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Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818) blends Gothic horror and romance in a story that has become a seminal myth of modern technology, revealing that "uncontrolled science ma[kes] man more demonic than deific" (Pharr 115). Stephen King has dealt with this theme on a number of occasions, such as The Stand (1978), Firestarter (1980), The Running Man (1982), The Talisman (1984), and Pet Sematary (1983). King also considers hubris to be a key theme in both Frankenstein and Pet Sematary:

> All tales of horror can be divided into two groups: those in which the horror results from an act of free will and conscious will - a conscious decision to do evil - and those in which the horror is predestinate, coming from outside like a stroke of lightning. The most classic horror tale of this latter type is the Old Testament story of Job, who becomes the human Astroturf in a kind of Superbowl between God and Satan.
>
> The stories of horror which are psychological - those which explore the terrain of the human heart - almost always revolve around the free-will concept; "inside evil," if you will, the sort we have no right laying off on God the Father. This is Victor Frankenstein creating a living being out of spare parts to satisfy his own hubris, and then compounding his sin by refusing to take responsibility for what he has done. (Danse Macabre 62)

By refusing to acknowledge and accordingly repent his wrong-doing, Victor Frankenstein, on the one hand, succumbs to the mortal sin of pride - the same sin which resulted in Lucifer's fall from Heaven and Faust's pact with the Devil. On

the other, defiance is embedded in the Gothic tradition in the character of its hero-villain. Both Victor Frankenstein and Louis Creed of Pet Sematary embody this disputable Gothic ideal. So do several other central characters in King: for instance, Jack Torrance (The Shining), Harold Lauder (The Stand), Reverend Lester Lowe (Cycle of the Werewolf), and Max Devore (Bag of Bones). Both Frankenstein and Pet Sematary analyze also the concept of free will, apparently suggesting that although fate undeniably rules and despite the mechanistic world-view of the Gothic, the characters still possess free will to make moral choices. Mary Ferguson Pharr points out another invaluable theme in Frankenstein as well asPet Sematary: the dream of new life: ”a dream both seductive and malefic, the stuff finally of nightmares made flesh” (116).

In Pet Sematary King reworks traditional material in order to make a connection with the reader’s real-life anxieties. Since his horror fiction is grounded in American social reality, King interprets Shelley’s classic to suit his contemporary purposes. Aptly, Pharr argues that he does not copy Shelley, but rather amplifies the cultural echo she set in motion so that its resonance is clearer to the reader of Gothic fantasy today (120). In the same way, King refers to Shelley’s work as ”caught in a kind of cultural echo chamber” (Danse 65). In addition, he has written more than one introduction for editions of Frankenstein and commented on the novel as well as its film adaptations in Danse Macabre, acknowledging a somewhat reluctant admiration ”for a work both less vivid and more important than anything he has yet produced” (Pharr 120). King characterizes Frankenstein as ”a rather slow and talky melodrama” (Danse 52) and Shelley herself as ”not a particularly strong writer of emotional prose” (Danse 58). At any rate, King’s respect for this Gothic archetype is expressed, besides Pet Sematary, for instance, in It where the Creature appears with nearly every other imaginable monster.

A retelling of W. W. Jacobs’s ”The Monkey’s Paw (1902), the short story about parents who literally wish their son back from the dead,Pet Sematary also displays

King's interest in funerals and modern customs of surrounding death and burial (Winter 146). Furthermore, Tony Magistrale has compared the novel to Nathaniel Hawthorne's canon, claiming that King's fictional allegories owe much of their formulation to the romance tradition in nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature (The Moral Voyages of Stephen King 57) Acknowledging his debt to Hawthorne's tales (Danse 25), King, like Herman Melville, Flannery O'Connor, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, frequently places his protagonists in situations where they face the reality of evil, and from this encounter they must make choices which will influence the rest of their lives. How his characters react to the loss of innocence, and what they learn from the fall from grace has a decisive effect on their survival. Undoubtedly, the journey into the wilderness links Hawthorne's Aylmer, Chillingworth, Goodman Brown, and Rappuccini to King's Louis Creed who entering the woods behind the Pet Sematary refuses to recognize sin, to exert self-discipline, and therefore loses his soul. If Ralph Waldo Emerson and the other nineteenth-century transcendentalists are right in their claim that nature offers a vehicle to self-knowledge, then the self disclosed by Thoreau among the pines at Walden pond differs dramatically from the "self's essential darkness and the human affinity to sin" in the woods of Hawthorne and King (Magistrale, Voyages59).

