



Stephen King and Horror Fiction as Enhancement Tools of Psychosocial Skills

Stephen King et la fiction d'horreur comme outils d'amélioration des compétences psychosociales

Racha KERCENNA ¹

English Department University of Blida 2 | Algeria
r.kercenna.etu@univ-blida2.dz

Abstract: One of the lengthiest discussions regarding the literary canon has to do with Stephen King and his ongoing oeuvre. Various opinions exist, suggesting at times that his corpus is nothing but harmless junk and at others insisting on the merits of his numerous masterpieces. Far from striving for another opinion to add to the pile, this article seeks a more objective answer to whether Art-horror is as valuable and significant as other genres in mainstream literature. With that end in mind, it concerns itself with the inner workings of Man's psyche - especially in the early stages of skill formation - the nature and quality of education, and how King's fiction bridges the gap between both and allows the reader to discover and generate solutions to significant problems. Beyond the entertaining aspects of such stories, this article uncovers the role they play in strengthening communication and family ties between junior and senior readers. It also investigates the cognitive training that such macabre adventures provide as a valuable complement to the formal training at school.

Keywords: Canon, Education, Horror, Pulp Fiction, Psychosocial-skills.

Résumé: L'une des discussions les plus longues concernant le canon littéraire porte sur Stephen King et son œuvre en constante évolution. Les opinions sont diverses, suggérant parfois que son corpus n'est qu'une littérature divertissante et sans conséquence, et insistant à d'autres moments sur les mérites de ses nombreux chefs-d'œuvre. Loin de chercher à ajouter une opinion supplémentaire à ce débat, cet article vise à apporter une réponse plus objective à la question suivante : l'« Art-horreur » a-t-il une valeur et une importance égales à celles des autres genres de la littérature grand public ? Dans cette perspective, il s'intéresse aux mécanismes internes de la psyché humaine - notamment lors des premières étapes de l'acquisition des compétences -, à la nature et à la qualité de l'éducation, et à la manière dont la fiction de King comble le fossé entre ces deux domaines, permettant au lecteur de découvrir et de générer des solutions à des problèmes significatifs. Au-delà de l'aspect divertissant de ces récits, cet article met en lumière le rôle qu'ils jouent dans le renforcement de la communication et des liens familiaux entre les lecteurs, jeunes et adultes. Il étudie également l'entraînement cognitif que procurent ces aventures macabres, en tant que complément précieux à la formation formelle dispensée à l'école.

Mots-clés : Compétences psychosociales, Éducation, Fiction d'horreur, littérature canonique, littérature populaire.



¹ Corresponding author: RACHA KERCENNA | r.kercenna.etu@univ-blida2.dz

As a household name in the horror genre, Stephen King never stopped raising eyebrows and generating questions about his oeuvre. Literary forums discussing the seriousness and weight of his work are not hard to find. Be it on websites or magazines, among laypeople or critics, many are the readers who obstinately wave him off as a mere pulp fiction writer whose monsters and curses are only shockers that might thrill at best. Countless other scholars back up a completely different opinion, maintaining that the man wrote, and is still writing, masterpieces that have revolutionized the genre of his expertise and gone far beyond it. *Mile 81* is a short story whose analysis intends to show how King's signature genre not only equals but even competes with canonical works of mainstream literature. Like many of his other novels and short stories, it has to do with monsters and helpless children; helpless not only because they are young and vulnerable but also due to their environment and their elders' absence and lack of attentiveness. That the victim and the savior in such a story are both children points to the importance of formal and informal training, as well as education and parental guidance, as crucial components that can determine the child's fate and future. Following this line of enquiry, this article will adopt a discourse analysis with a theoretical framework in its investigation of the inner workings of Man's psyche - especially in the early stages of skill formation - the nature and quality of education both at home and at schools, and how Art-horror in general, and King's fiction in particular, bridges the gap between both and allows the reader to see what the author intends him to see in a creative process that prompts him to find and generate plausible solutions to the raised problems.

