

The haunted house of memory in the fiction
of Stephen King.

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore a set of key issues and themes in the fiction of Stephen King, and then to present, in the form of a creative extract, a demonstration of an imaginative engagement with those same literary preoccupations mapped out in that opening critical section

This thesis is thus divided into two parts. The first part, 'Critical Encounters', explores through an interconnected series of close readings a selection of novels and novellas that circle around questions of suffering and survival. Chapter One, 'Monsters by Design', looks closely at Carrie (1974), The Shining (1977), and Misery (1987), among other texts, in order to define King's hun monsters and investigate the episodes of domestic violence that are among his most terrifying scenes. Chapter Two, 'Retrospection of Abuse', uses 'The Body', a novella in Different Seasons (1982), as a core text to examine King's use of abuse and abusive characters as a means of defining character and assigning motivation for further violent tendencies. Chapter Three, 'Remorse and Resurrection', examines the influence of science and religious faith in terms of mourning the loss of loved ones. Chapter Four, 'The Selfish Apparition', a detailed engagement with Bag of Bones (1998), delves into the meanings behind the appearance of ghostly apparitions and suggests that they may be less para-psychological and more psychoanalytical in nature. The second part, 'Creative Engagement', demonstrates the influence King's writing has had on my own work by providing an extract from a new novel, Without Warning, a sequel to my first book, Summer of the Cicada (Jonathan Cape, 2005). Without Warning is a unique experiment for me, as it has been written not only in the wake of the literary works of King - which have long exerted an influence on me as a writer and as one of his 'constant readers' - but in the light of a sustained period of research and reflection on King as a writer. Being in the midst of a critical and creative immersion in King, including his own accounts of his craft as well as interviews and essays by other scholars, has shaped my writing and made me meditate on my craft in a way I had not done before. This thesis is then both a study of aspects of the fiction of one of America's foremost storytellers, and an example of an emerging writer grappling with the fiction and criticism of a major influence.

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