Yet another way to analyze Pet Sematary is to view it as a kind of Greek tragedy. King has repeatedly argued that entertainment often seems the only goal of what he terms fearsomes, but, clearly, these tales of horror become art, when they manage to touch our "phobic pressure points" (Mustazza 73; Danse 4). In doing so, they suggest that horror fiction at best is not make-believe at all, but "a literature whose essence is our single certainty - that, in Hamlet's words, 'all that live must die' " (Winter 152). In King, we sense the tragic element in life and the effects of the Aristotelian emotions of fear and pity produced by watching his characters suffer pain comparable to that evoked by world's greatest tragedies. For the ancient Greeks, the character flaw (hamartia) and fate cause the fall of a person of high station. Renaissance tragedy also involves the suffering and death

of an aristocratic person, although that outcome does not result from fate but from human agency. However, modern America has preferred the form known as ”domestic tragedy” or ”tragedy of the common person,” in which the aristocrats or historical personages were replaced by common people, and the tragedy was the result of the collision of character and dire circumstance (Mustazza 74). Besides interfering with the natural order, Louis Creed is pushed along the path of destruction by the flaw in his character. Named with intention, Creed’s ”creed” turns out to be rationality which convinces him wrongly that he has the ability to return the dead to life, and he cannot help but use it (Winter 151). In King’s view, Louis Creed ”never ceases to be the rational man. Everything is plotted out - this is what can happen, this is what can’t happen. But nothing that he thinks can happen is eventually what does happen” (151).

A number of critics have attempted to address the issue of moral responsibility in the novel. Most of King’s characters retain a fair amount of free will when confronting evil, and, as Magistrale points out, the majority of his protagonists are like Louis Creed: they choose their own course of action (Landscape of Fear 62). He goes on to argue that, like so many of Hawthorne’s young idealists, the awareness of sin forces King’s characters to proceed in one of two possible directions, either toward moral regeneration or toward moral degeneration, that is, the characters are offered a double-edged deal: the danger of Faustian temptation as well as the possibility for rebirth and transcendence (Voyages 57, 59). In fact, Louis consciously chooses to liberate the malevolent energies residing in the Micmac burial ground and freely elects to avail himself of its delusive magic (64). Tim Underwood and Leonard Mustazza also acknowledge Louis’s responsibility for the disaster, emphasizing that King has created a character with whom it is easy to identify and sympathize, an essentially good man in a difficult situation (Underwood, Kingdom 309; Mustazza 78).

In my reading of Pet Sematary, the flaw in Louis’s character is hubris - not merely the lack of emotional and intellectual resources that Underwood suggests (Kingdom 309). Since the notion of hubris includes both pride and defiance, two

emotions which call upon conscious action, I regard Louis as responsible for his actions. Struck by fate, he deliberately chooses evil, and ”maybe the worst thing about it was that he didn’t feel bad, didn’t feel guilty at all” (Pet Sematary 146). Also, King has Jud Crandall, Louis Creed’s surrogate father, state: ”[B]ringing the dead back to life ... that’s about as close as playing God as you can get, ain’t it?” (Pet Sematary 168). Douglas E. Winter states that Pet Sematary focuses upon the question of moral responsibility for interference with natural order (150). In the natural order of things, fathers do not bury their sons, but to unearth them defies the very law of nature. Instead of rage and defiance, Louis Creed ought to understand the lesson taught by Jud Crandall: ”Sometimes dead is better” (Pet Sematary 166) or the one another surrogate father, Dick Hallorann teaches Danny Torrance in The Shining: ”You grieve for your daddy. ... That’s what a good son has to do. But see that you get on. That’s your job in the hard world, to keep your love alive and see that you get on, no matter what” (463). Further, Louis carries out his quest in secrecy, which clearly indicates that he personally feels that he has something to hide. Supposedly, he lets evil seeds grow in his heart. Winter notes that secrets constitute the dark undercurrent of the novel: the secrets that divide man and woman, the secrets of the mortician’s room, and the secrets of the burial place that lies beyond the Pet Sematary (152; Pet Sematary 141).