1. King and art-horror

To get a better understanding of King's corpus, its value beyond the enjoyment barriers of pulp fiction, and its significance as a tool of cognitive training, it is fundamental that we know more about King's preferred genre and that we place it with the exactitude of science at the proper end of the literary spectrum. Oscar Wilde once said that to define is to limit, but it does not follow that limitation is always undesirable. In the present study, the limitation can become the ultimate tool to measure the depth of a literary genre often regarded by scholars and teachers as little more than junk. In an article entitled *The Nature of Horror*, American philosopher Noel Carroll focuses on this problem and offers a brief yet thorough analysis of Horror and some of its variations. The latter is a vast and constantly growing division of art that includes written fiction, screenplays, theatre, cinema, TV, web dramas, manga, comics, manhua, and even music. Accordingly, it is not surprising that a profusion of subgenres exists already, encompassing by means of illustration the Slasher, the Paranormal, the Gothic, the Lovecraftian, the splatter, the apocalyptic, and even the comedy horror. Out of all these and more, only Art-Horror is of any interest to the present study on account of being the subgenre that King has mastered and revolutionized for many decades. Noel Carroll investigates the difference between this division, on the one hand, and others, such as natural Horror (Horror caused by natural factors), psychological Horror (concerned with human psychological phenomena and disturbances), and tales of terror (including some of the works of both Poe and Hitchcock). According to him, the primary characteristic of Art-Horror is the presence of monsters as a central element in the plot. Although monsters can be an essential component in other kinds of fiction, such as myths and fairy tales, it remains that in such worlds, they are simply a "part of the everyday furniture of the universe" (Carroll, 1987: 52). However, they represent in Art-Horror a disturbance of natural order.

The following analysis demonstrates how Art-Horror functions and whence the strong abhorrence that clings so tightly to its monsters comes. If other genres, such as fantasy, allow and even encourage the existence of non-human creatures, why is it that only Art-Horror makes them so hateful to the reader? Part of the answer to this question resides in the appellation of the genre itself, which derives from the affective state it generates in the reader. Carroll explains how this rule applies to thriller, mystery, and horror variations of art, named after the effects they promote; that is to say, a sense of suspense, mystery, and horror. Accordingly, the affective states of the reader are strongly linked and remarkably similar to the ones experienced by the characters. In this regard he writes, "The characters of works of horror exemplify for us the way in which to react to the monsters in the fiction. Our emotions are supposed to mirror those of the positive human characters" (Carroll, 1987: 53). Our understanding of this correlation can be pushed further by deconstructing the generated affective states and probing their causes. A sense of abhorrence and disgust visible in shudders, various expressive gestures, and facial expressions of revulsion often accompany fear of the monster in horror works. In other words, the monster is not only feared but also held as repugnant by characters and readers alike. Fear is easily understood when the character confronts a non-human entity coming after their life. However, disgust is harder to place. Generally, people are repulsed by what is dirty, and dirt is nothing but a state of impurity. In other words, it is a state in which the initial condition of cleanliness and purity is disturbed and altered by several causes. In a study entitled *Purity and Danger*, British anthropologist Mary Douglas associates this sense of impurity with violating cultural categorization schemes. If we are to illustrate this idea for the sake of simplification, let us take the works of King as a case study. Among many of his titles, the focal point of this article is his 2011 novella, *Mile 81*, in which the monster causing terror and taking lives is a car. That is not the first of King's four-wheel abominations, considering that his killer vehicle's novel *Christine* was published in 1983. Applying the Art-Horror theories we have so far enumerated, the first thing to note here is that the characters approach the cars in either story with a mixture of fear and disgust. In a later part of the article, we will discuss the significance of fear again. For now, however, we will focus on the element of disgust. The monster car in *Mile 81* inspires repugnance because of its break-up with the significant traits of automobile characterization. We can explain this violation in the following terms.

For one thing, none of the characters can place the model of the vehicle, which gives it an alien touch that borders on the strange and the uncanny. Moreover, the thick veil of mud that covers its surface in the middle of a dry summer day throws doubt as to whence it had come from, thus questioning even its geographical origin. A trait shared between this car and Christine is that the two could move on their own, make decisions, and execute them voluntarily. Thus, given free will and consciousness, the two vehicles violate the norms of categorization that regulate the world of machinery. Christine goes further in "her" ability to fix its damages and in its owner's manic insistence on referring to it using female pronouns as though it were a person instead of an inanimate object. All such elements estrange the two cars from all other automobiles and create a sense of impurity that goes hand in hand with the fear of the monstrous entity. In such a manner, the schemes of cultural categorizations fall apart to generate disgust and terror in the characters' minds.

