritual. At the same time, Turner is careful to distinguish this universality from a notion of stasis and he immediately goes on to stress that he regards "mankind as one in essence though manifold in expression, creative and not merely

adaptive in his manifoldness" (Dramas 17). During the liminal phase, the liminal subjects form a community wherein all boundaries are crossed and binaries no longer operate. As a result, the changes wrought during this phase emphasise the creative ability of humans, not "merely" their adaptability to previously existing ideal archetypes of society.

This emphasis on creativity is central to Turner's concept of societal change as processual, and constitutes his departure from Mircea Eliade's theory of ritual in The Myth of the Eternal Return. According to Eliade, humans, by ritual, reactivate the ideal, trying to erase the binary of the natural/supernatural world. The liminal phase is what Eliade calls chaos, which, like liminality, has its own kind of order, and is what must be regained to attain the ideal. Unlike the transitory liminal phase, however, chaos as Eliade conceives it is real and static, a zone existing before creation. In human acts of symbolic creation, for example, when taking possession of an unclaimed territory, "rites are performed that symbolically repeat the act of creation" (10). Rather than moving through a separation process, Eliade's model of societal ritual movement consists of returning to a new beginning by abolishing time, regaining chaos, out of which the ideal is reactivated. As a result, archaic man's life, according to Eliade, "is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others," the ultimate goal being to attempt to reattain that ideal.

The structure of Eliade's model is thus static, with clearly divided areas of chaos, archetype, and archaic society. There is, perhaps, some movement in this model, but it tends to be circular, whereas Turner's processual framework opens up the circle by not assuming a return to archetype. Instead, the condition of the subject in the post-liminal phase is different from that which characterized the pre-separation phase; if it were not, the purpose of undergoing the ritual would have been pointless.

The constant processual nature of ritual is partly what makes liminality a period of blending borders as opposed to breaking and then restoring them; once borders are crossed, the liminal phase no longer has the characteristic of being "betwixt and between."

A society structured like this liminal phase, where there is no discrimination among its members, seems utopian, though no group can last permanently without a hierarchical, rigid structure. Turner cites examples of some communities that have attempted to maintain this state of existence, including the Franciscan order of friars. Though this religious order has managed to endure since the thirteenth century, it has also developed into a structural system with laws and other attributes of ordered society. This example illustrates the fragility and temporariness of what Turner calls "communitas," the free and equal society composing this liminal phenomenon which, in the context of ritual, prepares the liminal entity for his or her next stage of life in the structured world.

The liminal state is separated from the outside world by a series of binary oppositions between liminal properties and those of the status system. Some include: transition/state, communitas/structure, humility/pride, sacredness/secularity, simplicity/complexity (106). The divisions between these binaries are not absolutely delineated, however, since each side cannot exist wholly alone but needs its opposite against which to find a balance: thus ritual itself "universally involves a dialectic between "structure" and "antistructure"" (MacAloon 3). Within the liminal phase of ritual, binaries are merged together, showing how each is indispensable to the other. For example, during fertility rituals, which are often necessary to correct certain conflicting norms in the society's structure, medicines are used that symbolise both fruitfulness and sterility. Ritual participants perform actions and make use of objects that represent both birth and death (Turner 28).

In the case of Gothic fiction, a similar dialectic characterizes the relationship between the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvellous, the three genres defined by Tzvetan Todorov in The Fantastic. For Todorov, the fantastic in its pure form lasts only for a moment, and ultimately shifts into one of the other two modes. He views the fantastic genre as resting on "the frontier of two genres, the marvellous and the uncanny" (41), a positioning he finds confirmed by different types of the Gothic novel. The uncanny includes works by Anne Radcliffe, in which the supernatural is explained and the genre ultimately adopts the laws of the readers' "real" world. The marvellous, in contrast, includes Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, Matthew Lewis' The Monk, and Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, where the supernatural is to be taken for granted as an everyday occurrence by characters and the reader. The fantastic lies between these two, and here the criterion is that characters and reader are not sure if the situation is governed by supernatural or real events. For Todorov, the fantastic is "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). This person (a character in the novel, or even the reader) must make a choice either to use natural laws to find an explanation, or to accept new rules of the supernatural.

According to Todorov, the totally fantastic text must fulfil three conditions: first, the text must allow the reader to see the world described as one of living persons, and to hesitate between arriving at a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described; second, while the hesitation is experienced by a character, the reader must be made to identify with that character; third, the reader must adopt an attitude toward the text which prevents any allegorical interpretation of it (33). Todorov's example of such a fantastic text is Henry James's The Turn of the Screw, much hailed as a

gothic horror story. In James's tale, the reader is never certain if ghosts really exist at Bly, or if they are merely part of the governess's wild imagination. The governess thinks that ghosts are influencing the children's behaviour, though the reader cannot be absolutely certain whether the ghosts actually exist or whether the governess is mad. In the midst of the uncertainty about the novel's end - where either a ghost or the governess kills Miles - the reader must draw his or her own conclusions.

The structural forms of Turner and Todorov's theories are similar in content where each deals with the binaries of "reality" versus the "symbolic" or "non-real in substance." Todorov's uncanny is governed by laws of the real world whereas the marvellous is entirely in the non-real. The first and last stages of ritual begin and end in reality, but coming and going to and from the liminal stage they are uncertain. The fantastic is an equal blending of real and unreal to create hesitation, a suspended state. Todorov's scheme indicates a clearly delineated boundary between the fantastic and the uncanny, and between the fantastic and the marvellous, the movement of change between genres going in either direction. This plan of movement thus differs considerably from the ritual process described by Turner which moves only in one direction: from the crumbling status quo, to the liminal phase, to reintegration into a new status quo. The liminal phase also blends real and symbolic, but surrounded on both sides as it is by clear beginnings and ends of ritual processes, it more effectively relates to Gothic textual structure than does Todorov's categorized scheme of the fantastic.

Todorov's third condition posits that the fantastic is totally distinct from the marvellous and the uncanny and thus from the real world. His description of the fantastic as resting on the frontiers of these neighbouring genres tends to attribute concreteness to the fantastic which, by definition, cannot be pinned down. Thus Todorov's static model better conforms with Eliade's cycle in which the chaos

period exists outside of time, which itself has distinctive beginnings and ends; for Eliade, the passage from chaos to cosmos, disorder to order, occurs at a precise moment, as in, for example, an ancient Babylonian creation ritual, which repeats the moment of Creation (56). There is no blending or hesitation at borders; there is simply no structure, then suddenly there is structure. Todorov's marvellous also corresponds with Eliade's ideal archetype which exists only according to its own rules distinct from reality. The uncanny is more closely related to Eliade's real, non-ritual world in the sense that though it attempts to include the marvellous, all mystery is ultimately explained in terms of the laws of the real world just as Eliade's ritual subject returns to its original state after briefly repeating the archetype.

In this respect, Turner's concept of movement makes his theory more appropriate for the Gothic genre. In the light of Turner's theory, however, the marvellous and the uncanny are actually blended together as essential parts of the fantastic phase. Unlike Eliade's notion of regeneration and repetition where a subject must undergo a ritual more than once, the ceremony Turner describes is not repeated identically each time, for "life crises are irreversible. There is analogy but not replication" (21). Therefore the result of ritual is not a complete return or restoration of an ideal, rather a progression onwards to a different, "better than last time" improvement, as it were. The ritual subject thus emerges from her ordeal "with a sharpened awareness" of her role in society (13).

Eliade's static model of ritual is similar to the plot of Romance, while Turner's dynamic framework identifies with the processual unfolding of a Gothic novel. William Patrick Day describes the archetypal romance as where the hero undergoes a "series of transformations and ritual sufferings" to emerge again into the world he left behind, or a new paradise. In the Gothic the hero undergoes

ritual suffering but he "never recovers his true identity" or never regains the ideal archetype to which he can return in paradise (7). Instead, he is "subject to endless transformation and metamorphosis." The hero's journey toward self identity is thus like that of the neophyte in tribal initiation rituals. Just as the hero departs from the natural world and enters the underworld "in search of a lost identity," so the neophyte also leaves normal life to become a "blank slate" in order to be taught the knowledge and wisdom of the new status to which he or she is moving (Day 7; Turner 103). The ordeals and humiliations that both hero and neophyte suffer are symbolic of the destruction of his original status in society that is necessary to prepare the way for the new. The neophyte is stripped of status and rendered weak and vulnerable, just as the hero is at the mercy of whatever monsters or mysterious forces are at work in the Gothic underworld. As Day observes, the Gothic hero becomes a passive observer rather than active participant, and takes on feminine qualities of passivity and endurance. The heroine is also incapable of effective action and shares the central features of "victimization and isolation" with the male protagonist.

According to Day, nineteenth-century readers of Gothic, rather than escaping fear and anxiety of everyday life, came instead "face to face" with what they were trying to escape; thus he attributes to the Gothic the homeopathic characteristics of ritual: healing with poison. The reader of the Gothic can also be seen as a victim and neophyte, in that he or she is a willing yet passive witness to the fears laid out in the text; like Stoker's characters Jonathan and Mina Harker encountering vampires, the reader watches "appalled and...bewildered" but attracted with a "wicked, burning desire" (293; 46). While reading the Gothic text the reader may escape the real world temporarily but in the process of engaging with the text, she comes "face to face" with the terrors of the real world. According to Andrew M.

Greely, we willingly read fiction that scares us because, though we may be "too well aware" of the terrors hidden in everyday life, we delight not in reminding ourselves of these terrors but reassure ourselves "that we are capable for the moment of surviving them" (21). Reading horror fiction helps adults to realise that "it's okay [for them] to be afraid of the dark" and that "it's okay to question one's own issue of morality and immorality" (Davis 17). According to Douglas E. Winter, horror fiction's focus on "morbidly and morality" reveals "a guilty fascination with darkness and irrationality, with the potential for expanding human consciousness and perception" (Fear Itself 185). Within this tension between fantasy and reality, "our worst fears or darkest desires are brought into tangible existence" (187). In the act of reading, the reader is both passive observer and masochist-victim for exposing herself to these terrors. The reader knows, however, that the experience is temporary and that she will emerge from the text with a new outlook on the real world.

By way of turning now to Stephen King's novel, we should note that 'Salem's Lot was written only six years after Turner's The Ritual Process, and that both Turner and King were very much participants of the social and political crises happening in America in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In his study, Turner drew attention to the processes whereby people began to separate themselves from a society involved in a futile war, seeking a way to counteract the failings of the official culture with their own alternative peace-oriented lifestyle. In his novel, King examines post-Vietnam American society with a critical eye, and divides his fictional society of small-town America into opposing sides that include a dying official culture resisting badly-needed change, and an upstart liminal group that attempts to affect change.

As Jonathan Davis notes, within the smaller representative framework of the rural-town setting, King creates an epicentre "of the human spirit in America" where he is able to construct an effective framework for social commentary by demonstrating social problems arising from "moral choice, technology, religion, government, capitalism, the repression that can result from social organization of any form" (25). Davis goes on to explain that though Americans have the right to free speech, the right to choose religion and government leaders, plenty of food, and class mobility, their country has the highest crime rate in the world and a high rate of substance abuse, witnesses violence and injustice done to men, women, and children, has millions of homeless and unemployed, and needless to say, corrupt politicians. Americans, in short, are just as vulnerable and filled with the same emotions as all nationalities, and for Davis "it is this recognition of one universal human heart that is the foundation of Stephen King's fiction" (32).

King's main preoccupation is with the daily human struggle between good and evil. The horror novel is the ideal fictional genre in which to work out this preoccupation because, as King writes in his forward to Night Shift, no one truly believes in fantastical monsters like vampires, the boogey man, and those creatures hiding under the bed or in the closet. Our disbelief makes monsters ideal vehicles for hiding those horrors in which we all do believe: "hate, alienation, growing lovelessly old, tottering out into a hostile world on the unsteady legs of adolescence" (xvii-iii).

Arguably, realist novels offer representations of similar fears and desires, but insofar as they attempt to provide mirror reflections of the world, they do not have the ability to expose the most sensitive, painful horrors that we prefer not to face. Those who do not read horror fiction are already, as Davis suggests, "so tuned in to the horrors of everyday life they have consciously chosen to push the

absurdity [of the fantastic spectacle of the Gothic] aside," whereas those who read horror do so "to gain a better understanding of the human condition" (17, 18). As King explains in Danse Macabre, "we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones" (13).

Though realist or "mainstream" writers, as King labels them, also deal with the themes of fear and death, "only the writer of horror and the supernatural gives the reader such an opportunity for total identification and catharsis." This is because the genre of horror and the supernatural operates as "a kind of filter screen between the conscious and the subconscious" (Night Shift xvii), a positioning similar to the way that the liminal phase operates in ritual. On one side of the screen lie the parts of life we can easily face, and on the other we keep those parts we need to get rid of. Quoting and questioning Peter Penzoldt's argument that for some writers the supernatural is "merely a pretext to describe things they would never have dared mention in realistic terms," Todorov suggests that a better explanation is that the fantastic "permits us to cross certain frontiers that are inaccessible" except through this means (158). King echoes this thought, arguing that horror appeals to us because it "offers us a chance to exercise...emotions which society demands we keep closely in hand" (Danse Macabre 31).

King places the horror writer at a joining point between the external world of stories that "could happen" and the internal world of the "symbolic unconsciousness" where the reader feels "that weird sensation of being not quite asleep or awake, when time stretches and skews... when the dream seems real and the reality dreamlike." For King, the horror story must hold the reader "spellbound for a little while, lost in a world that never was" (Night Shift xx). This betwixt and between state of the horror narrative recalls the characteristics of Turner's liminal state with the reader in the role of the

liminal subject. Like tribal curative rituals where poisonous medicines and sterile or death-related objects are employed to destroy symbolically the problem before rebuilding can begin (Turner 26), the main purpose of the horror story is "to reaffirm the virtues of the norm by showing us what...happens to people who venture into taboo lands" (Davis 18).