By comparing the individual life spans of Louis Creed and Victor Frankenstein, I wish to prove how the protagonists deliberately develop the flaw in their character into the mortal sin of pride and defiance. Despite the difference in background and personal experience, Louis and Victor’s individual lives culminate in a similar disaster for the same reason: hubris. Louis loses his father at three, whereas Victor’s childhood and youth seems nearly a paradigm of happiness. The loss of the father at least partly contributes to Louis’s overtly rational attitude toward death - so does his cousin Ruthie’s violent car accident. Despite the prayers and the agony of the twelve-year-old Louis, Ruthie remains dead. Victor, in contrast, is raised in a nuclear family with two parents and two brothers, and the domestic circle is supplemented with a flawless best friend and a

foster sister, Elisabeth, who later becomes his wife. However, at the age of seventeen Victor loses his mother who dies of scarlet fever, and his separation from the enclosure of the family begins. Victor leaves his Genevan home for the University of Ingolstadt and soon outstrips not merely his peers but also his professors in search of the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. Like Louis Creed who keeps a personal record against death, whispering to himself at the moment of victory: "won one today, Louis" (Pet Sematary 161), Victor is first driven by the purest of motives: "Wealth was an inferior object: but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (Shelley 39).

Louis epitomizes normality and takes pride in his common sense, whereas Victor is alienated first from his family and then from humanity itself by his dreams of success and glory. Although both men subscribe to science - Louis in modern medicine, Victor in natural philosophy - they seem to have little in common at first sight. Victor, the student genius and the dreamer, does not effortlessly find his counterpart in Louis, the rational and devoted family man who lacks both Victor's ego and imagination. However, as the story progresses, Louis develops into a madman in the course of his personal tragedy, while Victor embraces deepening madness due to his inhumane experiments and personal losses. In both cases, the destruction is brought about by the protagonist's own free will. Although grief-stricken, Louis excludes the facts concerning the nature of his daughter's resurrected cat and finds an odd fascination in the idea of resurrection as an act itself. "In spite of everything," he muses, "the idea had that deadly attraction, that sick luster, that *glamour*" (Pet Sematary 255; italics original). Victor's decision to create a human being is based on shortsighted enthusiasm rather than on careful consideration, and since his attempts to resurrect a human being are not grounded on the grief of a personal loss, hubris directs his attempts even more clearly than those of Louis. By theorizing that the secret of life is the first step to the secret of resurrection (Pharr 117), Victor rationalizes his dreams of glory. Ultimately, however, like Lucifer, he wants to become God and create a master race (like another Gothic loner, the vampire): "A new species

would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (Shelley 51).

Dedicated to the mission of resurrecting his son, Louis acts in a desperate haste. And when he takes his wife killed by the "Creature" (that is, his own resurrected son) to the Micmac burial grounds, Louis is to quote King "in a state of transcendence," beyond sanity (Magistrale, Stephen King: The Second Decade 9). Also, when creating the Creature, Victor is in a trance-like state. The protagonist recalls later that he "seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (Shelley 52). When the Creature opens its eyes, the beauty of Victor's dream vanishes and disgust fills his heart. Both Elisabeth Frankenstein and Rachel Creed die at the hands of the monsters their husbands have created. While Victor's mother rests in peace (like Norma Crandall in Pet Sematary), the innocent Creature (like the innocent Gage Creed) - stalks its innocent victims. However, the guilty parties, that is, the creators of these monsters are not able to realize the truth. Lying on his deathbed, Victor warns a friend of ambition, adding, however, that somebody else might succeed where he failed (Shelley 210). Thus, he dies unfulfilled and somewhat defiant - indeed, a pitiable man who is even unable to destroy the creature he has resurrected. The faithful Creature, however, voluntarily follows Victor into death. Louis, insane and beyond such an emotion as hubris, is united with her resurrected wife, Rachel. Hence, both novels reaffirm order, showing in graphic terms that hubris leads to disaster.

