

The Concept of Fear and Coming of Age in Stephen King's Novel "It"

Martinović, Nera

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Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i
književnosti i pedagogije

Nera Martinović

Koncept straha i sazrijevanje u romanu *Ono* Stephena Kinga

Završni rad

Mentor: doc.dr.sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

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It

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Supervisor: Dr. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki, Assistant Professor

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Abstract

Horror fiction has intrigued and entertained people ever since it appeared in the end of the 18th century. Stephen King is one of the most famous modern horror novelists, and the novel *It* definitely proves King's belonging to this genre. The novel portrays the lives of the Losers Club, a group of children in Derry, who face It, a mysterious shape-shifting monster that kills children in their town.

This thesis deals with the concept of fear presented in this novel, the characters' views on fear and facing their fears. It also discusses the concept of growing up, or coming of age, in this novel. Both parts of the thesis are connected, since the perception of fear influences the way the characters deal with it, and eventually how they grow up in the process, and the influence of maturity on their perception of fear. These topics are relevant because fear is a very powerful emotion, and King provides us with an insight into the realm of fear, or horror, and helps us understand our own fears. It also emphasizes the importance of nurturing our inner child, because children perceive the world in a different, simpler, and maybe even better way. It teaches us to deal with our fears and conquer them in order to fully mature.

Keywords: *It*, Stephen King, fear, maturity

Introduction

Stephen King is one of the most celebrated horror writers of today. His most prominent work is *It*, which features probably one of the most legendary horror figures, the eponymous It. This paper analyzes the concept of fear in King's novel, explores ways of dealing with fears, and discusses the importance of growing up in facing our fears. The opening chapter deals with the definition of the horror genre, and the most important elements of horror fiction. The second chapter examines the concept of fear and maturity in the novel, firstly by focusing on the monster in the novel, then on fear itself. Furthermore, it deals with the problem of facing one's fears, and in the last part, it discusses the problem of growing up in the novel. The paper explores the way coming of age influences our perception of fear and how we learn to face our fears as we grow up.

1. Horror Fiction

J.A. Cuddon has defined the horror story as "a fictional narrative (usually in prose) of variable length which shocks or even frightens the reader, and/or induces a feeling of repulsion and loathing" (Cuddon 339). Horror stories make us explore the limits of what we, or people in general, are capable of experiencing. They explore "our capacity to experience fear and what lurks on and beyond the shifting frontiers of consciousness" (Cuddon 340), by talking about psychological chaos, trauma, and taboo desires. The horror genre explores the human psyche by intruding our comfort level. Also, horror can be both supernatural and non-supernatural, but still extremely personal, since different people are afraid of different things. The source of fear constantly changes and speaks volumes about the human condition and our identity.

The horror story appeared as a genre in the late 18th century, but writers have known for a long time that the horrific had a certain magnetic appeal. The main theme at that time was the image of the Devil, which was a dominant figure in the 19th century. Another theme popular in the 19th century was the theme of doubles (*doppelgängers*), featured, for example, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and in Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*. The theme of vampirism became popular in the Romantic period, John Polidori's *The Vampyre* being the first fictional vampire story. Later in the 19th century, the setting of the vampire stories became Eastern Europe, the most famous example being Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which is set in Transylvania. Other characters of the genre can be werewolves, zombies, ghosts and monsters, for example in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Sometimes there is an overlap with other genres, a story can be both a horror story and a detective story, for example.

The two main elements in horror fiction are horror and terror, the difference between which Ann Radcliffe discusses and elaborates in her essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry". Terror is a feeling we get before a certain event happens, a feeling of dread, while horror is a feeling we get after the event has happened, and it is a feeling of disgust or revulsion: "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (Radcliffe 6).

Horror stories use another tactic – suspense. It is used in scenes when a character goes into the attic, or down in the basement, or maybe even an abandoned house. Our suspense is intensified by our familiarity with the genre, because we know that when characters involved in the world of horror go somewhere where they should not, a menacing sense of calamity overtakes the scene. The fact that the characters are doing something they should not be doing, and that it might be dangerous for them, creates a feeling of tension and suspense (Russell 17).

The most famous authors of horror fiction are Horace Walpole, Mary Shelley, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, with the most renowned contemporary author being Stephen King. King is an American author of horror, supernatural fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. He published many novels, some under the pen name Richard Bachman. King received many awards for his work and he is a writer who has a distinct and unique writing style. His famed works are *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Misery*, *The Green Mile*, *Bag of Bones*, *Rose Madder*, and of course, *It*.