Just as every object, movement, and unit of space and time in ritual also has a concrete existence in the external world, so in horror fiction, settings are not totally imaginary but grounded in the real world. King provides an excellent example of this kind of symbolism when he describes in careful detail, the layout of 'Salem's Lot. The town's precisely divided sections and road positioning symbolize the like-minded regularity of the people's lives:

Brock Street crossed Jointner Avenue dead centre and at right angles, and the township itself was nearly circular.... On a map, the two main roads gave the town an appearance very much like a telescopic sight. (17)

Geographically accurate, the diction also suggests that the town is a target for any destructive force to spot out and hit.

The whole town is in a very vulnerable position in relation to the Marsten house that sits abandoned on a hill overlooking the town and visible from most parts of the town. Aside from this geographical advantage, the history of the house also seems to influence the way that characters perceive its appearance, even those who do not know of the events that happened there, for "small towns have long memories and pass their horrors down ceremonially from generation to generation" (25). Like the town community, real society also has ways of recording and passing its horrors, only

instead of a house and its stories, we have the Gothic novel. Today, horror writers still tell the stories told by Homer, of the hero's quest and descent into the underworld, and the search for self.

The horror story reaffirms the morals upheld by society, using monsters as examples of the moral degenerates whom we revile, placing them in all their hideousness before us that we may realize that we are not and should not be like them. It is the monstrous aberration's "lack of order" that horrifies us (Danse Macabre 39). As King explains our attraction to monstrosity further, "we are expressing our faith and belief in the norm and watching for the mutant. The writer of horror fiction is neither more nor less than an agent of the status quo" (39). If a society notices that its leaders are not acting appropriately (i.e. the American government during Vietnam), then the writer will expose these wrongdoers as monstrosities in the context of a fantastic work. Similarly, Turner writes that in the liminal state, reversal of power reigns allowing "the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious status" to be "satirized, ridiculed, or contemned in terms of axiomatic values" ("Liminality" 22).

In 'Salem's Lot, no monster appears until after King has introduced the town and its people in their everyday selves, as part of the first "normal" phase of the processual framework. Although we learn of some ominous problems stirring under the town's private activities, it is only when Mike Ryerson the local grave-digger is hypnotized by the open and seeing eyes of the dead Danny Glick that we know for certain that supernatural activities are afoot. Prior to this, even the gruesome death of Irwin Purinton, the town milkman's dog, and the disappearance of Ralphie Glick while walking one night after dark in the woods with his brother are explicable. For Delbert Markey, the local bar owner, the dog's murder can be explained as the result of "Devil worshippers... Wouldn't surprise me a bit. I

don't know what's got into people these days" (68). What is disturbing is the matter-of-fact manner with which he views this information, which suggests not only that the demons and monsters have escaped the confines of horror fiction and entered the real world, but that society "these days" is indeed becoming so filled with real demons and monsters that we have come to regard them as "natural" aberrations. Even more disturbing, perhaps, is the extent to which we confidently ascribe to Markey's logic, the same way eleven-year-old Danny Glick was confident in his fear that if anything lurks in the woods, it is human because "there were no ghosts, but there were preeverts [sic]" (71).

The town, like society in its pre-ritual phase, adheres to a well established, regime. Every level of the social hierarchy has its designated living and working space in the town's clearly divided quadrants; farmland, the poor area in the trailer park, the middle-class, and the business district. As the opening description of the town's daily activities from morning to night reveal, everyone has his and her place, fulfils expected functions, and holds traditional ideals of the way the world should be. The dairy farm's workers start the day first, followed by the milkman, then Eva, the busy boarding-house owner. A young mother next wakes to feed her hungry baby, then maintenance workers begin their routine tasks. Children are bussed to school, the town drunk wakes up, then recess begins at school. At noon, the local businessman goes for lunch, then a young woman has her hair done at a beauty parlour (34-59). Compared to a traditional Gothic novel, this surface description of events is as interesting as a laundry list.

After mid-afternoon, however, events occur that no amount of routine details can gloss over or disguise from being obvious breakdowns of the town's traditional moral structure: the local telephone repair man visits a local housewife whose husband is absent; an out-of-place "eccentric writer" stares

out his window at the house on the hill and feels "a crawl of terror in his belly" (61); then a child, Ralphie Glick, is kidnapped and murdered in a graveyard at midnight. At this point the narrative has left the realm of realist fiction and is hovering in the area of the fantastic - that area that to Todorov lies between the uncanny - ultimately explicated by natural terms - and the marvellous - where the rules of the supernatural apply.

Once the vampire's presence is established, Todorov's rules of the marvellous would seem to apply, but what prevents this easy shift is that, despite the supernatural powers of the vampires, the other characters are merely ordinary humans and their surroundings are of an ordinary town in a real country. This grounding is a far cry from the incredible landscape of William Beckford's Vathek - which is populated with sorcerers, witches, goblins, and all manner of supernatural beings - and seems to make Salem's Lot closer to the fiction of Kafka and Blanchot wherein, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, "the "normal" man is precisely the fantastic being; the fantastic becomes the rule, not the exception" (qtd. in Todorov 173). In King's novel, the vampire is a fantastic creature but also takes the form of an ordinary human being who happens to be undead. As in the case of Stoker's count Dracula who passes easily for a foreign noble interested in buying real-estate in a modern, progressive country like England, so King's monster participates in the most ordinary capitalist activity of buying property in America, the most modern and progressive country of the twentieth-century. In the new world, vampires pass as the local antique dealer, the boy down the street, the grounds-keeper, the dump custodian, the librarian, the local drunk.

By the last part of the novel, the town has ironically moved into a new state of existence, into what Todorov calls the marvellous, where everyone has accepted the fact that vampires do exist in

what the "real world" has become. According to the town sheriff, Parkins Gillespie, this condition is also widespread: "[The town] ain't alive.... That's why *he* [Barlow] came here. It's dead, like him. Has been for twenty years or more. Whole country's goin' the same way" (401).

This "new" vampiric third phase in the town's cultural development abides by its own rules and structure, and is incapable of change, much like the town's original society, only now, its members are immortal, whereas before, the traditions were immortal and did not adapt to the ever-changing people. Like the conflicting norms of tribal society that require healing rituals to maintain peaceful balance, the town at the novel's beginning has two sets of characters in conflict: on the "structural" side there are the respected elders including Susan's mother Ann Norton, Mark's parents Henry and June Petrie, the sadistic bus driver Charlie Rhodes, the wealthy business man Larry Crockett; on the "anti-structure" side there is Ben, Matt, Jim Cody, Susan, and Mark. This group composes a "communitas" of liminal subjects who distinguish themselves from the rest of society, becoming isolated if not physically, then psychologically, with their knowledge of the pending vampire threat. The characters in this group treat each other as equals, regardless of their former status in the official culture: writer, teacher, doctor, artist-rebellious daughter, and school-boy.

The reason behind these two opposing sections of society are not, as Parkins Gillespie suggests, caused by the arrival of the vampire, but existed within the community of 'Salem's Lot for many years before. The crisis of old community members trying to maintain traditions in the face of the young demanding change and reform has long been building up and the vampires facilitate a kind of ritual that the town must undergo in order to renew itself. Since the town resists change, however, the

vampire society takes over and turns the town into a grotesque parody of what it was: dead, but still stubbornly carrying on with its ordinary horrors of daily life.

As the chronology of the town's seemingly mundane activities unfolds, each passing scene hints at these little corruptions. The town has its corrupt politician in Crockett, the wealthy real-estate agent who literally sells his soul and his town to the devil when he makes an illegal but self-prospering deal with the vampires (58). The relationship between Bonnie Sawyer and her lover Corey Bryant suggests that the town has its share of infidelity and lust, and upon being discovered by Bonnie's husband Reggie, there also enters domestic violence, spouse abuse, and rape (60). Dud Rogers, town dump custodian kills rats with a blood-thirstiness almost as grotesque as the vampire's; prior to killing each rat, he personifies it as a towns-member whom he hates (51). At school, the morning's recess is punctuated by a violent fight between the physically advantaged bully Ritchie Boddin and Mark, the weaker new kid (46). Charlie Rhodes, the bus driver, suspects all his passengers of corruption, though his own treatment of them is equally sadistic (41).

All of these corruptions create cracks in and weaken the town's ruling structure, but two instances of violence in "ordinary" life in particular set the stage for the kind brought by the vampires. One of these is the Sawyer's marriage, which is already twisted and broken, and a sick parody of the union between two people. Much like a vampire and its victim, Reggie treats his wife as a possession and slave, with no regard for her as a human being. Ironically, therefore, the vampires aid in exacting revenge on Reggie and stopping the violence, although this enforced change is itself hardly constructive of a new future for Bonnie.

The second instance of violence in ordinary life, and an episode that is even more horrific and monstrous than the gory death of the head vampire, is that of Sandy McDougall, working-class mother, waking up and punching her screaming baby Randy (38-39). Having married Randy's father at age sixteen and six months pregnant, she had hoped to find "a blessed escape hatch" from poverty and the struggle and stigma of unwed motherhood. Having ascribed to the old secure structure of married family life, Sandy wakes up too late to find that life is not as she dreamed, that she may as well be unmarried with her husband at work all day and out all night drinking. Frustrated at her ruined future, she begins to destroy her son's. Watching Randy scream while covered in his own waste, Sandy reflects, "This is what she had given up high school for, her friends for, her hopes of becoming a model for" (38). The horror erupts the next moment, raw and not clothed by the comforting filter screen of the fantastic:

"You shut up!" she screamed back suddenly, and threw the plastic bottle at him. It struck his forehead and he toppled on his back in the crib, wailing and thrashing his arms. There was a red circle just below the hairline, and she felt a horrid surge of gratification, pity, and hate in her throat. She plucked him out of the crib like a rag.

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" She had punched him twice before she could stop herself and Randy's screams of pain had become too great for sound. He lay gasping in his crib, his face purple. (39)

Later, and within his own home, Roy McDougall witnesses a scene that resembles even more closely the vampiric idiom: "the baby naked and screaming, blood running from his nose; Sandy holding him,

her sleeveless blouse smeared with blood" (140). This scene recalls a similar one in Dracula where Lucy Westenra as a vampire drinks the blood of a child: "the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and...the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe" (217). The scene in King's novel, however, does not have a Gothic setting; here there are no supernatural creatures actually drinking blood, yet the horror element is equally present, and perhaps even more powerful.

Another scene of violence which leads up to the vampire invasion and connects it to the conflict between structure and anti-structure also features hierarchical and thus generational conflict: that between Susan and her mother. Susan as a member of the anti-structure group struggles against structure as represented by her mother, Ann, who blindly resists change even though the old order has become stagnant and ready to crumble. Ann exemplifies this culture's self-destructive immovability when she worries, "Oh Susan, I only want what's best for you. Can't you see that?" (23). What is "best" by Ann's standards is stability, familiarity, and tradition, living the same way one has always lived. Ann is also suspicious of Ben because of his artistic talent, though Susan's father Bill grows to accept him after Ben passes tests of conformity to being what Bill calls a "serious minded fellow," one who works hard at whatever he does, is modest and appreciative of life's simple pleasures (65). What seems to lie behind Ann's fear of Ben is the way that he hovers at the edge of society observing its flaws, the admission of which would necessitate change. Not surprisingly, then, Ann is also one of Barlow's victims who easily succumb to the immortal vampire state.

As members of the liminal section of the 'Lot's society, or the 'communitas,' Susan, Mark, and Ben must each undergo their own ritual of change during the town's ordeal. Susan has reached the end of one part of her growth and needs a catalyst to help stimulate change. She has completed her

education and is ready to begin a new life of her own, but her parents refuse to let her cross the border from child to independent adult. Consequently, while her mother bakes cookies and her father watches football their daughter goes out to become a monstrous reflection of their desired permanence.

The evening that she goes out to investigate the Marsten house, Susan initially attempts to explain vampires away with the rationalistic argument that monsters exist only in drive-in movies where the viewer is safe. Yet though she tells herself "what in God's name could happen to you in sight of your own house?" she is filled with undefinable fear and "emotion overflowing logic" (261). At this point, she is at the very border of belief and disbelief, existing in a pure state of the fantastic, until Mark arrives and takes her across the border into a belief in the reality of vampires. Whereas Mark, however, has the childhood wisdom which enables him to believe both in vampires and in the real world, Susan's sense of logic forces her to choose either one or the other, and thus she is not strong enough to resist the force of the vampire and finally succumbs to the realm of the marvellous.

Mark has learned about the rote habits of adults by listening to the conversations of his parents which he regards as being "as ponderous as the books in the folio section of the library and just as dusty" (137). Both use proverbs in their everyday language, sayings that hold true in any age but which also have a cliched aspect that allies them with structure: "still waters run deep...it's a long, long road that has no turning" and "the child is the father of the man...as the twig is bent, the tree is shaped" (137-38). The adage most frequently used throughout the novel is "In the midst of life we are in death" (40, 138), which takes on a whole new meaning in the vampire context. Mark's parents wonder if he understands death, and he does, but in his own way: "Understand death? Sure. That was when the monsters got you" (139).