In my reading of Pet Sematary and Frankenstein, the relationship between Louis/Victor and the Creature(s) has a two-fold function. On the one hand, it reflects the conflict between God and man as well as that between an author and his creation; on the other, the Creature reveals the Gothic janus face of its creator, posing the same question as, for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) and Oscar Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray (1891): "Who made whom?" or, as Halberstam puts it: "Who rather than what is the object of terror?" (28). In other words, the Creature remains a victim who never asked to be born, but who, since given the gift of his miserable and

disputable life, returns to its creator to claim its hereditary rights. In King, resurrected Gage is possessed by outside evil, whereas only rejected by its creator, does Shelley's Creature become genuinely evil. In addition to work by William Beckford, Charles Brockden Brown, William Godwin (her father), Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, and several of the German terror-novelists, Mary Shelley was influenced by the myths of Prometheus and Faust (Punter, The Literature of Terror 1 106). Despite her mentor Percy Bysshe Shelley's belief in Prometheus Unbound, that is, in the human possibilities of transcending human limitations, Mary Shelley creates a Modern Prometheus in the character of Victor Frankenstein bound by science to nightmare. She emphasizes that man is mortal (Pharr 116) and that hubris does not turn man into God but the Devil. Although it is Creed/Frankenstein who defies God by creating life, it is Gage/the Creature who bears part of the punishment. David Punter points out that Mary Shelley is concerned to present the latter in the light of Rousseauistic and Godwinian theories, as born innocent, a tabula rasa, a morally neutral creature who is made evil by hardships in life (Terror 1 106-109). In King, the soul of the deceased has been replaced by an ancient evil demon.

Hubris in Pet Sematary

I will now explore King's version of the Frankenstein myth in greater detail, focusing on hubris and death. Each of Pet Sematary's three sections begins with a biblical paraphrase that continues from section to section. Obviously, the paraphrases both frame the story and make it resonate with the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:11-44), providing a contradiction between God's will and Louis Creed's consciously evil act. The first paraphrase clearly indicates that for someone possessing power death equals sleep and can thus be reversed. Since his power, however, proves insufficient, is exercised with the wrong attitude, and lacks humility, Louis fails in his effort. On the narrative level, the first part introduces the Creed family - the father, Louis (a young physician), the mother, Rachel (a house-wife), Eileen/Ellie (dedicated to her pet cat Church(ill), and Gage (Ellie's baby brother). When the family moves from Chicago to Ludlow, Louis

Creed attains a position as a manager of a university infirmary. Subscribing merely to rationality, ”[h]e had pronounced two dozen people dead in his career and had never once felt the passage of a soul” (Pet Sematary 22). Rachel Creed, in contrast, fears the very thought of death having witnessed the final agonies of her sister ravaged by spinal meningitis. When Jud Crandall takes the family to the Pet Sematary in the woods, the five-year-old Ellie intuitively apprehends the message implicit in the cemetery and fears for her cat and her family (Pet Sematary 70). Undoubtedly, the deaths of Pascow, a college student, and Church function as warnings, because the third one to die on the same road will be Gage.

Although Victor (!) Pascow plays only an introductory role, repetitive allusions - even in dreams (Pet Sematary 83-87, 314-319) - strengthen the force of Pascow’s imperative: ”The door must not be opened,” ”The barrier was not made to be broken” (Pet Sematary 87). Alongside the other Gothic beasts - the Byronic vampire, Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, and the Wandering Jew - both Victor Frankenstein and Louis Creed represent the seeker after forbidden knowledge. The ultimate forbidden knowledge links sex with death, because both the vampire and the seeker after forbidden knowledge attain the knowledge of reproduction through death. Ironically, Louis’s initial act of love turns into that of death when he reproduces his son for the second time. Also, the knowledge of eternal life condemns these characters to social isolation, because, as Punter points out, the knowledge itself transgresses the boundaries between the natural, the human and the divine (Terror 1 105). The warning is also found in a number of fairy tales, for instance, Bluebeard’s bloody chamber, which the villain’s latest wife opens with the key he has forbidden her to use, reveals the dead bodies of her predecessors and warns her of her impending doom (Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde 241). Disobedience, in turn, is condemned in ”Little Red Riding Hood” and ”Goldilocks and Three Bears” who ”should have been better brought up” (243), to say the least. A number of fairy tales can, finally, be viewed as replayings of one biblical masterplot: the Genesis account of the Fall (Tatar, Off

With Their Heads 96) or Greek myths, such as the fall of Icarus - a kind of hubris. This thematic connection between the Gothic and fairy tales contributes to my conviction that although perhaps on different abstraction levels, most stories basically deal with similar concerns.