After noting the affective states generated by Art-Horror and breaking them down into two main components, it is time to probe how they function on personal, psychological, and literary levels. The horror genre generates a plethora of responses that vary depending on the audience itself. Horror movies, for example, attract endless viewers who thrive on the effect of jump scares. At the same time, however, the same effects are considered hateful or less desirable by other types of viewers who care nothing for the thrill of spooks. Without a stable and typical response, we could analyze as feedback for the benefit of psychological or literary investigations, our introspective reactions cannot be trusted entirely because they are too subjective. Many of their incentives remain personal. Thus, the characters' responses to the same stimuli in the plot also serve as more objective feedback that can be analyzed and studied. Following Carroll's viewpoint, "we can ground our conjectures on observations of the way in which characters respond to the monsters in works of horror" (Carroll, 1987: 53). This method would allow a monster regarded with a mixture of horror and disgust by the characters of a novel or a movie to be known to the audience as a source of similar feelings and impressions even when their affective states fail to match those of the characters owing to personal traits, different personalities, and varied levels of fear tolerance.

2. Art-Horror as a cognitive tool

In addition to their function as a modulator of the reader's affective states in response to the monsters in the plot, fictional characters are also a medium to convey particular ideas. Certain characters, especially children of tender age, serve as the coded symbols of a subconscious language between the author and the reader. King, for one, has repeatedly used children in his novels to criticize the American lifestyle using a portrayal that is, in professor Sara Martin Alegre's words, "gradually excluding the imaginary from the relationship between parents and children" (Martin Alegre, 2001: 105). We can note that with ease in many of his narratives, including his very first novel, *Carrie*, whose eponymous character is at once the monster and the victim. However, if Carrie is a monster at all, then she is one that had been shaped and created by her community and, more particularly, by her religiously fanatic mother. This approach toward the unpleasant realities in life allowed King to address the reluctant adults among his audience, especially those who are unwilling "to cope with the horrors of plain reality, which they are prepared to approach only through fiction" (Martin Alegre, 2001: 113) mainly because the latter is regarded first and foremost as a harmless and escapist form of entertainment. As a medium of social and psychological exchange, the genre often regarded as commercialized junk acquires considerable importance as a cognitive tool of equal value to other canonical works in mainstream literature.

Both occasional and faithful readers of King might easily notice that the figure of the child is present in the majority of his works as a victimized party, sometimes abused by either peers or elders like Carrie White, at others brutalized by all sorts of monstrous creatures like Ben Mears in *Salem's Lot* (1975). In either case, the focus is still on the younger and comparatively helpless generation, which suggests the idea of interference with children's healthy progress within the folds of the American family. The latter fundamental structure is criticized in King's oeuvre, even when the monsters are absent. As mentioned earlier, *Carrie's* eponymous character is abused by her entire community, especially by her mom. The ongoing strain of that abuse became the trigger that broke, at last, her threshold of

pain and unleashed her telekinetic powers on the entire town. In the *Bill Hodges trilogy*, the monster that Brady Hartfield has become is similarly the result of his mother's sexual and psychological manipulations when he was nothing but a child. Thus, the genre's focus on the character of the persecuted infant can serve as a cautious message against the gradual collapse of both safety and stability within the folds of American families. However, such truths remain bitter in America or elsewhere in the big, wide world. Both adult and junior readers might find them shocking and even abhorrent despite their importance in their own lives. The layer of horror that King has so skillfully added to his works is, in a way, the cognitive and literary tool he found to be most efficient to approach the readers who were, as mentioned before, unwilling to cope with the disturbing images of their reality, and who sought nothing else in literature but an outlet of escapism.