Mark does not hesitate to accept the marvellous despite the laws of the real because as a child (age eleven) on the verge of becoming a young adult, he as yet recognizes no division between the natural and the supernatural. When Susan asks if he really believes in vampires even after having seen one, he is "honestly puzzled" because he sees no reason to deny what his own eyes have seen (278). On first encountering a vampire, he reacts with the logic unique to the state of childhood, applying all the rules about vampires that he has learned from his monster magazines, "the ones his mother was afraid might damage or warp him in some way" (240). Instead, it is these magazines which end up as his salvation, not the advice of the official culture. Once the vampires take over the town, the rules of the adult world become inadequate and the only way to survive, as the group of vampire killers learn, is through the knowledge gained from legends and stories usually reserved for children, or for light entertainment. Fighting supposed fiction with fiction, Matt Burke prepares for battle with "*Dracula. Dracula's Guest. The Search for Dracula. The Golden Bough. The Natural History of the Vampire ... Hungarian Folk Tales. Monsters of the Darkness. Monsters in Real Life...Varney the Vampyre*" (296-97).

At this part of the ritual process, roles are reversed in the way that Turner sees operating in Halloween practices: "the powers of the structurally inferior are manifested in the liminal dominance of preadolescent children" (172). Mark is just sufficiently poised on the border between childhood and adulthood to react as neither would when faced with an unearthly horror; "an adult might have had hysterics...and a slightly younger or older child might also have done" (242). Mark is old enough to be aware of yet still distant enough from the adult mentality to observe the fears of the adult world: "their terrors were so tame and domestic: the job, the money...pallid compared to the fears every child lies

cheek and jowl with in his dark bed...the child who must cope with the thing under his bed...the thing which leers and capers and threatens...every night" (242). The child who withstands such horrors regularly is stronger than the adult; thus whereas Matt Burke suffers a heart seizure from fear after encountering a vampire for the first time, Mark falls asleep not ten minutes after speaking with the dead and once buried Danny Glick. "Such is the difference between men and boys," the narrator observes, in a darkly humorous reversal of which is the stronger and wiser (243).

The state of childhood, however, does not involve "effortless merging of dream and reality," but rather alienation from adult reality (293). When Mark returns to the "reality" of his parents' home after his near-death encounter with Barlow and Straker, he puts the supernatural experience away and adapts momentarily to his context. When Susan now a vampire wakes him at his window, he is not unnerved by her appearance, for "the insanities of sleep and waking had become remarkably similar" (294).

Ben shares Mark's position as an observer of society, because he is a writer. Whereas Mark is not a member of the official culture because of his youth, Ben is also marginal because he is a stranger and, as the town's rumours spread, he has a tragic past involving the death of a lover, for which he may have been responsible. Like the Gothic hero entering the underworld and like the ritual subject, Ben undergoes a change by leaving the part of his life that has died with his wife, and attempts to move on to a new stage and a fresh start. Ben returns to the town as the site of his childhood in order to facilitate this change which he actually desires and makes an effort to stimulate, unlike the change resistant town. He makes a good start by beginning a new relationship with Susan, but the town he

hoped to rediscover is dead, and takes her with it, leaving Ben to save it from the permanent and monstrous control of the vampire.

Bonding in *communitas* with the others, Ben finds both love and a basis for faith, which he in turn demonstrates by use of the symbols of ancient religion. His faith is strong enough even to repel and injure Marjorie Glick with only a cross-shape made of two tongue depressors bound with tape (266). Before facing Barlow, Ben goes to confession to Father Callahan, and feels "helpless in the grip of this alien ritual." To him, this sacrament serves as a link to medieval times, "the days when werewolves and incubi and witches were an accepted part of the outer darkness and the church the only beacon of light" (326). The confessional transcends boundaries of time, as do the vampires who exist in Ben's present world as much as they did in the past. Ben pours holy water over his weapons in the final battle with Barlow, the water being another symbol of the church to represent cleansing and purity. His faith presumably causes the water to glow in the presence of evil, but it is not necessarily faith of a christian kind. Rather, as Mark senses, the strength running through Ben in the final conflict is "more elemental, less refined.... It [is] Force; it [is] Power; it [is] whatever moved the greatest wheels of the universe" (408).

Faith in symbols is an essential part of the ritual process, as indicated when Father Callahan's cross loses the power to protect him at the moment he allows doubt to overwhelm him. As neither a new nor an old priest, he does not know what cause to take up; he wants the "challenge" of battling evil, but "can no longer even trust his basic postulates" because of the way that the seeming progress of society has left him as a traditionalist wanting to hang on to a cause (150). There no longer seems to be any clearly malevolent "EVIL" threatening mankind against which he can lead an army of good.

Instead, Callahan finds only a "mindless, moronic evil from which there was no mercy or reprieve. The fist crashing into the baby's face, the tire cut open with a jack-knife, the bar-room brawl" (149). This kind of evil is so mindless and prevalent that it seems impervious to change. Whereas in the past it was the church that provided the means of recognizing evil and the rituals to combat it, now, for Callahan the church itself is a structure that has crumbled and become ineffective. Thus a disillusioned Callahan muses on the way that the "great social, moral, and spiritual battles of the ages [had boiled] down to Sandy McDougall slamming her snot-nosed kid in the corner and the kid would grow up and slam his own kid in the corner, world without end, hallelujah, chunky peanut butter" (151).

By the end of the novel, however, the reader is left with some hope for the future when Ben and Mark return to purify the town with fire, literally, not just symbolically. This epilogue section completes the segment begun in the prologue, thus structurally isolating the middle story as a liminal phase. The prologue begins the story with Ben and Mark's new beginning, but hints at their mysterious and terrible past. The new beginning describes the start of another quest and retreat from the society they have just left. They retreat to a Mexican town cut off from outside activity, influences of corruption, and tourists, during which time Mark undergoes preparation to become a Catholic. During the prologue, neither Mark nor Ben are named, and though Ben's former occupation as a writer is mentioned, he works at any form of labour indiscriminately including a textile mill, tractor assembly line, and at a gas station as a car mechanic. Though the epilogue still refers to Ben and Mark as "the tall man and the boy," as soon as they return to the Lot, they regain their names (424). Once again they are crossing a threshold to another set of laws which make setting fires on public property not only acceptable but necessary and essential.

Because the effect of this act is not described, however, the reader is kept wondering whether the fire will succeed in destroying all the vampires. The question of Barlow's absolute demise also remains, for his teeth are still intact after the rest of his body crumbles, and they twist in Ben's hand, "trying to come together and bite" (418). The prologue and epilogue show that every stage of the ritual process is temporary, not just the liminal stage, because the spiral structuring suggests that there will always be one more process that the protagonists must undergo after that which unfolds in the body of the text. The town's process of change which Mark and Ben conclude, ends in hope, but the possibility also remains for the recurrence of evil and the need once more for yet another healing ritual.

CHAPTER TWO

The Vampire and the Liminal

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Gothic genre occupies the same position in the literary canon as does the figure of the vampire within the worlds depicted in Gothic texts: both have a liminal aspect and both tend to be marginalized from mainstream culture and literature. Fred Botting expresses the situation well when he observes that the Gothic arises in "the awful obscurity" of eighteenth-century rationality and morality, and that subsequently it has "shadowed" modern progress "with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values" (2). Similarly Robert F. Geary, notes the paradoxical aspect of the Gothic: a product of eighteenth-century rationalistic currents, the genre works to criticize previous standards and to interpret in new ways, the "socio-cultural experience" (122). What makes the Gothic problematic, in turn, as William Patrick Day explains, is that it offers the reader an escape, "not

only from conventional ideals" but from the realistic novel's solutions to conflicts of those ideals: excessive in emotional content, the supernatural, and sensational and terrifying incidents, the Gothic has been attacked since its eighteenth-century beginnings for "subverting the mores and manners on which good social behaviour rested" (5, 4).

Yet as much as the Gothic functions as social critique and adapts itself to immediate problems, so much, according to Barton Levi St. Armand, does the genre reflect "an underlying search for a monomyth"; both exploiting possibilities of "fanciful interior decoration" and unifying "Romantic multiplicity," it becomes a "paradigm for expressing fundamental human experience" (66). In all these ways, therefore, the Gothic novel subscribes to the conditions of "liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority," and the positive side of this seemingly negative positioning, according to Victor Turner, is that these are also the conditions that frequently generate "myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art" (128).

Like the Gothic genre itself, and moreso than any other supernatural figures in this mode, vampires share certain characteristics with liminal subjects involved in ritual process. Of all Gothic monsters, the vampire most resembles ordinary humans, most of its monstrous qualities being hidden within. Vampires exist in a permanently liminal state, exempt from the rules governing the real world, and yet like liminal subjects they must also be obedient to the rules of their condition. In 'Salem's Lot, these liminal features are played out starkly against a background of realism; in King's novel the "fantastic" myth of the vampire invades the very real setting of an ordinary small town, and it is this realistic aspect that most allies King's novel with the practical and social dynamic that for Turner characterizes the ritual process.

For Turner it is in the liminal phase that "the confrontation of everyday norms [takes] place through socially subversive and ritually inersive acts" (Abrahams ix). The vampire is in itself a figure of such subversion, for while vampires embody the ordinary shape of "everyday norms," their lifestyle is quite the opposite. Whereas in "normal" human society, activities connected with survival are for the most part carried out in daylight, consumption of any part of the human body is taboo, and physical boundaries cannot be altered. Vampires prowl at night, drink human blood to survive, and even walk through walls.

During the liminal period, the ritual subject loses all characteristics that normally would distinguish him or her in class or rank. In the liminal phase, the ritual subject occupies a position definable only as undefinable; liminal entities are "neither here nor there...betwixt and between the positions assigned...by law, custom, convention, ceremonial" (95). Characteristics of liminal entities include: absolute poverty, little or no clothing to indicate rank, passive and humble behaviour and absolute obedience to instructors. The vampire is similarly equal among others of its kind, with no distinctions regarding age or gender. All vampires have the one common need for living blood, just as all must demonstrate absolute obedience to the rules governing them. As itemized by Van Helsing in Stoker's Dracula these include: waking only at sunset, having no mirror reflection, not entering a room unless invited, avoiding all religious symbols such as the crucifix, holy water, the blessed sacrament (host), as well as traditional herbs and plants such as garlic and white roses. The vampire must lie in boxes of his native earth and "can only pass running water at the slack or the flood of the tide" (246). Just as in certain rituals, humans frequently disguise themselves as monsters, so vampires perform the

reverse and disguise themselves as human. When in such disguises, the vampire is able to develop intense friendships with human protagonists (often potential victims), regardless of class distinction.

For Turner, "*liminality* represents the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions," on one side of which is "*outsiderhood*" which "refers to actions and relationships which do not flow from a recognised social status but originate outside it" (*Dramas* 237). The "Outsider," "Other," or "liminal subject" and other liminal situations and roles are endowed with "magico-religious properties" and are considered to be "dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting to anyone or anything that does not also share a liminal existence" (108). The vampire aptly fits such a description as "polluting," for, by involving a non-liminal being (a "normal" human) in its sphere (ie. drinking that person's blood), the vampire exposes that person to the possibility of becoming a vampire in turn.

As a liminal subject endowed with "polluting" and "magico-religious properties," the vampire has long been an object of both fear and desire in folklore and fiction. In a rather romanticised description of the European vampire provided by Devendra P. Varma, he is "odious yet still attractive," often described as tall, dark haired and handsome, well groomed, but with waxen face and hands (xx, xxi). He casts no shadow and has no mirror reflection; distinctive features include sharp canine teeth and hollow eyes which add "to his romantic expression of undefinable melancholy diffusing a lonesome sadness" (xx). For Varma, this version of vampire is "a symbol of love transcending time and space" (xxi)..

Two of the earliest works of vampire fiction, a fragment by Lord Byron and the short novel *The Vampyre* (1819) by his physician John Polidori, describe the friendships between aristocrat/vampires and their adoring travelling companions. According to Nina Auerbach, Byron's

lordly Augustus Darvell's "menace lies not in sadistic persecution, but in his offer of "intimacy, or friendship" (14). Similarly Polidori's Lord Ruthven engages in intimacy and friendship with his travelling companion whose loyalty he secures with an oath never to reveal his secret of vampirism. Auerbach concludes from the willingness of these companions to follow their undead friends that "Byronic vampires are only incidentally interested in blood" (14). In both Polidori's and Byron's stories, the "vampire is an equalizer, turning vassals into peers" (15), thereby fulfilling a primary function of the liminal phase in the ritual process.

The oath sworn in Polidori's story signifies a bond between willing companions, and to a certain extent this is also true in the case of Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla" (1873). Laura, the victim/narrator, and her father first willingly invite Carmilla to stay with them after her coach overturns, though they do not know at first that she is a vampire. The two young women begin as good friends, but Laura is soon intimidated by Carmilla's intense show of affection. Carmilla, drawing Laura close to her, murmurs:

I live in your warm life and you shall die -- die, sweetly die -- into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love...(389)

Unable to withdraw from Carmilla's embraces, Laura experiences "a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust" (390). Such affection oversteps the accepted bounds of friendship, for as Laura explains, "It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses" (391). Here, the vampire transcends

boundaries of sex, and in doing so breaks a taboo of Laura's traditional society regarding same-sex love, and though she is very conscious of this taboo, Laura is still overpowered; her fear and disgust are unable to tear her away. Carmilla's ability to love, and particularly to love life as embodied by her victims supports Auerbach's observation that nineteenth-century vampires "were vampires *because* they loved. They offered an intimacy, a homoerotic sharing, that threatened the hierarchical distance of sanctioned relationships" (60).