In his book *Stephen King, the Second Decade: Danse Macabre to The Dark Half*, Tony Magistrale describes the eight points Stephen King listed about the horror genre that deal with certain characteristic of the novels' genre. Said points could be interpreted as a sort of set of conventions specific to King's creative opus. The first point refers to the way we prove our bravery through horror fiction, because we can test the limits of our bravery without actually experiencing any real danger. The second point talks about how horror fiction makes it possible for us to reestablish feelings of normality, because we see that the world in the novel is far worse than the one we live in. For example, we could have had a depraved childhood, but we did not lose a brother to a monster, as Bill did in *It*. The third point refers only to the earlier works of Stephen King, as it talks about how horror fiction makes us feel comfortable about the *status quo*, because we see how much worse it could be. However, in his recent novels, such as *Dolores Clairborne* and *Insomnia*, King portrays worlds that are very similar to our own world. The fourth point refers to the fact that horror fiction makes us feel like we are a part of a larger whole. For example, in *It*, we identify with the Losers Club, since they united to beat the evil that has been haunting their town for a very long time. The fifth points talks about how horror fiction helps us understand, in a way, the mystery of death. It helps us understand why some characters sacrifice themselves to save others, how they face death, and even suggests certain versions of the afterlife. The sixth point describes how through horror fiction, we indulge our darkest collective and social

anxieties, and it gives us ways to deal with certain fears about the world. It also helps us examine the larger problems that our society faces. The seventh point talks about how horror fiction allows us to return to our childhood, because we have to become children again to understand the world of horror to which King takes us. The final point returns us to our everyday world, enabling us to transcend the world of darkness and negation. The genre aids us in facing our fears, helps us cope with the foulness that occasionally emerges in our lives, and makes us believe in the good in our lives that keeps us going nevertheless. As Russell notes, these points help us understand the significance of horror fiction and the ways it can affect, and maybe even improve, our views on life and fear (Magistrale, qtd. in Russell 19-23).

2. Fear/Maturity

2.1. The Monster

Different types of monsters appear in horror fiction novels. The simple definition of a monster in works of horror would be an entity that humans regard as something abnormal, a disturbance of the natural order (Carroll, "The Nature of Horror" 52). Another definition could be that they are "beings whose existence science denies" (Carroll, "Horror and Humor" 148). Monsters in horror fiction are usually identified as unclean, impure. They can be made of rotting flesh, crawl out of oozing places, they are associated with vermin, disease etc., which is why the characters, along with the readers, regard them not only with fear, but also with loathing, like a combination of terror and disgust. (Carroll, "The Nature of Horror" 54).

One of the most notorious monsters in Stephen King's works is undoubtedly the Monster from the novel *It*. The monster itself is an alien who haunts a specific town in Maine, Derry. It does not have a specific name, because it is also a shape-shifter and it changes monstrous forms to adapt to children's individual fears and imagination, therefore having an unlimited range of shapes (Spooner and McEvoy 143). The monster is dubbed It, particularly because it appears in so many shapes, and it cannot be given a definitive name. Also, one of the reasons why the monster is called It could be the fact that the monster is "not classifiable according to our standard categories" (Carroll, "The Nature of Horror" 55) because it is a shape-shifter. Even though It is capable of physically manifesting just one creature at a time, It changes its shape according to the fears of a certain child, and every child sees him as a different, sort of personal, monster. The evil locus of the book, says Tony Magistrale, "tends to change into monstrous incarnations that are particular to the child it puts under siege" (128).

The most common shape It takes is the shape of the Pennywise the Dancing Clown. It appeared in that shape to George Denbrough: "The face of the clown in the storm drain was white, there were funny tufts of red hair on either side of his bald head, and there was a big clown-smile painted over his mouth" (King 13). To George's brother Bill, It appeared in the shape of George's ghost, and to Mike Hanlon, It appeared as a flesh-eating bird resembling the movie monster, Rodan. Further on, It appeared as a mummy to Ben, Eddie saw a leper, Richie a werewolf, Stan two drowned boys, and Beverly saw blood in her drain. It also changes in order to get kids to trust It and to approach, allowing the monster to catch them.

For example, Pennywise changes the color of his eyes to attract George: "How, George wondered, could I have thought his eyes were yellow? They were a bright, dancing blue, the color of his mom's eyes, and Bill's" (King 14). The monster itself clarifies its reasons for preying on children of varying age – children's fears can easily be interpreted in a physical form.

However, when the Losers Club came back to Derry as adults, they see It in a slightly different shape than the one they saw when they were kids. Eddie sees It in the form of his high school bully Belch Huggins as a leper, Richie as a Paul Bunyan statue, Ben as Dracula, and Beverly in the shape of the witch from Hansel and Gretel. When they encounter It in It's lair, both in 1958 and 1985, It appears in the form of something like a giant pregnant female spider. In truth, not even this description is entirely true to its nature because neither as children nor as adults could they perceive It's true shape: "...not a Spider either, not really, but this shape isn't one It picked out of our minds; it's just the closest our minds can come to (the deadlights) whatever It really is" (King 1064).