3. King's monsters as a symbol of social horror

King's capacity to give his readers both the things they wanted most and the things they wanted entirely gone from their lives without exciting their conscious notice is mainly due to the inclusion of the monstrous entities in his novels. The latter set of characters is a symbol of fear in a supernatural context and a thinly veiled reproduction of reality. Focusing on all the non-human entities in King's fiction would allow us to corroborate the above-mentioned notion concerning the author's use of horrific elements to approach real-life issues related to family life and children's well-being. *Under the Dome* (2009) puts a small rural town called Chester's Mill under the control and influence of alien entities that regard its entire population as nothing more than a game. Its complete isolation from the world speaks of similar circumstances that many microscopic towns in Maine experience as a reality. The power struggle within and without the town parallels the political scene in the country, with Big Jim Rennie as a prototype of corruption in the hands of influential individuals in such small communities, and the Aliens above as a metaphor for the detached and ruthless politicians who hurl destruction from beyond and only watch its disastrous outcomes in detached amusement. According to the same principle, Pennywise, the monstrous clown of *It* (1986), is a demonic entity that feeds on fear and plays mind tricks on its victims, taking the shape and aspects of each of their secret terrors. *Mile 81* is no different in its use of the monster as a symbol of fear, a symbol that is quite flexible considering the affective states it creates in its victims and the manner in which the children, in particular, regard it. The alien entity, which takes the form of a car in the plot, is a shapeshifter that vaguely reflects the things they fear most. Gazing at the car from a deserted diner's window, Pete Simmons, for instance, experiences anxiety directly linked to his apprehension of adult punishment. He associates the sight of the car with the proximity of an adult and, therefore, with the lurking threat of punishment. At different stages of the story, his thoughts wander towards several forms of chastisement. He could be getting himself into trouble with his parents, for instance, if he failed to make his curfew or was found out to have been out on a dangerous adventure. He even entertains the irrational fear of being thrown into jail for having broken into an abandoned rest area and sipped from a left-behind bottle of liquor. The same car incites different kinds of fear in the hearts of the Lussier kids, especially Rachel, the elder of the pair. Having been raised in a different environment than Pete, Rachel associates the car with danger in a manner that aligns with the basic training of her parents' concerning strangers and strange cars. From beginning to end, the girl had accordingly chosen to stay as far as possible from

the vehicle, which suggests to the mind the repetitive instructions of keeping away from strangers, which most caring parents implement in their infants. In this manner, the nature of fear concerning the monstrous entity in the story helps show the differences between upper-class families that could afford to go on holidays during the summer and the less well-to-do parents who had to work all year long, causing their children to be neglected and poorly attended.

Having thus established the significance of the monstrous figure in Stephen King's works, not only as part of the supernatural make of his plots but also as a critical element in his commentary on the social circumstances of family life in America, it is now time to question the weight of such comments. Countless literary authors have made valuable contributions within their communities' social and political strata; some have even gone beyond. Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell are two such names that are still recognized today not only in their capacities as novelists but as social critics as well, activists who raised awareness in regard to child labor, social ostracism, education, and lower-class circumstances. Many critics and readers object to King reaching the same status or equaling such figures because of his novels' inability to provide clear-cut solutions to the problems and issues he approaches. Unlike other authors of mainstream literature, King seems to have never been tempted by the prospect of moralizing or volunteering solutions to the social riddles in his plots. Instead of being read as a shortcoming, this preference can become a more efficient way out of the predicaments that preoccupy his characters. There are ample reasons to believe that the contemporary reader has had enough of moralizing and preaching. Very few works get away with that nowadays, which is a confirmation of King's talent as an author who knows how to sell the books he writes. Being a renowned author of popular fiction, his avoidance of a forceful, preachy tone has made his works attractive to countless readers of various age groups. Both children and adults enjoy losing themselves within the pages of his novels. Neither group appreciates being ordered around by any authoritarian figure, even if only fictional. After all, the post-modern reader is highly aware of the surrogate nature of fictional characters and how they can serve as mouthpieces to their authors. By that, King's approach loses all semblance of being a literary or technical weakness on his part. Instead, it becomes clearer that such is his self-developed tool to change what he criticizes in his books without actually doing anything other than pointing it out to his readers and getting it out of their blind spots. In that manner, "unless they are sadistic monsters, his adult readers are bound to feel pity for the child abused and manipulated by monstrous adults" (Martin Alegre, 2001: 113). In other words, King's fiction is more challenging than any other. It engages the readers in an ongoing debate concerning its plot, demanding solutions to the presented problems.