In contrast, Stoker's sensual vampires are not only more sadistic than truly affectionate like the endearing Carmilla, but above all the relationships are very heterosexual. When Jonathan encounters the female vampires he is immediately filled with unease at their approach, feeling "some longing, and at the same time some deadly fear." He is filled with "wicked, burning desire," and is in an "agony of delightful anticipation" as he smells the vampire's breath "honey sweet" but with "a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood" underlying it (46). This encounter is sensually detailed and drawn out slowly whereas Dracula's attack on Jonathan is clumsy and sudden. Though Dracula is tempted to feed off Jonathan when he cuts himself shaving, and is stopped only by the crucifix on Jonathan's neck, even in the small preliminary attack he makes, his manner is more violent than seductive: "When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat" (35).

Jonathan expresses no attraction whatsoever to Dracula, and says quite unflatteringly, "his breath was rank." Dracula's teeth are protuberant, and he fills Jonathan with "a horrible feeling of nausea" (27). Their relationship remains strictly business, but even so, Harker enters the vampire's company of his own will, only to find out later the consequences of his choice: "The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand grasped

mine with a strength which made me wince...it seemed as cold as ice - more like the hand of a dead than a living man" (25).

With respect to Dacula's own indifference to intimacy of the kind that Carmilla displays, Auerbach argues that it constitutes "a curt denial of the chief vampire attribute up to his time" (64). Beginning with Stoker's *Dracula*, vampires no longer assimilate themselves into human society, sharing in normal human life, but instead "become mesmerists, transforming human consciousness rather than entering it" (66).

Like *Dracula*, King's vampires are for the most part unaffectionate and cruel in their sensuality, which they employ only to manipulate their human victims. Although the vampire bite still takes the form of a kiss, it is not in the sense that Carmilla kisses her victims. Susan, newly transformed, calls to Mark, "I'll kiss you all over like your mother never did" (294). Perhaps because of his strong will or pre-sexual awareness, Mark resists, but when Jim Cody is attacked by Marjorie Glick he is horrified to discover that he is sexually aroused by her lips on him: "If you hadn't been here to pull me off," he says to Ben, "I would have...let her" (270).

When Barlow "seduces" Corey Bryant and Dud Rogers, he manipulates their desires, offering not himself, but the power to dominate other humans. In this respect, his approach is less erotic and more fatherly and friendly respectively. In paternal reassurance of certain revenge on Reggie Sawyer, Barlow chuckles "kindly and put[s] a hand on Corey's shoulder" before inclining "his head towards him." Barlow does not discriminate sex or age but feeds off all, and therefore, King's vampire is more true to the borderless, liminal idea of the vampire state than is Stoker's *Dracula*. In Stoker's novel, the vampires follow a hierarchy where each feeds on those weaker than him/herself; hence, *Dracula* feeds

on women and the women in turn feed on children, as do the three brides and Lucy the "bloofer lady." Men are useful to Dracula as agents of his will, but he disposes of them by killing them violently.

No longer restricted by Victorian gender prejudice and hierarchies, Barlow recognizes the equal blood-essence of all living humans and rather than employing sex to seduce them, offers them instead their hearts' desires. There is no real bond of friendship between Barlow and his American victims; they have the blood he wants and to get it, he promises them the power to attain whatever they desire. Straker offers Larry Crockett an enormous amount of money and land in return for arranging his master's arrival in the town. Barlow tempts Dud Rogers with the opportunity to have revenge on Ruthie Crockett for laughing at him, thus distracting him from his suspicions of the vampire himself:

"Tell me...does the hump on your back discommode you in your job?"

"No."

.....

"Does it perhaps inconvenience you in other ways?"

"No...well..." He looked into the eyes, fascinated.

"Come, come," the old party's voice cajoled gently. "We are friends, are we not?"

Speak to me, tell me." (146)

Similarly, Barlow distracts Corey Bryant after Reggie Sawyer terminates his affair with Bonnie:

"...I don't think you want to leave this so-perfect town, do you?"

"No..." Corey whispered, but he was suddenly doubtful. Fear was returning.

But surely it was unimportant. This man would allow no harm to come to him....

"And you shall yet have your vengeance on those who would fill themselves while

others want." (236)

Everyone eventually succumbs to the vampire's will because of his appeal to their respective sense of deprivation: Floyd's jealousy of Ben, Ann Norton's over protectiveness of Susan, Marjorie Glick's grief for her lost children.

According to Auerbach, Dracula exposes new binaries formerly unknown in vampire literature; it examines divisions between "male and female, antiquity and newness, class and class... homoerotic and heterosexual love" as opposed to levelling those boundaries. With these binaries Dracula introduces to its genre what Auerbach calls "a new fear: fear of the hated unknown" which, however, has long been the most basic fear of the Gothic genre. Van Helsing calls Dracula "the other," a term which, according to John Allen Stevenson, stems from the cultural constructs of "us" and "them," classifying "tribe, caste, class, race, religion" (140). Robin Wood identifies the figure of the Other more specifically as: other people, woman, the proletariat, other cultures, alternative ideologies, deviations from sexual norms, and children (169-70). The reasons why these groups are repressed "Others" stems from patriarchy and capitalism, under which Wood speculates "all human relations will be characterized by power, dominance, possessiveness, manipulation" (169). Despite the fact that Carmilla as a young woman of a similar hierarchical position, should not, in Auerbach's opinion, be unknown to Laura, being on the surface another beautiful young woman of rank, her refusal to divulge her past and her extreme emotional, lover-like affection cause Laura to fear her. Carmilla is Other doubly so because, following Wood's list of groups to be feared, she is both woman and inconsistent with "ideological sexual norms" as they are held by Laura (170).

Unlike Carmilla who appears no different from the other beautiful young women whom she befriends, Barlow is immediately detected as Other by the townspeople; he is unmistakably "foreign" and on that basis alone, to some, is suspect. Dud Rogers describes the vampire's speech as having a faint accent and decides crudely, "The guy might be a frog, or maybe a bohunk" (144). Dud already has this stranger categorized as Other, one of "them," which group of "them" being of no great matter, for Dud holds all people in contempt. Dud never once considers his unwonted guest to be a vampire because in the ordinary world of the town, vampires do not exist, though the threatening and hated foreigner does.

The nineteenth-century "zeal for classification" of races was, according to John Allen Stevenson, "a convenient metaphor to describe the undeniable human tendency to separate "us" from "them"; such an "idea like race helps us grapple with human otherness" (140). By affirming and classifying people's differences, we can feel secure in that those differences are "real" and "natural." The townspeople of 'Salem's Lot still operate with this nineteenth-century "zeal," another sign of their unwillingness to accept change, as when they gossip about Ben, the newcomer who, as soon as he arrives, inquires about renting the haunted house on the hill, and starts dating hometown-boy Floyd Tibbit's girlfriend Susan. As Parkins Gillespie reminds Ben, as is the case in any small "burg," "You're the stranger in town until you been here twenty years" (97).

One aspect of the vampire not mentioned by Van Helsing but included in a list of characteristics in Raymond T. McNally and Radu Florescu's biography In Search of Dracula is that "If a vampire is not found and rendered harmless, it first kills all members of its immediate family, then starts on the other inhabitants of the village" (142). This rule would seem to be a basic premise of

King's novel which, as he admits, was partly inspired by a dinner conversation with friends about old-world vampires taking over America, and partly written "as a form of literary homage" to Stoker's novel (Winter 36). Similarly in 'Salem's Lot, Jim Cody says: "The scariest part of this whole thing, from an academic point of view, is the relative ease with which a vampire colony could be founded" (256). King thus pays homage to Stoker by taking his idea of a vampire from an ancient, remote place and dropping it in his contemporary time and place, just as he adheres to the "epidemic" rule and capitalizes on society's fears of contamination and paranoia with the panic question of "where can you turn and who can you trust that will not turn around and bite?" Like Stoker does in Dracula, King exploits his reader's paranoia by keeping his vampire on the periphery of the novel's action. Yet this absence of the novel's main object of horror serves to intensify the effect, because the reader never knows where it will appear and who it will attack next. In this way the absence builds fear of the unknown and paranoia in the reader.

King maintains the reader's level of fear by accelerating the transformation process of human to vampire, while still employing the traditional symptoms with which the reader is familiar. King's vampires separate themselves from "normal" society almost immediately on becoming "infected" with vampire bites, feeling weak and ill at the slightest touch of the sun, their bodies quickly showing physical change. Marjorie Glick, for example, as seen from her husband Tony's point of view, seems to have become progressively worse almost overnight:

...her legs were the color of marble; all the tan she had picked up that summer on their vacation had faded out of them....Her mouth gaped as if her lungs could not get enough air, and he noticed the odd prominence of her teeth but thought nothing of it.

It could have been the light. (216)

Her husband's ignorance increases the tension of the scene, for the reader can see the obvious, that Marjorie already has the vampire characteristics of pronounced incisors, and dislike of the sun in which "normal" people regularly function. She is relinquishing her hold on a real physical human existence even as she lives:

I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror before I went to bed last night, and I hardly seemed to be there. For a minute I...thought I could see the tub behind me.

Like there was only a little of myself left and it was...oh, so *pale* (217)

This accelerated change is a new addition of King's, for while it took Lucy Westenra one month to die and become a vampire, Marjorie takes only a few days. In this quick-producing vampire "factory" of a story, King shows influences of George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) whose victims are infected by a bite, then die from the infection, and rise again in a few hours as one of the living dead.

Rather than aggressively and relentlessly attacking his victims like Romero's very physical living dead, however, Barlow borrows the ethereal nature of Dracula's brides, appearing to Ann Norton in a dream, after which she feels sick and sleepy, yearning for a man whose "face was handsome and commanding and arrogant and compelling. His nose was hawklike, his hair swept back from his brow, and his heavy, fascinating mouth masked strangely exciting white teeth that showed when *he* smiled. And his eyes...they were red and hypnotic" (356). Ann remembers her desire for this dream-man and the "thing" which he can give her that "she craved and needed: the touch; the penetration" (357). Once again, the vampire gives his victim what she desires in return for fulfilling his need.

This dream-like version of vampire does not seek to insinuate himself among human society; his servant Straker performs the menial tasks of dealing face to face with humans. Barlow is even more withdrawn from the "real" human world than Dracula who, having no such servant, puts on a display of being "normal" for Jonathan, at least for the first few days of Jonathan's stay in Transylvania. Barlow remains hidden in his cellar, at first appearing only in dreams before vampires become the majority of the town's population. Ann's initial response to Barlow is to regard him as a figment of her imagination, for like Dud Rogers, she never once identifies this man with "strangely exciting white teeth" as a vampire because such things do not exist in the world as she knows it. The vampire is the townspeople's fiction within our fiction, and being twice removed from the reader, becomes an even more frightening and mysterious character.

Along with his corporeality, Dracula is also given to taking on other physical shapes, unlike the more ethereal yet singularly formed Ruthven. Some of Dracula's disguises are "elemental dust" on moonlight, or "faint vapour" trailing under a door, but he can also take the shape of a wolf or bat, (245, 288). These disguises show that while the vampire can appear ethereal and dream-like at times, he is also capable of becoming a completely physical being, taking on bestial traits. As her own transformation progresses, Ann Norton's behaviour becomes very animal-like when she is prevented by a hospital orderly from carrying out Barlow's commands to kill his opponents:

[She] did not scream but began to make a high whining noise in her throat, almost keening. She scrambled after [her gun] like a crab....Ann Norton looked over her shoulder and hissed at him, her face pulled into a cheated scowl of hate....She attacked him. Her hands, hooked into claws, pinwheeled across his face....He held

the gun up out of her reach. Still keening, she clawed for it.

The bewildered man came up from behind and grabbed her. He would say later that it was like grabbing a bag of snakes. The body beneath the dressing gown was hot and repulsive, every muscle twitching and writhing. (358)

Similarly, when Mike Ryerson returns as a vampire, he presents the most non-human version of this type of monster; he is even more grisly than Thomas Preskett Prest's Varney (1853) who (when not drinking his friends' blood) is relatively civil, and Ryerson is so detached from human feeling so as to make LeFanu's Carmilla seem a harmless child. Significantly, most of the horror in this scene does not come from his physical appearance; indeed, at the moment of his death and transformation into a vampire, he appears to be "as beautiful as the profile of a Greek statue" (174). Instead, the horror lies in his glittering eyes which to Matt are "as blank as washed black-boards" with "no human thought or feeling in them." Matt's horror is this: "*The eyes are the windows of the soul*, Wordsworth had said. If so, these windows looked in on an empty room" (204). When he speaks, Susan hears his voice as having "no more human quality than a dog's bark" (206).

Once they die and the transition from human to vampire is complete, the 'Salem's Lot vampires hide in the darkest, most obscure spaces they can find to sleep during the day. Forsaking their beds, they squeeze themselves into the least likely places for humans to sleep, as if their bodies were incidental, comfort being of no concern. The entire McDougall family, for example, hide in the crawl space under their mobile home, whereas others hide in such places as an abandoned freezer in the town dump, the unused third floor of the town public library, underneath the floorboards of a hired-hand's shack, and in the hayloft of a barn on the local dairy farm (310-13). All of these locations are random

parts of the townspeople's formerly mundane lives; they are all ordinary places which we take for granted and which make up the fabric, the "boundaries" or even "texts" of our own world. As the people become transformed, however, these spaces are given new uses, and themselves become transformed into threatening spaces where monsters may hide. These ordinary places have now become areas of fear for the group of heroes trying to find Barlow, and take on the connotation of "coffin." Thus the realist world can easily be Gothicised by simply assigning another use to an object not normally used for such a purpose, and it is in this way that the Gothic can exist in the realistic mode: all that is needed is to turn the familiar into the fearful unknown.