Louis Creed's metamorphosis from a rationalist through a hubris-driven scientist into a raving lunatic begins with his encounter with the dying Victor Pascow. The fact that not even Pascow's final gruesome appearance (Pet Sematary 83) makes any difference to Louis Creed bears witness to his either inability or reluctance to see beyond rationality as well as the feeling of superiority he takes from this realization - in a word: hubris. As in fairy tales, Louis Creed ignores the deaths of Pascow and Church and the three warnings by Pascow. By repeating the warnings and emphasizing their serious character, King makes clear that Creed has voluntarily chosen to ignore them and is therefore responsible for the grim consequences.

The next phase in Louis Creed's gradual transformation turns him into a Victor Frankenstein: the Church-cat dies at the age of three years (for the number three see Pet Sematary 15, 52, 402). Winter argues that Ellie's cat is named with a purpose. In the death of Church, King signals that at the heart of Pet Sematary is "the rational being's struggle with modern death - death without God, death without hope of salvation" (149-150). However, aware of the pain that Church's death will cause Ellie, her rational father realizes that theoretical explanations prove worthless within the framework of a personal tragedy and, consequently, takes Jud Crandall's advice to bury the cat in the Micmac burying ground. Reino argues that at this point Church's return from the dead and the Lazarus quotation from the Gospel of John begin to conjoin, and the perceptive reader begins to suspect a connection between the cat's nickname ("Church"), the Herbaic name Pascow (suggesting Passover), the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and the theme of the Easter resurrection (96). Unlike Reino who regards Pet Sematary as a "revolt against Christian resignation" (96), I believe that the novel reinforces Christian values. King affirms thatPet Sematary is very Christian,

because it shows that man destroys himself when he attempts ”mechanistic miracles - abracadabra, pigeon and pie, the monkey’s paw” (Winter 151). Even the hard-headed protagonist’s last name (”Creed”) testifies to human helplessness before death, and the unfortunate outcome of his proud and defiant struggle against the natural order suggests that certain barriers are not made to be broken. Church’s return, finally, turns Louis Creed into a believer, in what he believes are shared opinions.

Louis Creed’s destiny is sealed when he in his hubris decides to avail himself of the destructive energies of the Micmac burial grounds. Since Louis Creed does not believe in the Christian revelation but in the furious Wendigo, the ”creature that moves through the north country [and whose touch can] turn you into a cannibal” (Pet Sematary 46), he has neither piety nor patience to wait till the Judgment Day to encounter his son The second paraphrase anticipates the terror drawing closer to the Creed family. Like modern Martha, Ellie addresses her wishes to God for Gage to come back (Pet Sematary 250). Unfortunately, the wish is brought about through her own father by the evil Wendigo, and, since the former exerts no power and the latter possesses it merely in an evil form, Ellie loses not only her brother but her whole family. The Ramones quotation: ”Hey-ho, let’s go” refers to the beginning of the tragic action in the Micmac burial grounds where Louis Creed turns from a loving father and a capable physician into a madman. In fact, the quotation recurs any time the natural course of life seems threatened (for instance, Pet Sematary 246, 252, 344, 402).

Part Two begins with Gage’s funeral and culminates in Louis’s reclaiming of his son’s body. Louis’s controlled attitude toward death turns out to be nothing but a veneer that is shattered when his own son is killed. In an action that recalls his comforting Ellie in her face of death, Louis, who no longer speaks the scientist’s language, rocks his lifeless son in his arms, reassuring him: ”Gage, it will be all right, this will end, this is just the night, please, Gage, I love you, Daddy loves you” (Pet Sematary 343). Mustazza maintains that the protagonist knows that things will not be ”all right,” and that the lie proves how much he has

changed (78). Referring to King's earlier opinion of Louis as a rational man till the end, I believe that at this point Louis has both made up his mind to resurrect Gage and is losing his sanity - he would not deliberately bother to lie. This exactly constitutes the tragedy of the novel: following his rational mind, the protagonist repeats the same mistakes over and over again and, simultaneously, falls deeper and deeper into his misery. Similarly, Bernadette Lynn Bosky notes the irony inherent in the novel, claiming that Louis begins to follow his intuitions only when he should begin to doubt them (268).