4. Art-Horror as a means for communication

Not only is Art-Horror used as a medium between the author and the readers in order to find solutions to social, political, and even psychological issues in their respective communities, but the genre can also serve as a means of communication between adults and their juniors, parents and their children. At least, this is true of King's fiction since it is one of the most popular in both America and the rest of the world. What is special about King is his ability to appeal to readers of almost any age group, unlike the novelists of other genres who might captivate an audience of a certain age but are bound to fail in

securing the interest of others. Given that advantage, his fiction not only points out the troublesome issues for the readers, as mentioned earlier, but also creates a strong bond in the family through an active exchange of opinions and ideas, a mutual awareness between children and parents, and even a more effortless flow of communication when talking to one's child about particular topics is either awkward or inefficient. The importance of such bonds is most visible in schools, where one can note, not without a touch of surprise, how avid young readers take little to no interest in their assigned literary books. Their lack of zeal regarding guided reading stems, in fact, from two main factors. The first is, as suggested, the nature and the assigned novels' genre. The second concerns the environment and the parties with whom they enjoy reading. Reading in the classroom often takes the form of focused study sessions in which the author, the novel, or the genre is torn to bits and analyzed from every conceivable literary perspective. Such engagement might appeal to a literary scholar of more mature years and finalized goals. However, to the youngsters of the classroom, the activity itself is devoid of practical value and, accordingly, barren of fun and enjoyment. Compared to that, reading at home, whether alone or with a parent, appears to be much more unrestrained and interesting. According to Kelly Chandler, professor of Human Development and Family Studies, it is not only because the junior readers are allowed more freedom in choosing their books, but also because such activities at home "are not reading conferences; their purpose is to share and connect, rather than to evaluate and extend. The ongoing opportunity to talk about our reading is more important than any individual response we might discuss" (Chandler, 1999: 234). That suggests another element in the chain of readership between author and audience, an element that thrives on interpersonal relationships between adults and children and relies on influence for its growth.

All parents, regardless of age, race, status, education, and many other factors, strongly influence their children. Accordingly, the offspring's most urgent desire is to replicate what the parent does, how the parent acts, and even what the parent reads. In Professor Kelly Chandler's study about the role played by parents in shaping their children's reading preferences, the results showed that most tested students became avid readers of King after their parents had introduced them to the author by lending them their own books. Such exchange became a strong motivation for the junior readers who wanted to discover the world of their elders and share with them in a manner they could not access or replicate in school. The same study shows how some parents were concerned about their children's new interests, especially those who had not shared willingly and whose little ones had simply borrowed their reading lists without asking for permission. The source of concern here is the eligibility to read King at a young age, considering that some of his literature is not very delicate and might not be fit for young minds, in that it deals with all sorts of matters quite openly. However, regardless of such fears on behalf of the parents, the fact that they had entertained them at all, and the fact that most adults do so as they attempt to censor the media they communicate to their juniors, points, in reality, to their understanding of that influence which flows from elder to younger individuals through media, education, and art. Such fears, however, are not unwarranted, even if they point towards a somewhat odd and not altogether valid direction. The number of facts, skills, and functions that can be learned and sculpted in schools is finite, leaving a significant margin of cognitive states and social skills that cannot fit in any formal learning environment. The evolution of such skills depends entirely on the nurture-oriented aspects

of our brains, which can only thrive on observation, imitation, and interpersonal relationships.

5. Activating and enhancing psychosocial skills

Great and understandable is the importance given to education within the walls of a formal establishment. Schools provide many opportunities to learn and develop all sorts of crucial skills. However, the greatest fallacy is to believe that such programs alone could be enough to complete the maturation process and reach the full growth of a child. Psychologists and neuroscientists today have concluded that non-cognitive skills are just as important, if not more so, to guarantee success later on in life. These skills include, among many others, the individual's ability to socialize, attitudes towards their community, and motivations to form and be an active part of it. According to American economist Professor James Heckman and fellow researcher Tim Kautz, the inadequacy of school programs in that regard shows in their incapacity to measure the non-cognitive abilities of the students in their standardized achievement tests (Heckman and Kautz, 2013: 15). Before diving deeper into how we can nurture such skills, we will first place them under a magnifying glass for longer and examine their aspects and particularities.

To begin with, social skills, as stated by Political scientist John B. Holbein, "involve the ability to work with others productively - to communicate, to build friendships, and solve group-based problems" (Holbein, 2017: 574), making them a crucial part of every individual's life regardless of any other factor. Their development, according to psychiatrist Nitin Gogtay, is a non-linear process analogous to the brain's structural and functional evolution (Gogtay et al., 2004: 8177). In other words, for such psychosocial and non-cognitive skills to thrive and evolve, time and experience are necessary. Like any other cognitive skill, social abilities depend for ontogenesis on investment at a younger age (Heckman and Kautz, 2013: 7). Accordingly, their subsequent blooming into moderate levels of a healthy state entails constant training achieved through the formerly mentioned bond with the parent via such activities as reading. It is also important to point out another characteristic that the social skills share with their cognitive counterparts: their capacity to "be changed over the lifecycle, but through different mechanisms and with different ease at different ages" (Heckman and Kautz, 2013: 10). Thus, if it is easier for a young child to learn two to three foreign languages without the shadow of an accent, it is also easier to develop social skills in the most tender years than in later epochs of life.