Not only do vampires alter their living space; they begin to use time in reverse, rising at dusk and retiring when they would have usually risen. To emphasise this point, King carefully depicts how the real world of the town, before its conversion to vampirism, follows a very orderly pattern of time, and at the outset of the novel he minutely documents the activities of the town's various characters from dawn to midnight. The first people to rise in the morning are, significantly, the dairy-farm workers and after describing the feeding and milking of the cows, the narrative then follows the delivered milk to the various homes and people in the town. As much as the milk route seems itself only incidental to the narrative, and designed mainly to reflect the progression of time, however, milk itself becomes a key linking symbol, since it is a life giving substance which humans consume in the same way that the vampire consumes blood. In turn, a whole series of binaries arise with this connection including the opposition of white and red. This color symbolism is as important in the modern world as it is in tribal societies, where, for example a white bird represents "good luck or strength," while a red bird stands for "mystical misfortune" or suffering (Turner 31). Whereas in tribal cultures, the symbolism of a color

is flexible, however, in America the alignment has become fixed, and recalls the ongoing race struggles that have been a part of American history since the earliest colonisation, beginning with fear of the "red" aboriginals, then fear of the "black" slaves. Encoded in this alignment is the Puritan association of white with purity and red - or any other "color" - with "wantonness." Thus making "milk" a metaphor for the "blood" of vampirism becomes especially horrifying.

In Dracula, Stoker had also established a connection between milk and blood when Dracula's attack on Mina is described as having "a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" (288). No two situations would seem to be farther apart, especially since milk is life-giving and a vampire's blood spells a paradox of living death. In the same way, the description of the early morning milk-route in King's novel seems to evoke innocence, but by evening, the blood begins to flow with the death of a child. The transition from life-giving milk into living-death-sustaining blood marks the town's progression into a liminal state.

The ritual required here, however, is more complex than a return to the innocence of the morning, for as the 'Salem's Lot milkman Irwin Purinton makes his deliveries, we are continually introduced not merely to the various "rustics" but to each of their bitterness, fear, desire, or secret sin. Thus while those who are introduced on the milk route are initially connected to each other only through their similar consumption of milk, ultimately they become united in their mutual dependence on blood for survival when they enter the living-dead nature of existence in the vampire world.

To emphasise this shift from one mode of connection to another, once the vampire element has entered, the narrative proceeds in a manner quite distinct from the earlier orderly chronology of daily activities. Not only does the narrative begin with a meditation of evening rather than morning, but the

focus seems to skip from character to character without following any particular pattern, until one notices the common element of blood flow. Barlow begins with Danny Glick who, on first waking as a vampire, feeds on Mike Ryerson who was digging his grave. Mike in turn feeds on Carl Foreman, the undertaker preparing his body, and then returns to Matt who looked after him before his transformation. Meanwhile, Danny moves on to "infect" his mother, followed by baby Randy McDougall, who likewise feeds on his parents. Susan Norton's ex-boyfriend Floyd, under the influence of the head vampire, beats up Ben who soon becomes Barlow's adversary. By this point, time matters less and less for the growing number of townspeople who are leaving the rigorous schedule of ordinary life. The only moment in time that ultimately matters to anyone is sunset when the vampires take over the world. Chaos reigns now, but according to its own order; the seeming randomness of the scene-jumping is ordered by the disease-like spread of the vampire infection.

One key feature of liminality is the suspension of normal time; liminal subjects do not move in time using it to mark the beginnings and ends of events, lives, and relationships. Time in the small town is almost as suspended as it is in the Gothic vampire world, having no importance other than that it is expected to last forever and bring no change with it. Carmilla as Romantic-gothic vampire does not exist in real time since her human life, which is rooted in processual time, ended long ago, leaving her body suspended in time and in the blood which fills her coffin (466). From the beginning of "Carmilla," Laura's narrative is also more or less detached from time, describing events only as having taken place eight years before the time of her writing which date is unspecified (362). The events in Dracula, however, are most scrupulously dated by letters and journals. Also, being more distinctly based on an actual historical character, Wallachian warlord Vlad the Impaler, Dracula is more human and tangible

than his literary predecessors. King's novel is likewise rooted in history which partly removes it from the Gothic-Romantic dream-like state of "Carmilla." Not only year and month, but the time of day of each event is given. The contemporary reader in 1975 would be experiencing the novel's events "as they happen," as it were, and even some future events, for the epilogue is dated 1976. King, moreover, constructs a dilated history of 'Salem's Lot down to its date of founding. King's careful documentation of the passage of time not only more closely connects the events in the novel with reality, but also makes the effect more jarring when time is made absent by the vampire invasion. Similarly, the town's documented "official" history stands in sharp contrast to the "unofficial" history - that which is not recorded, which is one of King's main concerns.

Example after example of the town's unrecorded secrets unfold in a section beginning with "the town knew about darkness," each little bit of gossip further exposing the sordid inner parts of the town's collective psyche. The people may live in the buildings of the town but their relationship with it does not end there:

The town is an accumulation of three parts which, in sum, are greater than the sections. The town is the people who live there, the buildings which they have erected to den or do business in, and it is the land...Being in the town is a daily act of utter intercourse And in the dark, the town is yours and you are the town's and together you sleep like the dead... There is no life here but the slow death of days, and so when evil falls on the town, its coming seems almost preordained. (208-09)

The list of sordid town secrets follows, most passages beginning with "They know that... but they don't know that...." The conclusion of this list curiously does not condemn the town as being corrupt; rather,

"the town cares for devil's work no more than it cares for God's or man's. It knew darkness. And darkness was enough" (212). The town is a narrative in itself but only we outside the text are able to read it. Ben tries to read it, at least the part about Hubert Marsten, the rum-running hired killer whose house Barlow and Straker now occupy, in order to write a novel about him, but he himself ends up as an integral part of the town's surreal narrative. King's narrative thus shows how even the truth cannot come out in a corrupt society, and wherein the writer is regarded with suspicion by those he tries to help, and is prevented from exposing the truth by having to expend all his energies in actively combatting evil. In the same way, the town of 'Salem's Lot is itself a microcosm of King's own society, and if he is able to succeed in exposing the corruptions of his own time it is through his skilful use of Gothic techniques to disguise his critique.

Richard Nixon declared in his 1968 presidential campaign, "Freedom from fear is a basic right of every American. We must restore it." For Auerbach, this can also be a means of generating fear, for it involves pitting "every American" against "darkly unspecified but presumably non-native agents of terror, imagined in any 'them' the quaking voter imagines" (2). In a country which fosters this attitude of "us" against "them" it is not surprising that many individuals and communities as well have cut themselves off from the outside world. This point was also raised, in fact, when King first discussed with friends, the idea of vampires taking over America. King was initially of the opinion that if Dracula returned to rural America, "the FBI would quickly put him to rest, a victim of wiretaps and covert surveillance." As his friends pointed out, however, "there are so many small towns...which remain so isolated that almost anything could happen there. People could drop out of sight, disappear, perhaps even come back as the living dead" (Winter 37). In King's novel itself, both the element of fear and its

relation to isolation is expressed by the rational doctor Jim Cody when he observes what many American likely realised when the Watergate scandal was unfolding: "This is beginning to seem like a paranoid's dream," and the scariest thing for Cody is "the relative ease with which a vampire colony could be founded" (256). Modern life-styles cut people off from each other so effectively that no one is any longer aware what goes on outside their homes:

There's no in-town industry....The schools are three-town consolidated, and if the absence list starts getting a little longer, who notices? A lot of people go to church over in Cumberland, a lot more don't go at all. And TV has pretty well put the kibosh on the old neighbourhood get-togethers....(256)

As the vampire Barlow observes of the town, it "seems full of foreigners...beautiful, enticing foreigners, bursting with vitality, full-blooded and full of life" (234-35). Barlow finds Americans so attractive because, though they may fear "each Other," they are living versions of himself: "in this land...it seems the more you have the more aggressive you become." Ironically comparing these "rustics" to people in crowded cities with their "hollow sophistication," he goes on to explain that the "folk here are...stuffed with the aggression and darkness so necessary to..." and he trails off, but the sentence obviously asks to be concluded with "to make good vampires" (236). Despite American modernity, and its geographical isolation from Europe, and the founding fathers' rejection of the old world of superstition and attempt to found the new nation in the Age of Reason, the vampiristic element was clearly not left behind and the arrival of Barlow from the old world is essentially a means of exploiting the American attraction to such "antiques."

What makes the vampiristic motif so adaptable to a critique of American culture in turn, is the extent to which a capitalist economy is very like a blood-sucking system. Indeed, what Karl Marx says about the bourgeoisie in his Communist Manifesto, can easily be applied to the rise and actions of the vampire. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie have "sprouted from the ruins" of the ruling class and instead of levelling class barriers, have established "new classes, new conditions of repression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (80). The vampire's relation to his victims is comparable to the capitalist use of others as commodities. The vampire regards humans as his "cash-payment" suppliers with whom he enters into an "exchange" in which they give him blood and he gives them eternal life in return. Like the capitalist, the vampire has, "resolved personal worth into exchange value," and Marx calls this treatment of the human being "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" (82).

When the vampire feeds, he is indiscriminate of who his victims are; he is a catalyst bringing about a seeming state of equality, but wherein he turns all humans into his blood-supply. Like the vampire, according to Marx the capitalist system treats all occupations in the same way, converting "the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers" (82). Always foreseeing the need for more blood, the vampire must search for other places in which to settle. In Stoker's novel, Dracula seeks to leave the isolated, sparsely populated Carpathian mountains, and establish himself in England where he longs "to go through the crowded streets of...mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death" (29). Similarly, King's Barlow seeks out a thriving community of people "bursting with vitality, full-blooded and full of life" (235). Thus Marx could just as well be describing the vampire when he writes: "The need of a

constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere" (83). LeFanu's *Carmilla* constantly moves from one region of the country to the next, forming her connexions not so much under the guise of business as friendship, but her intentions are the same: to attain that "market" for her "product." King's Barlow had established his connection in *'Salem's Lot* through Hubie Marsten who had in turn been involved in exploitative activities through his own connections as a rum-runner and contract killer for the "mob."

'Salem's Lot is a culmination of nearly a century's worth of traditional vampire literature since Stoker, but also including the influences on Stoker himself of LeFanu, Polidori, and the folklore surrounding the historical Vlad the Impaler. Just as Stoker uses the vampire in literature as a way of looking at the repressions and fears of his society, so does King, who, for all that he rewrites Dracula almost scene for scene in rural America, widens his narrative scope to address the nature of fear in American society and the contemporary world in general.

CHAPTER THREE

Carnival, the Gothic, and Popular Culture

The world is a vampire, sent to drain
secret destroyers, hold you up to the flames
and what do i get, for my pain
betrayed desires and a piece of the game.

Bullet with Butterfly Wings

Smashing Pumpkins

In his introduction to a collection of essays on King's "Horrorscapes," Tony Magistrale notes that "No body of literature, even the literature of supernatural terror, can be understood as discrete from the culture from which it arises" (3). While this is also true of Romantic and Victorian Gothic fiction, in these works the focus is mainly on sexual undercurrents, whereas in *'Salem's Lot* the sordid secrets are more socio-political in nature, reflecting many disturbing issues facing America's consciousness in the early 1970's. In this sense, King's Gothic has many affinities with the kind of "grotesque realism" and carnivalesque parody that for Bakhtin has its roots in popular culture and which he found epitomized in the work of Rabelais. Indeed, just as Rabelais's work is an "encyclopedia of folk culture," according to Bakhtin, so King is a writer for and of the people. In the case of both Rabelais and King, furthermore, the hero tends to be the communal spirit, and the monsters tend to be the official culture and the conservative forces of the establishment.

In his detailed analysis of Rabelais's two novels, Gargantua and Pantagruel, Bakhtin focused on the way that the grotesque and carnival reflect the people's culture of Renaissance times. The grotesque for him was rooted in the material world, and when embodied in art or cultural practices it "reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (24). A concrete example he gives is the Kerch terracotta collection which includes figurines of "senile pregnant hags" in postures of mirth, symbolising the life process of the body, ever "dying and as yet unfinished" (26, 27). To foreground this aspect, the grotesque exaggerates bodily functions and especially features excessive eating and drinking. Although the Gothic does not focus on excesses of the living human body and is more concerned with the transgression of "the proper order of aesthetic as well as social order in the overflow of emotions that undermine boundaries of life and fiction," it does evidence an "over-abundance of imaginative frenzy" (Botting 4, 3). Similarly, although the Gothic does not deal with excesses in material life, it does serve to foreground and thus magnify psychological, political, and social realities.

In calling such excesses "grotesque realism," Bakhtin is careful to emphasize that such materialism is not "Naturalistic," and while this notion may seem contradictory, Bakhtin's point is that conventional notions of realism are not true to the body; so-called "realistic" novels are mirrors of official culture, not of the true human experience. In Rabelais's novel Gargantua, moreover, though the character of Gargantua is huge beyond human proportions and the adventures he undergoes are equally impossible in the genre of realism, he is very much a perfect reconstruction of a functioning human being, though magnified many times over: "He was continually wallowing, and rolling up and down in the mire and dirt: he blurred and sullied his nose with filth, he blotted and smutted his face with any

kind of nasty stuff" (26). Rabelais goes on to describe Gargantua's constant consumption and excretion of any and all substances, but before he does so, he also observes:

Gargantua, from three years upward unto five...spent that time like the other little children of the country; that is, in *drinking, eating, and sleeping; in eating, sleeping, and drinking; and in sleeping, drinking, and eating.* (26)

Taken out of the exaggerated context, this passage could be suggestive of the bodily functions and habits of any ordinary child. Thus all that Rabelais really does is to magnify an ordinary human many times over in size and function, in much the same way that Swift does in Gulliver's Travels. As Gulliver notes, with respect to the women of Brobdingnag, "my Sense was more acute in Proportion to my Littleness" and that though these women to their lovers may be "as sweet as...any Lady in *England*," to him they are:

far from being a tempting Sight, or from giving me any other Motions than those of Horror and Disgust. Their Skins appeared so coarse and uneven, so variously coloured when I saw them near, with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trencher, and Hairs hanging from it thicker than Pack-threads; to say nothing further concerning the rest of their Persons. (95)

Swift's point, in short, is that a sense of the grotesque in the usual meaning of "disgusting" is dependant upon one's perspective, and Rabelais's purpose is to ally this debased attitude toward the "grotesque body" with the sanitized attitude of the official culture.