Like Victor Frankenstein and Hawthorne's idealists, the protagonist finds no consolation in his desperate acts. His encounter with evil leads merely to self-destruction and isolation, and the abyss of death only discloses a grotesque version of his love. Indeed, while Gage was his joy, the joy has now left Louis Creed. The bitter nature of this separation alienates Louis both from his family and calling. Since a healer by profession, Dr. Creed is expected to take care of his wife and daughter, but he is unable to do so. Fittingly, an acquaintance by the name Steve Masterton observes the sordid situation of the family, asking Louis to "master" himself: "Ellie isn't vocalizing. And Rachel has had such a bad shock that her very conception of time seems to have twisted out of shape" (Pet Sematary 232). Louis Creed, however, concentrates merely on his plans to resurrect Gage.

To me Louis's mourning seems a combination of the driven ambition of Lucifer/Faust/Frankenstein and madness. The protagonist's yearn to act is not based on pure love but on a selfish need, because he is aware of the qualitatively altered life of the house-cat (Pet Sematary160). Although the resurrection of Church should have brought the lesson home, Louis now ardently desires to undo death's victory. Ironically, Jud Crandall who was the one to introduce Louis to the Micmac burial grounds now warns him: "You make up reasons ... they seem like good reasons ... but mostly you do it because you want to" (Pet Sematary 168). Magistrale notes that Jud himself is capable of exercising a greater measure of self-control than Louis; he rejects the temptation to resurrect Norma (Voyages 65).

Since madness is drawing closer to the protagonist, King comments on the human limits: ”[T]he most terrifying question of all may be just how much horror the human mind can stand and still maintain a wakeful, staring, unrelenting sanity” (Pet Sematary 229). As the second part progresses, the reader watches the mental collapse of Louis Creed, and, because of the emotional groundwork in the first part, the reader feels the Aristotelean fear and pity - fear that Louis Creed will attempt to resurrect his son; pity for a decent man’s suffering (Mustazza 78).

Both the third paraphrase and the third part of Pet Sematary focus on resurrection. Both Lazarus and Gage Creed have been dead several days, but, unlike Lazarus, Gage does not ”come forth” unaltered and alive but deteriorated, deformed, and transformed into an amoral devourer and demon. The latter quotation links both with the fairy tale ”Three Wishes” and, of course, to the short story from which it has been quoted, ”The Monkey’s Paw.” In Danse Macabre King argues that the speculation what might have been ”makes these stories such quinessential tales of terror” (22). Also, the third part of Pet Sematary contains several horrific scenes - the blood and guts for which the horror genre is infamous (Mustazza 81).

The flaw in Louis’s character - hubris - exposes him to the amoral Wendigo. Natalie Schroeder maintains that King leaves Louis’s ultimate motives ambiguous: either he is completely controlled by the evil Wendigo or, in his grief, ready to reach for any possible way to get his son back - even to committing what he knows is blasphemy, by playing God knowingly this time and resurrecting Gage (137). Clearly, evil places in King exert power of their own and on their own, but it is of crucial importance to notice that rarely without human assistance. In some cases, like the alien spacecraft in Tommyknockers and the Chinese mine in Desperation, evil prevails inactive if left untouched. In other cases, ”evil places call evil men” (’Salem’s Lot 113; King in Winter 44). For instance, the Marsten House preserves the evil of Hubie Marsten and calls upon an even greater evil in the character of Count Barlow. Having introduced the Micmac burying ground to the Creed family, Jud Crandall assumes that he himself might be responsible for

the death of Gage Creed. In his view, the resurrected Church activated the Wendigo which deliberately exerted its power, killing Gage on the road and exposing Louis to the temptation to revive his son (Pet Sematary 275). Anticipating an accident, Rachel returns from Chicago earlier than expected and, like Jud Crandall, feels that something is trying to keep her from Louis (Pet Sematary 368). In King, evil occurs in cycles: like the spider-monster of It, feeding on children every twenty-five years, Wendigo, too, seems to rest periodically. Hence, it becomes obvious that Schroeder needs not choose ”either - or” but ”both” of her two options: Louis is exposed to the evil Wendigo because of his own flawed character.