The significance of investing time and effort in developing psychosocial skills at an early age is evident when investigating the significant differences in the make of both Rachel and Pete in *Mile 81*. At the story's beginning, the parents' absence from their children's lives becomes instantly noticeable in the reckless freedom with which the Simmons brothers idle away the hours of their summer holidays. The fact that their parents' return is at a fixed hour in the late afternoon suggests their status as lower-middle class, who have to show up for work daily and are unable at the same time to afford daycare for their children. This gap in family ties does not necessarily suggest irresponsibility on the parents' behalf but points out, all the same, a potential malfunction in the social machinery. Because of their social status, the Simmons must be at work even during holidays. In their incapacity to provide a babysitter for their children, they delegate the responsibility to

their elder son, who delegates it in turn to his younger brother. In this manner, Pete finds himself left to his own devices, having to amuse and care for himself. Amidst this lack of parental care, the only motivation he had been able to generate during his lonesome hours was the urge to impress both his elder brother and the latter's friends to gain acceptance and access to their realm, whence comes the idea of exploring the rest area in the first place. Before commenting on the psychosocial skills of Pete Simmons, we will compare them first with those displayed by Rachel Lussier.

First of all, Rachel is younger than Pete, which is a noteworthy fact, considering that even at that tender age, she makes far more responsible and rational decisions, which suggests a set of more evolved psychosocial capacities. The reason behind that is easily traceable to the felt presence of her parents. When first introduced to the reader, the Lussiers are taking a road trip together, spending the summer break as a united family. At the peak moment of their crisis, Rachel knew what to do, thanks to the prior training of her parents. The first thing she did was to ensure her brother's safety, stay as far as possible from danger, and summon help. Even though she had just witnessed an alien creature devour both her parents, she managed to remember the emergency number and make the call, giving the operator at the other end of the line as many details as she could in order for her to locate them. Even after encountering Pete, she had been the one cautioning him against getting close to the car lest it should hurt him too. All in all, Rachel Lussier is a far more mature child in all conceivable ways, and the reason is her early training, something she could not have learned in school alone but had acquired from interacting with her parents. Pete, on the other hand, lacks such skills even though he goes to school, which proves once more that apart from cognitive skills, education at formal establishments does not guarantee the development of other necessary psychosocial brain functions.

Having illustrated the importance of psychosocial skills, it is now important to consider how teachers and parents view them, especially compared to the more orthodox cognitive abilities. Most educators value textbook knowledge more than any other kind. The ultimate proof of that is the examination system, which prevails in America and worldwide. Tests and exams from primary school to university level exclusively concern the knowledge taught in class and follow a given syllabus. In the absence of any interest regarding the psychosocial know-how of the student, the latter type of skills cannot be tested and, therefore, cannot be improved, surveyed, and evolved, eventually leading to the shortcomings we have previously mentioned and illustrated. Belittling the psychosocial share of fundamental skills and knowledge causes the problem at hand to drift farther from the notice of both parents and educators, thus causing new issues to emerge in the learning environment. In his 1991 essay *I Won't Learn from You*, Herbert R. Kohl explains one such issue, namely the refusal to learn from specific figures. At one point or stage of the learning process, students whose home environment and culture might not align with the school's cultural scene are prone to reject the flow of incoming knowledge even when they are amply capable of learning. They adopt a defensive approach towards the teacher and the subject, and refuse access to their minds and brains. This refusal, despite their moderate and even advanced mental capacities, indicates, in fact, an anxiety on the part of the child to maintain and preserve what they perceive as a significant relationship with family members or peers. In their eyes, such relationships could be seriously undermined by the outside intervention of the school and its authoritative figures. This state of mind

shows in both the Simmons brothers. George, the elder of the two, was more than willing at the beginning of the story to put his own life at risk, playing a dangerous game called "Paratroops from hell" to secure his peers' high regard and gain their respect. The same motivation also prompted him to leave his little brother unsupervised. Pete is no different, considering that his motivation once he got to explore the rest area and even after crossing paths with the alien car was to impress his sibling and gain access to his peer group. That is to show that in the lack of awareness regarding the psychosocial skills of the child and their importance in school, children are apt to develop such behavioral patterns, thus barring the way of their elders and refusing to learn even when they are capable of it. The alternative is a desire to satisfy and impress parties that are oftentimes unworthy of such efforts.