The history of the monster is very interesting. It has been in Derry for a long time, and the people in Derry have, in fact, gotten used to the presence of a dreadful evil in their town, despite being unable to genuinely witness the monster for themselves. It always appears when there is an act of violence in the town, such as the murder of a crew of lumberjacks, John Markson killing his entire family, the ambush of the Bradley Gang, the big fire at Black Spot, and the explosion at the Ironworks. The interesting fact about the relationship between Derry and It is that the people in the town do not notice It anymore. This could be described as a state of collective ignorance, or an act of collective silence. The people have gotten so accustomed to It's evil, that they fail to notice when It starts attacking children in the town. And the crimes committed by Pennywise, or any other embodiment It assumes, are a reflection of the town's indifference towards its children (Magistrale 63). The town itself becomes the root of all evil, and the kids in the Losers Club realize that the town itself is evil, therefore allowing It to stay and kill within the town, without anyone noticing. Another possible explanation of this collective ignorance could be that the whole town is actually under It's control, and that It makes it impossible for the authorities, such as the police, to identify It as the murderer in their town. Every time It appeared, the police would find a person who could have committed one or more murders at the time. The police would arrest this suspect and convict them of all the murders that occurred, not knowing, or maybe not caring, that the person is actually innocent. For example, they arrest Eddie Corcoran's

stepfather for Eddie's murder, even though Eddie was killed by one of It's forms, the Gill-man. Don Hagarty says that when he looked into the clown's eyes, he understood who the clown was: "'It was Derry,' Don Hagarty said. 'It was this town.'" (King 36). Mike believes that something, some monster is feeding on Derry (King 148), and Beverly thinks that her abusive husband is nothing compared to the evil waiting for her in Derry (King 397).

The monster has a specific cycle, and it appears every twenty-seven years. This testifies to the multiple temporal onsets of the monster, since it appears in a regular cycle (Carroll, "The Philosophy of Horror" 100). Usually the cycle begins with violent events, such as the fire, or the murders of children, consequently leading into a chain reaction of mysterious violent crimes. When the killings stop, It goes into an inert state for another quarter-century. It seems that It feeds on human suffering, pain and violence and when It is satiated, It leaves. The Losers Club believed that It feeds on little children, on their meat and gains power that way. However, twenty-seven years later Mike understands that It's source of power was not food, but faith: "...food may be life, but the source of power is faith, not food. And who is more capable of a total act of faith than a child?" (King 908). Despite the Losers Club's confrontation with and banishment of the monster, It nonetheless returns after almost thirty years, as the Club was incapable of entirely purging the beast, instead only prematurely ending its reign of terror and carnage.

Intriguingly, the monster generally appears as a whimsical figure, the clown. However, the figure of the clown often transfigures into various horrific shapes. In terms of Noël Carroll's definition of the monster, the figure of the clown can be a monstrous figure:

It is a fantastic being, one possessed of an alternate biology, a biology that can withstand blows to the head by hammers and bricks that would be deadly for any mere human, and the clown can sustain falls that would result in serious injury for the rest of us. Not only are clowns exaggeratedly misshapen and, at times, outright travesties of the human form - contortions played on our paradigms of the human shape - they also possess a physical resiliency conjoined with muscular and cognitive disfunctionalities that mark them off as an imaginary species. (Carroll, "Horror and Humor" 155)

In this novel, King managed to turn the clown into a monstrous figure by changing his appearance: making it scarier, for example, by adding sharp teeth, very expressive makeup and a chilling grin, and also by making the clown the murderer of children. Even though

most of the murders are not described in the novel, the ones that are portrayed, are intricately detailed. They all involve mutilation of the body, and sometimes even dismemberment. According to Halttunen, this graphically prolongs the violence of the murder beyond the death itself, thus rendering the murder even more horrifying (75).

Furthermore, the monster, with its many shapes, evokes feelings of both terror and disgust. This can be explained with the term art-horror, explained by Noël Carroll in his article "The Nature of Horror". He notes that the term art-horror can be used to define the feeling we get when we encounter, in books or movies, a monster which is both threatening and impure. We feel fear when we evaluate the monster as threatening, and if we evaluate it as impure, we feel disgust. Art-horror combines the two evaluations and makes us feel both scared and disgusted (Carroll, "The Nature of Horror" 55). In an encounter with such a monster, we would not only recoil due to fear, but we would also recoil due to the feeling of revulsion and disgust, because we perceive the monster as impure, or filthy. In that sense, King's ferocious, disgusting, corrupt monster becomes a harsh juxtaposition to the blissful innocence and purity of children.