Death in King

Pet Sematary focuses on death from two angles. One states that ”except perhaps for childbirth, [death is] the most natural thing in the world” (Pet Sematary 56), finding its manifestation in the death of the eighty-year-old Norma Crandall. The other symbolizes death as Oz the Gweat and Tewwible, finding its expression in the death of the ten-year-old Zelda Goldman. Clearly, the Wendigo is connected with the latter. Reino points out that, accordingly, the name ”Norma” refers to normality; whereas ”Zelda” begins with the same letter of the alphabet as zombie, and her final illness and death, according to Rachel, does indeed evoke the figure of the ”living dead” (97). Oz the Gweat and Tewwible is symbolic of an unpredictable, indifferent, and evil death. Before getting sick, Zelda had hanged a picture of Oz the Great and Terrible upon her wall, calling him Oz the Gweat and Tewwible, because she could not make the r sound. Besides Jud Crandall’s inability to pronounce some words and the many misspellings that appear in the cemetary tombstones, the misspelling of Oz the Gweat and Tewwible seems to emphasize two points. First, even children unable to speak yet succumb to death, and the monster of death lurks behind the seemingly playful and funny misspelling. Second, as Reino notes, L. Frank Baum’s Wizard of Oz is frequently referred to as a parable of American dream of success, emphasizing the wonder and joy of a fairy tale without sorrows and nightmares (147). With the childish

misspelling, King, however, redesigns the friendly concept, emphasizing the nightmare of American society. The repetition of the concept intensifies its force (see, for instance, Pet Sematary 213, 247, 284). Undoubtedly, Oz the Gweat and Tewwible equals both unnatural and painful death as well as the amoral forces of Wendigo, since both seem to reside in the Micmac burial grounds:

> No, not Christ. These leavings were made in propiation of a much older God than the Christian one. People have called Him different things at different times, but Rachel's sister gave Him a perfectly good name, I think: Oz the Gweat and Tewwible. God of dead things left in the ground. God of rotting flowers in drainage ditches. God of the Mystery. (Pet Sematary 344)

Given over by the Indians to Wendigo, a malevolent demon of the wilds, the Micmac burying ground is "an evil, curdled place" (Pet Sematary 274). Jud used it as a boy to revive his dog, and now the spirit uses him to get at Louis through Gage.

On the first page of Pet Sematary King maintains: "Death is a mystery, and burial is a secret." Although a number of characters have lost their lives in his fiction, and the reader frequently obtains a detailed as well as often gory or grotesque description of the very act of dying, King only seldom penetrates beyond death to any kind of vision of afterlife. The following examples, however, focus on his characters' inner observations of the approaching death. Let me begin with Jake Chambers in The Gunslinger who does not personally experience the transgressing of the boundary between two dimensions. Jake dies in his own world only to reappear alive in Roland's world later in the novel. Possessing merely a few recollections of his own dimension, Jake feels similarly estranged in Roland's dimension:

> Jake feels nothing but surprise and his usual sense of headlong bewildernment - is this how it ends? He lands hard in the street and looks at an asphalt-sealed crack some two inches from his eyes. [---]

> Somewhere a radio is playing a song by the rock group Kiss. He sees his own hand trailing on the pavement, small, white, shapely. He has never bitten his nails.
>
> Looking at his hand, Jake dies. (The Gunslinger 83)

The detailed, introspective observations of death are embedded in intense realism implicit in all of King's oeuvre. On a number of occasions it has been stated that an individual experiences his death as a slow motion picture. In order to gain invaluable time to defend oneself, regain strength, or flee, the brain slackens the perception of time. Perhaps Jake, too, has attained a higher level of consciousness, while he is able to observe every detail of his death scene. Additionally, possibly because of the common-noted adrenaline flow linked with a stress situation, Jake feels no pain but retains a full possession of his mind to the very end.