One manifestation of the grotesque element in practice is carnival which, as Bakhtin describes it, is a festivity of the people that occurred as part of religious celebrations in the middle ages. In

carnival, all must take part, for as a popular-festive event, carnival has nothing in common with static private life and individual well-being. In a word, it is a social, or socialist, communal or "communitas" activity or state of being. During carnival, normal rules of official everyday culture are broken and rendered no longer applicable, just as they are in the liminal stage of ritual. Also like the ritual process, carnival follows certain rules and resembles "certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle" (Bakhtin 7). Although carnival greatly resembles a theatrical performance, however, it is essential that it is not an official art form or clearly divided from life by all the conventions of art. As Bakhtin explains, "carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (7).

Similar forms of carnivalesque celebration still occur today including the Mardi Gras of New Orleans and the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade in New York City. Anthropologist Jack Kugelmass describes events such as the Village Halloween Parade as "festivals that shun or are shunned by the official pantheon"; while the participants consist of "groups that at other times seek to legitimize themselves within the social and cultural hierarchy," the festivals in this case are designed to "deny the legitimacy of that hierarchy" (444).

Carnival is a period of organized chaos governed by rules which tend to uphold values which are opposite to those of the official, normal society. During the medieval "feast of fools," for example, celebrated on certain important christian feast days, participants would parody the official religious activities with "masquerades and improper dances," transferring church rituals and symbols to "the material bodily level: gluttony and drunken orgies on the altar table, indecent gestures, disrobing" (74-75). This profane, "derisive" attack on man's spiritual centres is "deeply immersed in the triumphant

theme of bodily regeneration and renewal" (75). As the medieval monk Johannes Pauli wrote in 1522: "it is not possible to always abide in a serious mood" (77). For those attempting to live a spiritual life, carnival is a reminder of their humanity and all the imperfections and irregularities that go with it.

The Gothic genre continues to serve the same purpose, for as Leslie Fiedler observes in Love and Death in the American Novel, "the gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing cliches by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness" (406). Just as the official cult of the Church is inverted and torn apart by the antics of the feast of fools, so, within the bounds of the gothic novel "the structure of the external world breaks down" (Egan 125).

Like the hesitation element of the fantastic, where the boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds also break down, rendering these worlds inseparable, carnival participants enter a liminal phase in which their costumes and behaviour exaggerate and symbolise elements of the real world. These elements of the grotesque, as well as requiring a quality of excessiveness, all involve a combination of seeming binaries, including birth and death, love and hate, anger and happiness, the ambivalence of which is also a major characteristic of the Gothic. Ambiguity abounds in the Gothic, which is rife with "uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family, and sexuality" (Botting 5). The grotesque, like the vampire, inspires in those who witness it, both horror and attraction, disgust and interest, ambiguous emotions characteristic of the "betwixt and between" liminal state of the fantastic.

In Carnival Culture: The Trashing of Taste in America, James B. Twitchell discloses the liminal qualities of popular culture in his suggested reasons for its powerfulness: "it takes very simple ideas very seriously, earnestly and energetically; that its predictability is its strength...that it is authentically

democratic and classless, and that it is infinitely tolerant, viciously cheap, and ultimately adaptive" (10). For Twitchell, "the vernacular contains the enabling language of a culture," the language which grows and changes with the people and which keeps them united, able to understand each other's ever-changing needs. Noting that the word "vulgar" derives from the Latin "vulgus" or "common people," he goes on to explain that the term "mob" is a Victorian slang version of *mobihus vulgus*, meaning "the rabble on the move," a most appropriate description of carnival (27).

For Bakhtin, the vulgar language (or "billingsgate") of the common people composes a form of ritual or a "drama of laughter" that presents "at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world" (149). Vulgar language and its accompanying gestures are oriented in the direction of the lower body and the earth, signifying on one side, "destruction, a grave for the one who is debased" but on the other, indicating the positive "fertilizing and generating stratum" of the lower body (148). Although for Bakhtin, the comic vulgarities of medieval folk culture resurface in what he calls the "Romantic grotesque" or the Gothic of the nineteenth century, here they are lacking the comic element: whereas in folk culture "madness is a gay parody of official reason," in the Gothic, "madness acquires a sombre, tragic aspect of individual isolation" (39). For Bakhtin the vulgar style of the "common people" encompasses both the terrifying and comic aspects of the "monstrous" (43). Although King's grotesque in certain ways is more sombre than comic, his writing style in itself is characterized by the vulgarities which Bakhtin associates with the people's language. As Tim Underwood explains, "Stephen King's enormous talent expresses itself through vulgar sensibilities" (295).

In 'Salem's Lot, moreover, King frequently encodes comments about language and style with a view to emphasizing its departure from the norms of "good" prose. Ben Mears, for example, defends

the coarse language he uses in discussing one of his novels with Susan: "The language is rough, but when you're writing about uneducated country boys, you can't..." (10). Ben's point would seem to be that in order to be "realistic," not only the subject matter but the language itself must reflect reality. More commentary comes later when Susan's mother Ann Norton is critical of Ben's novel because of the terrible scenes of life that it depicts. Later, Ann finds confirmation of her opinion from the town gossip Mabel Werts who describes another of Ben's novels as being not "writing but just a sexbook, pure and simple" (23).

In Ann Norton's world, schoolteachers are expected to be respected enforcers of the ruling "official" culture, and English teachers especially are supposed to be preservers of official language. When Ann hears that Matt Burke, local high school English teacher was spotted in the local bar, she regards him with suspicion, especially when he is reported to have been in Ben's company (189). For Ann, the characteristic tone of the official culture is of "intolerant, one-sided...seriousness," and its overtones are "Fear, religious awe, [and] humility" (Bakhtin 73). Ann demonstrates hypocrisy regarding these last characteristics, thereby contributing to the weakening of the official culture; by attempting to purge and protect her daughter from any new or changing ideas, her fear of the "unknown" and awe of the "known" rise in conflict within her when she displays not humility but pride in securing her own position of dominance: she says with "a spurious tone of comfort" that "sometimes young people don't know all there is to know," repeating "some young people think they know everything" (189). The official culture of elders is supposed to be the only place where truth exists, and only members of that culture who know the codes are supposed to have access to it. Susan's mother feels that she can provide that truth, and it is unquestionably the truth because it came from Mabel

Werts, the "head librarian," as it were, of the world's truths. Ann's repetition serves both to ignite Susan's anger and to reinforce Ann's confidence in her own beliefs, which have recently been shaken by Ben's invasion of her world.

When Susan's anger causes her to slap her mother's face, she breaks the major taboo that youth must respect their elders. Ann, however, does not learn from this ugly outburst and continues her futile efforts to maintain her daughter in her place in her carefully structured world. As Susan describes it, her mother wants her "married and settled down to a good man you [Ann] can put your thumb on. Settled down with a fellow who'll get me pregnant and turn me into a matron in a hurry" (191). Ann's response is: " 'Susan, you don't know what you want.' And she said it with such absolute, convinced certainty that for a moment Susan was tempted to believe her" (191). Susan's act of violence symbolizes warring forces between the static older way of thinking and the new way which tries to advocate change.

Another instance of conflict between the oppressive official and the deviant people's culture is the struggle between Bonnie and Reggie Sawyer, where Bonnie, the unsatisfied housewife, breaks the sacred and institutionalized bonds of marriage by taking a lover. In Rabelais's world of carnival, the cuckolded husband is frequently the target of laughter, and in what Bakhtin calls "the Gallic tradition" concerning women's nature and marriage, the woman is presented as being "at once mocking, destructive, and joyfully reasserting" (241). Bonnie Sawyer's adultery has an equally ambivalent aspect, for though she is morally wrong she yet seems right in submitting to the primal urge that draws her to her lover and thereby freeing herself from the distressing reality of an abusive marriage. The situation rises from a carnival activity (sexual promiscuity), encroaching on the oppressive, dominant culture represented by Reggie. His response to his wife's deviance from the norm is much like Ann's attitude

toward Susan, preferring to treat her as a possession, not a person. On catching her with a weaker, younger man in his place (which is also a form of status reversal characteristic of the liminal state), Reggie is infuriated, and becomes a very real monster of the town's warped official culture. In one of a series of short snapshot-like paragraphs describing the various dinner-hours of the townspeople, we see the restored and orderly Sawyer household after Bonnie has been "corrected" of her waywardness:

Reggie and Bonnie Sawyer are having a rib roast of beef, frozen corn, french-fried potatoes, and for dessert a chocolate bread pudding with hard sauce. These are all Reggie's favourites. Bonnie, her bruises just beginning to fade, serves silently with downcast eyes....Bonnie eats standing up. She is still too sore to sit down....After he beat her up on that night, he flushed all her pills down the toilet and raped her. And has raped her every night since then. (342)

Bonnie is "saved," as it were, from this living monster by an undead monster when her lover Corey returns after meeting up with Barlow. This time he is covered in dirt and slime, his pants still soiled from the last time he left the Sawyer household in fear, his eyes bearing an expression "that [is] worse than hate" and moves like a zombie (375). Despite his foul and repulsive appearance, including the "fish whiteness" of his flesh, Bonnie welcomes him with open arms in a melodramatic scene:

Over her face, terror and lust seemed to pass like alternating flashes of sunshine and shadow.

"Darling," she said.

Reggie screamed. (376)

The extremes of emotions in this brief encounter are reminiscent of early Gothic fantasies, particularly Walpole's The Castle of Otranto where the manic-depressive Manfred experiences violent mood swings from shame, to love, to "exquisite villainy," and where the norm is for a character's mind to be "agitated by a thousand contrary passions" (Walpole 37, 62).

In King's novel, the man who just moments before was an example of a hardened shotgun-wielding Vietnam war vet defending his home from the immoral outside, now takes up the screaming his wife left off, his shotgun "slapped from his hands as if from the hands of a child" (376). Rendered defenceless and forced into positions directly opposite to his macho role, Reggie as representative of the town's flawed official culture collapses, and the vampire culture takes its place.

In an attempt to explain the role of horror in the conflict between the normal and abnormal in King's fiction, Douglas Keesey cites Noel Carroll's Philosophy of Horror (1990) in which Carroll speculates that the horror story "can be conceptualized as a symbolic defense of a culture's standards of normality, the genre employs the abnormal, only for the purpose of showing it vanquished by the forces of the normal" (187). In the case of the Sawyer scenario, however, it is the supposed "normal" of the town that needs fixing, and the horror of Bonnie's daily life is ultimately vanquished not by the normal, but by the abnormal. What lies ahead, of course, is a life given over to carnal instinct and emotional oblivion, and this attitude toward the physical differs from that of Rabelais where the carnal side of life is of a comic, rejuvenating nature rather than fearsome and death-bringing. Still, a certain dark humour presides over the way that the over-bearing Reggie Sawyer is openly cuckolded by a vampire.

Dark humour itself, moreover, is an example of the liminal blending of binaries, intending simultaneously both to disgust and amuse the reader. In the horror genre, laughter is a necessary means

to releasing fear, for as William Paul writes, "Laughter inevitably follows the most terrifying images in fright movies...the laughter might be partly an expression of embarrassment.... Yet it is also a recognition of the pleasure in screaming itself" (67).

The 1950s E.C. (Educational Comics) series, recognized this binary of horror and laughter which it featured in such graphically excessive examples of "campy" Gothic horror as "Tales from the Crypt" and "The Vault of Horror." One scene in King's novel in particular, that is inspired by the dark humour of these comics, is that of the school-bus driver Charlie Rhodes, a Korean war vet, who is summoned out in the middle of the night by vampire children blowing the horn of his bus. Though not yet aware of the vampire presence, he still approaches the situation prepared to operate on the level of war combat ("This was infiltration, just like the army") at the same time that he assumes that the "enemy" are ordinary children. Though Charlie is allied with the "real" world he is himself an embodiment of hatred and violence. In his blind intolerance of children, he is equally an example of traditional society's crumbling framework that, being constantly buffeted by change and newer generations, must either be flexible enough to accommodate the new demands or must be knocked down to make way. In this case, it takes supernatural measures to cause a status reversal, and the dark humour lies in the formerly confident army veteran ready to defend his bus, transformed suddenly into a trembling, fearful state much like that of the children he has kicked off his bus countless times: "'No,' he said, trying to smile...`you don't understand. It's me. It's Charlie Rhodes'" (370). The point is that they do understand perfectly well, and as in the endings of E.C. horror comics, the former victims get their revenge.