To return to how Art-Horror in general and King's fiction in particular are much more than pulp fiction, the sole result of which is hedonistic enjoyment, we will consider a few more details in *Mile 81*. Pete Simmons and the kids in his neighborhood lacked a safe environment to amuse themselves. Accordingly, they were reduced to the dangerous alternative of playing dangerous games or exploring deserted and potentially unsafe locations, as in the case of Pete. Similarly, Rachel and Blake Lussier did not have a safe environment in which they could hide in case of danger. Like Pete's neighborhood, the deserted rest area was not child-friendly and offered no way out for the distressed children. Even after calling the cops, Rachel had so much trouble convincing them of her story and summoning actual help, which further endangered her own life and that of her younger brother. In the guise of all these details, King refrains from telling his readers anything about his viewpoint regarding the safety of little children amid their communities but paints a vivid picture that cannot evade notice, let alone the scrutiny of the inquisitive reader. The idea that he painted through Rachel's exchange with both the operator and the police officer, the lack of a shelter for the kids, and the meagre resources for healthy amusement suggest that the cultural environment of the time did not take children seriously and only waved them off as beings that are not yet valid in the social stratum.

Conclusion

In this capacity, the significance of King's oeuvre as serious literature becomes more obvious. The claim levelled by some readers and critics concerning its passivity towards the issues it tackles loses validity given the affective states it generates. By evoking such feelings of disgust and fear regarding a subtly disguised societal norm, such as the religious fanaticism of Carrie's mother, for instance, King's books convey the intended message on a level far deeper than that which moralizing literature can reach. *Mile 81*, for one, is a sufficient treatise against the neglect of children and children's needs. It points out effectively the damage done to the youngest citizens when their elders cannot escape the classism and unfair distribution of wealth that prevents them from being constantly present in the lives of their children. It also highlights the dangers of not taking the latter faction for granted and not including them as fully active members in their communities. In addition to that, King's literary tools spare the post-modern reader the unwanted lecturing tone usually embedded in moralizing works. The result is a popular vein of fiction that entertains both juniors and adults, fosters a strong bond between parents and their children, prepares and solidifies the latter group's psychosocial skills, and encourages the

entire social circle to actively and critically seek answers to the various dilemmas it uncovers.

Bibliographical references

- ALEGRE MARTIN S. December 2001. "Nightmares of Childhood: The Child and the Monster in Four Novels by Stephen King" in *Atlantis*. Vol 23, Juno2001. p. 105-114.
- CARROLL N. Autumn 1987. "The Nature of Horror" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol 46. p. 51-59.
- CHANDLER K. November 1999. "Reading Relationships: Parents, Adolescents, and Popular Fiction by Stephen King" in *The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. Vol 43. p. 228-239.
- GOGTAY N. ET AL. MAY 2004. "Dynamic mapping of human cortical development during childhood through early adulthood" in *PNAS*. Vol 101. p. 8174-8179.
- HECKMAN et al. 2013. "Fostering and Measuring Skills: Interventions that Improve Character and Cognition." in *NBER Working Papers*.
- HOLBEIN J. B. August 2017. "Childhood Skill Development and Adult Political Participation" in *The American Political Science Review*. Vol 111. p. 572-583.
- DOUGLAS M. 1921. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. United Kingdom. 1966.
- KING S. *The Bazaar of Bad Dreams: Stories*. Scribner. United States. 2015.
- KING S. *Carrie*. Doubleday. United States. 1974.
- KING S. *Christine*. Viking Press. United States. 1983.
- KING S. *It*. Viking Press. United States. 1986.
- KING S. *Salem's Lot*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. United States. 1975.
- KING S. *Under the Dome*. Scribner. United States. 2009.
- KOHL H. R. *I won't Learn from You*. New Press. United States. 1994.