The act of Jake's dying is summed up in a single sentence, whereas Carrie White of Carrie enters death through a tunnel, another widely acknowledged passage to the unknown. Sue Snell senses Carrie's presence in her mind, traces her through this connection, and, finally, witnesses and, more important, shares her death: "For a moment Sue felt as if she were watching a candle flame disappear down a long, black tunnel at a tremendous speed. (she's dying o my god i'm feeling her die) And then the light was gone, and the last conscious thought had been (momma i'm sorry where)" (Carrie 241). The ultimate question goes unanswered: either Sue as a living human being is unable to follow Carrie beyond the barrier or Carrie's sad life ends to the abyss of oblivia. More than even attempting an answer, King emphasizes the true nature of Carrie White in this connection. Inspite of her loveless existence, the abused and mocked teenager remains true to her mother, begging her forgiveness during the last moments of her sordid life.

While Carrie White disappears like a "candle flame" "down a long, black tunnel," Johnny Smith of The Dead Zone enters "limbo, a weird conduit between the land of the living and that of the dead" during his coma, and he is given the choice to live or die (The Dead Zone 93). Johnny decides to live because of his

responsibility for Susan: ”His girl was sick. He had to get her home” (The Dead Zone 94). Having fulfilled his macrocosmic destiny, that is, saved the world, Johnny finds himself in the same corridor between life and death again: ”The sweet hum of the voices faded. The misty brightness faded. But he was still he - Johnny Smith - intact” (The Dead Zone 385).

”The Reach” (Skeleton Crew), too, provides a rare glimpse of life after death in King’s oeuvre. Not surprisingly, King presents a third popular idea concerning the afterlife existence, that is, relatives and family receiving the deceased, pointing out the vast difference between the desparation of Pet Sematary and the gentle transcendence in ”The Reach”: ”There was a bit of pain, but not much; losing her maidenhead had been worse. They stood in the circle in the night. The snow blew around them and they sang” (Skeleton Crew 565). Since accepted and natural, Stella’s death provides a painless and for a horror writer surprisingly comforting view of death. Indeed, the difference between Louis Creed and Stella Flanders lies in their ability to love and give up. While capable of both, Stella obtains access to truths of which Louis Creed gets merely a distorted and grotesque view. The latter can similarly be applied to Victor Frankenstein who, like Louis Creed, never learns his lesson.

Conclusion

In Pet Sematary no Christian resurrection occurs. As Magistrale notes, by promising the miracle of resurrection, the amoral Wendigo manipulates Louis’s human frailty only to deliver a grotesque version of the miracle (Voyages 61). What is more, with deepening involvement with the dark powers of Wendigo the hero/villain of the novel, Louis Creed, is first alienated from his family and community and, finally, totally ruined with nothing left but his Frankenstein-like monsters. What links Dracula or ’Salem’s Lot and Frankenstein or Pet Sematary with both each other and the Gothic tradition can be summed up in William Faulkner’s words: ”A man sees further looking out of the dark upon the light than a man does in the light and looking out upon the light” (as quoted in

Winter 154).

Exploring the dark emotions of the human mind, Pet Sematary is concerned with death, decay, and disorder. A Gothic novel with a Gothic atmosphere, Pet Sematary includes direct references to the genre such as the comparison between Rachel's pain and Gothic penny-dreadfuls: "That day's penny-dreadful events were only complete when [Rachel] was pulled, screaming, from the East Room of the Brookings-Smith Mortuary" (Pet Sematary 229). Although minor observations in themselves, they, too, manifest the function of the Gothic along the same lines as Julia Briggs: "Irrational fear [initially, the death of a student] can split open the known world to reveal the underlying nightmares" (212). For this reason Pet Sematary seemed too frightening to be published at first. When King realized that Gage Creed would have to die, he also realized that he "had never had to deal with the consequences of death on a rational level" (King in Winter 147).

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First Response

A well presented and well-researched essay, especially admirable for the thoroughness of its knowledge of King's work and writing about it.

The relation of Pet Sematary to basic elements of the tragic and the gothic is well set out. More closely focused textual detail (analysing a specific part of the novel in depth for instance) would corroborate the general points and make them fresher. See, for instance, what Jody Castricano does with her chapter on Pet Sematary in Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Gothic Writing.