One more point which Paul makes about dark humour is that "a kind of loss of individuality" accompanies such circumstances, and "brings with it the gain of communal experience, a festive feeling akin to drunkenness" (67). For Bakhtin, it is always in a communal setting that the therapy of carnival takes place, and thus the closing of the movie theatre in King's novel is a precipitating fact in the stagnation of the town of 'Salem's Lot. The closing of the theatre, as Susan explains to Ben, is connected with the young people's leaving the town. Ben recalls having seen science-fiction and horror movies there, such as "*Rocket Man*" and "*Crash Callahan and the Voodoo Death God*," while Susan only remembers that the movies were "usually" bad, but she went with her friends anyway. Susan speculates that the "drive-in over in Cumberland killed it....That and TV" (14). Both these alternate mediums dispense with the communal aspect of the theatre, for people are now isolated in their own secure cars and homes.

Similarly, given that the horror films shown at the old theatre may have educated the town's youth about dealing with vampires, it is not surprising that Crockett's real-estate office - the former old theatre - becomes the contact point for the town's early invasion by the vampires. As the child Mark knows, "*You have to invite them inside*," otherwise the vampires cannot harm you. This he has learned from his monster magazines, which, like movies are another source of education against monsters, though criticised by official culture as trash that "might damage or warp" a young person, as Mark's mother puts it (240). Crockett, without this vital knowledge from comic books or movies, invites the vampire to the town when he makes a "deal with the devil" and accepts a dishonest but financially lucrative offer from Straker in return for the Marsten house and an old shop in town.

Evocative of the Faust legend so popular in Renaissance drama, this deal also entails particularly American dilemmas. While within his constitutional rights, Larry's personal gain comes at the expense of the community. Jonathan Davis explains this situation as a conflict of two American societal principals: having the freedom to pursue "the American dreams of life, liberty, and individual happiness" but at the same time "surrendering those values for the sake of keeping the societal machine rolling" (90). On one hand, America's economic system "reinforces the notion of individual gain based on open competition"; on the other hand, it tends "to dehumanize people in a push for corporate greatness" (90). Crockett's business ventures involve the sacrifice of other individuals to the vampire's "corporate greatness," but at the same time, the town itself expects individuals to conform to its laws. Of the two sides of the community - the conservative conformists and the liberal individuals - the former feel the need to restrain their freedom of individual expression and regard the latter who do not as "non-conformants to traditional values of purity and morality." This prejudice results in a breakdown of communication and ultimately a "lack of social harmony" (91). Crockett's "normal" act of pursuing his own ends without regard for others ultimately destroys not only his community but also his personal life, making him one with the other vampires - a multitude of beings existing together, but who are completely self-sufficient and who feed on rather than rely on each other for survival.

Davis suggests that King's solution to the dilemma of individual versus community is to maintain a "balance between fulfilment of the self and involvement with larger groups in pursuit of a collective good will" (101). The groundwork for achieving the balance in 'Salem's Lot is laid by the levelling of borders between individual and society during the vampire take-over. Once the town enters the liminal phase, Crockett's wealth serves him no purpose, for here the rules of carnival come into

effect, and as Bakhtin explains, "the popular-festive banquet has nothing in common with static private life and individual well-being" (302). Similarly, in a kind of Gothic grotesque form of Bakhtin's comic-grotesque, the town under siege of vampires takes on a festive - i.e. *feast-ive* - atmosphere of blood consumption, where all are assimilated, since all have blood, and personal wealth is no longer of import.

Bakhtin constantly reiterates the importance of the ever-changing cycle of life and death to the continuance of a healthy society, just as Turner emphasises the importance of the un-binaried liminal phase to the restoration or at least improvement of a healthy society. King, too, "is able to see the positive side of the monstrous," as Casebeer puts it (46), and in 'Salem's Lot he uses the most fearsome and traditionally the most solitary of gothic monsters to force a change in a bad social situation. Though they cause destruction, the vampires may be seen in a positive light, especially from the ritual point of view of homeopathy. Though the vampires take over the town in multiple numbers, as individuals they are examples of what we do not want to be, and what the group of vampire-killers are driven to destroy. Thus, the repression of the vernacular, as it were, results in rebellion and revolution necessary to "enable" the culture to get it moving and producing again. According to Casebeer, although King is "not ready to embrace the monstrous," he maintains a balance between the antagonist ("often a persona embodying death, decay, or meaninglessness") and hero(s) protagonist (lovers or parent/child) (46). The antagonist in 'Salem's Lot is the societal machine turned into individual vampires, and the protagonists are the free individuals bonded together to recover the balance.

Though instances of the grotesque and the bawdiness of carnival exist before the vampire reign, they occur under cover and are participated in not only by children and other liminal adults but

also by members of the dominant culture. Every time the narrative focuses on Crockett, for example, he is in the middle of some (usually parenthesised) lecherous act, yet while adhering to a strict daily regime:

[Larry] put away the book he had been reading (*Satan's Sex Slaves*) and set his watch by the whistle. He went to the door and hung the "Back at One O'clock" sign from the shade pull. His routine was unvarying. He would walk up to the Excellent Cafe, have two cheeseburgers with the works and a cup of coffee, and watch Pauline's legs while he smoked a William Penn. (52)

The narrative later also mentions that part of his daily routine consists of "pretending to read his Monday correspondence" while "his eyes crawled over the front of his secretary's blouse" (78).

Crockett's private indiscretions are small, but when added to a list of all the other townspeople's secrets, 'Salem's Lot begins to acquire the features of a soap opera. For example:

The town has its secrets and keeps them well. The people don't know them all. They know old Albie Crane's wife ran off with a travelling man from New York... But Albie cracked her skull open after the travelling man had left her cold...(210)

The list goes on with "They know...but they don't know..." in an enumerative version of Rabelaisian exaggeration and grotesque. Similarly, the history of the town itself has a bawdy or grotesque nature. For example, the town's main street, Jointner Avenue, is named after the town's most distinguished personage, a member of the House of Representatives who died of syphilis, the narrator adds parenthetically. The next famous person to come from the town is Pearl Ann Butts "who ran off to

New York City in 1907 to become a Ziegfeld girl" (17). Another part of the area's geography is named "Drunk's Leap because a few years back Tommy Rathbun, Virge Rathbun's tosspot brother, staggered over the edge while looking for a place to take a leak" (18).

To a great extent, however, it is not the immoralities of the town that are the problem but rather its commitment to rationalism. Thus whereas for Rabelais the church was the evil force which oppressed the people by imbuing them with superstition, in the modern world it is the spirit of the enlightenment. For example, in a metafictional moment, when Susan's rational thought comes in conflict with an irrational experience, she suddenly becomes aware of herself fulfilling the role of every horror-movie heroine, "venturing up the narrow attic stairs...or down into some dark, cobwebby cellar..." while she the viewer sits comfortably in reality where monsters do not exist, thinking

What a silly bitch...I'd never do that! And here she was, doing it, and she began to grasp how deep the division between the human cerebrum and the human midbrain had become; how the cerebrum can force one on and on in spite of the warnings given by that instinctive part, which is so similar in physical construction to the brain of an alligator....(260)

Here the saving element that Rabelais associated with the body, becomes the reptilian brain, and it is because Susan ignores her animalistic instinct that she ultimately becomes a vampire.

Reason is also the downfall of Henry Petrie, Mark's father, though his belief in logic is about as strong as a true priest's belief in religion should be: he is "a straight arrow, confident in himself and in the natural laws of physics, mathematics, economics, and (to a slightly lesser degree) sociology" (347).

These intellectual systems, however, are all human constructs and they leave no room for belief in the elemental power that as Ben discovers, "move[s] the greatest wheels of the universe" (408).

Father Callahan tries to make Henry see that his decision to disbelieve the vampire story is based on "internal beliefs rather than external facts" (348). At this stage in the novel's process, the rules of anti-structure have cancelled out the rules of the structure in the official culture, and everything Henry believed in before answers to reversed rules: that which is meant to exist in the imagination exists as fact in the real world and that which he wishes were real - namely, that vampires do not exist - is only a dream. Destruction ensues when the rules formerly abided by refuse to change according to the changing circumstances around them, and become invalid, betraying those who still believe in and adhere to them.

Henry Petrie's unquestioning adherence to scientific views resembles the unquestioning faith the American people once had in their institutions of government and the office of president. Like Rabelais, King parodies those hypocrites among the official culture, depicting "both government and organized religion as 'spiritually bankrupt'" (Egan 126), but whereas for Rabelais, where the official culture was the church, for King it is the state. King explains that during the time he was writing 'Salem's Lot, the American media exposed, one after the other "another mangled freedom from the ditch of tapes, burn-bags, shredding machines and politician's studied answers of 'At this point in time I cannot recall'" (Winter 41). Never before the 1973 Watergate scandal had any event so disfigured the government in the eyes of the American people:

In the space of one year beginning on October 10, 1973, a vice-president resigned in disgrace, a former attorney general was indicted, and a Congressional committee

ascertained that President Nixon himself had underpaid income taxes to the tune of almost half a million dollars. Americans learned of the "plumbers," of "dirty tricks," of a politicized FBI, and of an Internal Revenue Service ordered to audit the tax returns of political enemies. As each new episode became public it appeared that nothing more damaging could possibly turn up, and yet on every occasion something still more devastating emerged. (Dinnerstein and Jackson 367)

Linking his invasion of vampires to the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, King describes the root of the characters' fears in *'Salem's Lot* as stemming from the feeling "that the Government has invaded everybody" (Winter 42). He has described "the unspeakable obscenity" of this invasion in the novel as an expression of the cause of his own "disillusionment and consequent fear for the future" (41).

Even before Watergate, the American experience in Vietnam revealed that the United States was not omnipotent, not virtuous, and not infinite in natural resources. Commenting on the combination of Vietnam, Watergate, and the supposed "energy crisis," Maldwyn Jones notes that the aftermath of these events resulted in a significantly diminished number of voters turning out for the next elections after Nixon's departure, which "for many voters... was a question of deciding which of two unexciting candidates [Ford and Carter] they distrusted less" (567). In 1975 on the eve of the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Americans discovered the limits of liberty and government power.

Written in 1975, King's novel is very much concerned with the history of America. The town of *'Salem's Lot*, we are told, was founded in 1765, the same year the British Parliament passed the "first direct tax ever imposed upon the colonies," at a period of time when the new world was beginning to

struggle for independence (Stamp Act, 1765; Sugar Act, 1764; Tea Act, 1773) (Jones 40). 'Salem's Lot itself was named for the wood lot occupied by the wild sow of a local farmer which, as the novel's narrator states glibly, "proves little, except that perhaps in America even a pig can aspire to immortality" (17). A mad pig marks the starting point of this small town, and a tea party marks the beginnings of the United States as a country, which shows how the future of a community is rooted in its origins. The colonies' rebellion during the "Boston Tea Party" sets the stage for an on-going process wherein Americans constantly reassert their independence from whatever ruling culture imposes restrictions on individual rights and freedoms; similarly, the wild pig confined in its wood lot foreshadows the town's isolation and subsequent descent into the madness of vampirism.

The way that independence and isolation are related and dangerous is, in turn, a major theme of King's novel, and it is by highlighting the supposed innocence and immunity of the town that King subtly suggests the way that it functions as a mirror of America:

What 'Salem's Lot knew of wars and burnings and crises in government it got mostly from Walter Cronkite on TV. Oh, the Potter boy got killed in Vietnam and Claude Bowie's son came back with a mechanical foot - stepped on a land mine - but he got a job with the post office helping Kenny Danles so *that* was all right...except for these things, the Lot's knowledge of the country's torment was academic....Nothing too nasty could happen in such a nice little town... (19-20)

More than serving to remind the reader that there is a world outside and that such cultivated ignorance is dangerous, the many references to the Vietnam and Korean wars draw attention to the way that American intervention took the form of an official culture's attempt to assert its authority over

the people. As Jones explains, both the Korean and Vietnam wars which America waged against Communism in the name of liberty were unsuccessful and pointless: the Korean war left South Korea free from "the threat of Communist tyranny," but the country "has been ruled ever since by a right wing government seen as equally odious by many Western critics" (523). Similarly, after Nixon finally withdrew American troops from Vietnam in 1975, the "feeble and corrupt Saigon government...surrendered unconditionally to the Communists" (562).

King also explicitly connects the nightmares of history and the horrors of Gothic when he has one of the presumably tough-minded veterans of Vietnam become involved in the vampire scheme. Thus upon delivering packages to the Marsten house with his friend Royal Snow, Hank Peters experiences a kind of fear, "that he had not even felt in Nam, although he had been scared most of his time there":

That was rational fear. Fear that you might step on a pongee stick and see your foot swell up like some noxious green balloon, fear that some kid in black p.j.'s...might blow your head off with a Russian rifle....But this fear was childlike, dreamy. There was no reference point to it....Ghosts? He didn't believe in ghosts.

Not after Nam. (87)

Vietnam, in short, was also a horror story, and the reference point that Henry is missing is precisely the connection between two kinds of monstrous interventions. Similarly, one of the things that made the Vietnam war so frightening was that it seemed to lack a reference point, making "why are we in Vietnam" a recurrent question of the time.

It is, therefore, the realism of 'Salem's Lot that makes the novel so scary, and which, according to James Hicks, "shatters its readers' sense of the American pastoral and their idealization of small town America." The horror of this pastoral town lies in the readers' realization that "the American pastoral is corruptible, that small-town America is not a bulwark against depravity" (76). Realism in the novel is horrific because it reflects the truth, and trying to ignore it or cover it up, as the townspeople discover, is not going to make it go away. Hank Peters finds that no matter how much money Larry Crockett pays him to forget about the child's clothes he'd seen in Barlow's cellar, it will not dispel his nightmares (92).

To the extent that King's purpose is to expose the facts of life, his realism is much like that of Rabelais, for like Rabelais, King is concerned with the grotesqueries of our existence. Where they differ is in the way that they handle the topic of human frailty. Whereas the Rabelaisian grotesque celebrates imperfections of the body, the Gothic demonstrates the corruption that arises in consequence of the repression of these imperfections, both physical and psychological.

Several major discrepancies between these two corporeal views are those regarding drunkenness and bodily functions: whereas in Rabelais, drunkenness is a positive, regenerative, and communal affair, in King it is representative of the consequences of the repressed grotesque element. Father Callahan, for example, drinks excessively, but alone, and his emotions while drunk are not of gaiety but of morose cynicism and depression:

Well, well, he thought. Here I am, Sunday night and drunk again....*Bless me, Father, for I have sinned....I'm a drunk and I'm a lousy priest, Father....Your penance is six head-knocks and a good swift kick in the ass. Go your way and sin*

no more. (148-49)

Callahan's depression stems from his yearning to battle "EVIL with its cerements of deception cast aside" in a "pure" struggle, "unhindered by the politics that rode the back of every social issue" (150). Society, however, as Callahan muses, prefers to hide, repress, and ignore its imperfections rather than come face to face with them: "Gentlemen, better prisons will cure this. Better cops. Better social services agencies....Countrymen, if this eugenics bill is passed, I can guarantee you that never again -" (149-50). Father Callahan's drunken musings bring into question society's ethics when facing its abhorred imperfections and its unwillingness to tolerate anything short of the "norm" that a "eugenics bill" like that which he imagines would enforce. All the solutions to the world's problems that Callahan cynically suggests are destructive and repressive, rather than regenerative and liberating.

Weasel Craig is another town drunk, only the "official" one, as it were, not hidden behind the robes of respectability like Callahan, but actively drunk in a community setting. Even still, though he draws laughter from the other patrons at the local bar, he is regarded with pity as "the wreck of a fine man." Weasel is isolated as a drunk even in a crowd of other drinkers as when a waitress is "a trifle scandalized that her old English Classics teacher should be here, boozing it up with the likes of Weasel Craig" (117). She calls Weasel "y'old fart" but addresses her former teacher as "Mr. Burke," though they are both of an equal level of seniority to her. Weasel's image in the novel is steadily debased and at the end of this scene in the bar, he is lying pathetically on the floor of the men's bathroom with "a fellow in an army uniform...pissing approximately two inches from his right ear." Weasel, for Ben, is a reminder of his own mortality, looking "old and ravaged by cold, impersonal forces" (120). Here, Weasel's drunken state is closer to alienation and death than the community and life in Rabelais's work,

and the image of excrement in this scene as emitted by a figure of the official culture, the "fellow in an army uniform," promotes that alienation rather than accepts and celebrates drunkenness.

The excremental image is a major part of Rabelaisian regeneration but once again, in King's novel, excrement and other bodily emissions are signs of an ailing, unhealthy society. Father Callahan, in a state of intoxication himself, considers the image of "the old drunk, simultaneously crapping himself and blowing lunch" as detached from himself, though the truth is, they are separated only by the fine line of his respectable position of priest, and his ability to control his bodily functions, whereas the old drunk has lost this control and so is disgusting to official culture. In Rabelais, characters relieve themselves purposefully, in full control of their actions, because they are comfortable with their bodily functions. For example, Bakhtin refers to the grotesque habits of an abbot who begins his daily exercises by relieving himself in many different ways (293). When King's characters defecate, however, it is because they have lost control of their bodies due to some force of discord in society. In a moment of extreme fear, for example, Corey Bryant loses control of his "sphincter" and is "only dimly aware of it." The cause of his fear, however, is not because of vampires, or the mysterious unknown, but the known and the real: Reggie Sawyer has his shotgun in Corey's mouth.

Another illustration of the failed regenerative element in King's excremental vision is that while young Gargantua rolls joyously in his own excrement, Randy McDougall sits covered in his, screaming in pain and hunger. Sandy regards her son in this state with anger and disgust, rejecting him as a negative symbol of her ruined life, rather than embracing him as a life-filled, fertilizing source. Once both Corey and Randy become vampires, they are no longer troubled by bodily functions, but their existence is a paradox in Rabelais's grotesque vision; as vampires, they consume excessively, but emit

nothing and are therefore not regenerative but spreaders of a sterile death-in-life. Thus, the Rabelaisian body is life-giving even in death, recognizing that the two are necessarily linked and that life is impossible without change, whereas the vampiric American cult of progress is concerned with a denial of death.

These differences between Rabelais and King illustrate the varying attitudes toward the social situations of each writer's time: the community-oriented French Renaissance under the oppressive power of the Christian church, and the individualist, capitalist America dominated by the corporate power of its government. In each culture, the two sides of society strive constantly to balance the conflicting rules that govern them, but while Rabelais celebrates the ever-changing life-death process through the regenerative nature of the grotesque element in carnival, King emphasizes the negative consequences of repressing society's need for change. Similarly, King's version of the Gothic demonstrates the genre's survival through change. While the Gothic of the past focuses on the aesthetic effect of fear, King is concerned with questioning of the sources of fear. At the same time, however, King maintains the Gothic "tradition," which is itself a liminal quality, of incorporating various influences of popular culture including folk legends, novels, comic books, and films. The liminal quality of the grotesque in particular, is an essential part of the Gothic, contributing to the genre's adaptability to any time and culture. This adaptability makes the Gothic a valuable social critique, and a central component of the regenerative process. Through its own adaptability, the Gothic demonstrates that change is essential to the well-being and survival of any culture.

CONCLUSION

Whenever King is asked why he writes horror, he usually responds: "Why do you assume that I have a choice?" and proceeds to explain that it just so happens that the "stuff of fear" is what remains with him in his observations of the world (Night Shift xii, xiii). In an interview with Tony Magistrale, he further notes that much of his fiction "follows the Gothic tradition wherein the past has this unbreakable hold on the present" (qtd. in The Second Decade 10). In 'Salem's Lot we see this kind of continuity in the way that the shadow of Hubert Marsten hangs over the town and draws the vampire Barlow to the community. Both, moreover, are "undead" beings in the sense that Barlow, as vampire, embodies the living memory of the dead Marsten's corruptness. While Barlow drinks the blood of his victims to survive, Marsten as a hired-killer made his living at the expense of the blood of others. The house on the hill is the town's constant reminder of Marsten, and it would seem that whether or not it is occupied by ghosts or vampires is less important than the persistence of the horrific element; as Ben concludes, he would rather it were ghosts than "another evil man" (113).

The house inhabited by Marsten's memory and Barlow's presence symbolizes the unbreakable hold that the town's official culture and traditions attempt to exert on the ever-changing present. As Magistrale observes, the focus of 'Salem's Lot is on "the estrangement of individuals caught in the machinery of social institutions no longer adequate to contemporary needs" (Landscapes 32). As I have suggested, King's handling of this problem is best addressed in the context of Turner's theories of the ritual process and the relationship between structure and antistructure. The status quo is in need of constant questioning, and the aberrant behaviour and irrationalism encoded in Gothic fiction function as the needed social critique.

In order to maintain itself, the official culture must repress and marginalize all that does not adhere to its rules, and generating this repression is the fear of otherness. Such fear, of course, is a primary ingredient of the Gothic, making this genre an excellent mode for exploring and exposing these political issues. King not only examines this fear but also demonstrates that these monstrous others are not outside but within. In 'Salem's Lot, he explores this theme in terms of the vampire adage that "you must invite them in," while in his subsequent novels he becomes more overtly political and shows the way that fear of otherness causes the authorities of the official culture to betray their people's trust.

In Firestarter (1980), King's third novel, for example, he focuses on the way that "the secret service" works to undermine the freedoms of Americans. Government agents, though represented as ordinary human beings, are the monsters and representatives of evil, while the forces of good are led by such "inferior" people as the child Charley, who with telekinetic abilities can move objects and start fires with her mind. If we bear in mind that "Charlie" was the name that the Americans gave to the Vietcong, then King's point would seem to be that the source of horror is from within the government system, rather than outside, and that ironically the destruction which Charley wreaks, serves to cleanse the country of these horrors in the same way that Ben and Mark purify 'Salem's Lot with fire.

The Tommyknockers (1987), similarly focuses on the enemy within, and ourselves as the monsters. "Tommyknockers" are traditional children's bogey monsters as in the rhyme: "Late last night and the night before, /Tommyknockers, Tommyknockers, knocking at the door." King gives the name's origins as being connected to "tommy," the archaic British slang for army rations, employed to refer to "ghosts of miners who died of starvation, but still go on knocking for food and rescue" (7). These Tommyknockers come into existence when air oxydizes off the hull of a buried alien spaceship,

transforming the people of Haven, Maine, into replications of the ship's original deceased grotesque and mercenary occupants; these new monsters, however, are not from other worlds. As the hero Jim Gardener realizes while climbing around in the ship, "*Dead? Oh, no. You're crawling around inside the oldest haunted house in the universe, Gard ole Gard...Nothing there, of course. Except there was. I had a perfectly good reason to raise this fuss; I met the Tommyknockers, and they were us*" (730). Whereas in the traditional Gothic the monster arises from the mysterious outside unknown, in both Tommyknockers and 'Salem's Lot, the monster is no more mysterious than the town librarian, the local grounds keeper or the little boy down the street. In King's world, the monsters are known; they are ourselves.

Whatever the form of the horror novel, be it Gothic or twentieth-century science fiction, its main objective is to uncover the truth. As LeFanu proclaims in one of his stories, "The events which I have recorded are not imaginary. They are FACTS," and according to Michael Begnal, these are the "ills which plague" his society, including "flaws or misuses of religion, the aristocracy, the law, Romantic love, and sexuality" (38). King is equally concerned with the "facts" and he uses similar words to describe his writing: "I think that the real truth of fiction is that fiction is the truth...And if you lie in your fiction, you are immoral and have no business writing at all" (qtd. in Beahm 47). The horror genre, according to Magistrale, "explodes the civilized lies we use to insulate ourselves from death" and he goes on to list a number of reasons for the importance of such fiction:

It allows us to prove our bravery....It enables us to reestablish feelings of normality....It confirms our good feelings about the status quo....It lets us feel we are part of the larger whole....It provides an opportunity to penetrate the mystery

of death. (The Second Decade 22)

Above all, Magistrale notes, the horror genre is for King, "not about meaningless pain and suffering in an absurdists' universe." Rather the "true aesthetic of terror...emphasizes not destruction and violence but reintegration and moral evolution" (26).

Ironically, the various segments of the American status quo have seen fit to ban King's books for reasons ranging from complaints of poor literary quality to complaints about profanity and pornography. As documented by George Beahm, some of the banned books and objections of the censors were as follows:

- * Las Vegas, Nevada (1975) - *Carrie* challenged at the Clark High School Library as "trash."
- * Vergennes, Vermont (1978) - *Carrie* was placed on a special closed shelf in the high school library because it could "harm" students, especially "young girls."
- * Bradford, New York (1984) - *Cujo* was removed from the shelves of the school library "because it was a bunch of garbage."
- * Washington County, Alabama (1984) - *Christine* was banned from all school libraries because the book contained "unacceptable language" and was considered "pornographic."
- * Vancouver, Washington (1986) - *The Shining* was removed from four junior high libraries because the book's "descriptive foul language" made it unsuitable for teenagers. (44)

For King, himself, moreover, even if these changes were true, banning books is not the solution. Thus when a state-wide referendum to ban obscenity in Maine was proposed, King spoke against it not necessarily because he promotes pornography and crimes against children (the prevention of which was the offensive side's main objective), but "because it takes the responsibility of saying "no" out of the hands of citizens and puts it into those of the police and the courts. I think it's a bad idea because it's undemocratic, high-handed, and frighteningly diffuse" (qtd. in Beahm 157). King's fear is that if the freedom of expression is once taken away from the populous, it will result in a select few censoring the thoughts of the many. Rev. Jasper Wyman, the referendum's main promoter used the argument that "the referendum's passage would not result in the banning of any works with literary value" (156). The difficulty with this answer is that it leaves the question "who is to judge what has literary value?" In the case of the Gothic novel, critical judgment has been passed many times on its lack of literary value, and it is because no law forbids its creation, that writers of Gothic are able to continue to describe the world's truths as they see them.

What we should note in turn is that this "garbage" by King and other popular writers like him, is read by millions of people world wide, King's works having been translated into 32 languages (Beahm 30), and has become part of the cultural history of the twentieth century. This history, according to James Twitchell, "especially since the 1960s, is the history of the most rapid shift ever in dominant taste," whereby what we once called "vulgar" is "now coming back toward the center" (52, 57). For Twitchell, this also explains the contemporary appeal of Bakhtin's criticism: "he understood that the transformation into modern times essentially had to do with the repression of the vulgar," and its resistance to this repression, whereby it became "institutionalized at the margin."

This "institutionalized" vulgar or "people's" culture plays the role of Turner's anti-structure in critiquing the values of the official culture. According to Turner, however, the anti-structural element must always remain temporary and marginal, and thus if the return of the vulgar proceeds according to Twitchell's speculations, then in completing its "liminal phase," popular fiction may eventually turn into structure, become the new canon, as it were.

In any case, Turner and Bakhtin are especially helpful in attempting to discuss literature from a cultural perspective, and because not only do they provide insights from "other" disciplines but also because both were themselves "radicals" in their own areas. More generally, I would argue that in the realm of literary criticism traditional critical theories can be seen to constitute the structural side, and that interdisciplinary approaches constitute the "anti-structure" necessary to create a balance between the literary importance of canonical texts and the cultural significance of popular literature.

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