2.2. Fear

H.P. Lovecraft wrote that "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (21). The main focus of a person's fear must be on something perceived as harmful or threatening. If one does not consider something harmful, one will not be afraid of it (Carroll, "Horror and Humor" 150). As mentioned before, monsters evoke feelings of both fear and revulsion, and when we perceive the monster as threatening and disgusting, we consequentially experience a horrific response, which is a combination of the aforementioned feelings. This explains the main difference between horror fiction and mere monster fiction, i.e. fiction with a monster character – the monsters in horror fiction evoke horror, we are perturbed by their appearance, while monsters in monster fiction, for example Chewbacca from *Star Wars*, are not perceived as horrifying (Carroll, "Horror and Humor" 149). Nonetheless, fear can sometimes even be a positive emotion, for example, "in those circumstances where the benefits and rewards that the subject gains from the overall experience surpass the risks" (Bantinaki 389).

Many factors influence our perception of fear. Both heredity and environmental factors influence our experience of fear. After we are born, the influence of our family begins to increase, and later on, as we grow up, the influence of the broader social environment also increases. In the article "Fears of Adolescence", the authors elaborate that it is the interaction between innate dispositions and environment that shapes our perception and experience of fear, as well as the reaction individuals have to fear, and, most importantly, why some sources of fear are supported, while others are suppressed in an individual context (Michalčáková et al. 22).

This novel has many great examples of various things people fear. The causes of children's fears are numerous, but for the Losers Club, the fundamental source of their fear is It, or the town of Derry. Even in adulthood, they are all afraid of this mythical monster. Although none of them can remember the exact reason why they are afraid of returning to Derry when Mike asks for them to gather there, they know for certain that they are mortified. As they depart from the town in 1958 after confronting the monster, believing it to have perished, the cast forgets the events that unraveled in the sewers under Derry. This implies a suppression of negative emotions – a rather common and natural coping mechanism that people use to deal with trauma. An alternate interpretation of this phenomenon could

suggest a more sinister power at work: the monster may have in fact manipulated their memories and emotions, inflicting them with collective amnesia. Upon their return, repressed memories begin to resurface: as they reunite, the cast begin to remember fragments of events through conversation.

Although she does not remember anything either, Beverly is different from the rest of the Losers Club. Her childhood continued to influence her adulthood, when she actually married Tom Rogan, who is eerily similar to her abusive father. The others forgot everything in order to, as Magistrale states, "establish adult lives" (Magistrale 130). In a way, Beverly is more similar to Mike than any of the other members of the Club. He stayed in Derry when everyone else left, and monitored It, gathered information about the violent events in Derry throughout history, and tried to understand how It operates. He does not have a successful life and career, like the rest of them, but he sacrificed himself for them, because he knew that It will come back and that someone has to gather them when that happens. Beverly, on the other hand, leads a seemingly interesting and lush life, but she also, unaware of course, sacrificed herself and suffers daily tyranny from It, in the form of her husband Tom. She is basically trapped in her own childhood, and the slightest mistake she makes, for example smoking a cigarette, reawakens It's wrath, i.e. Tom's wrath (Magistrale 130).

Strange as it may seem, even It has fears. After the children attacked it in the house on Neibolt Street, It started to feel a little bit scared, because they actually managed to hurt It, which was until then unimaginable. However, It's biggest fear is the fear of the Other, its equal counterpart, a rival of sorts, who may aid the children in their battle against It, and might even be able to provide them with the key to destroying it. It fears that it is not the only apparition in the town of Derry: "Hate was new. Hurt was new. Being crossed in Its purpose was new. But the most terrible new thing was this fear. Not fear of the children, that had passed, but the fear of not being alone" (King 1024). The Other could be the figure of the Turtle, which was, in the past, a comforting figure for the children and actually manipulated their minds in order to direct them towards the information necessary for their confrontation with It. For example, the children believed that they had accidentally stumbled upon a book which talks about the ritual of Chüd, but in truth, the Turtle had directed them towards that book, as if it was their destiny to find it. It is stricken by fear once the Losers Club reassembles, sensing that they are stronger and more determined as ever to destroy it. Just as fear had strengthened the Club, it also inversely weakened the monster, making it

less of a threat: "Because maybe It's scared of us...really scared for the first time in Its long, long life" (King 741).

2.3. Facing Fears

Psychologists often say that the best way to conquer fears is to face them. But for the Losers Club, facing their fears as children only helped them weaken the monster, not beat it. When they met It individually, they were too paralyzed with fear to even think about trying to confront It. Even so, when this band of outcasts faced It together, the power of their bonds became clear. Together, in their own unique ways, the children were able to overcome the overbearing fear of facing the monster, showing that in times of need or distress, good friends can help us pull through and overcome our greatest fears.

However, just like any other group of friends, the Losers Club has a weak link. The weak link in the Club is Stanley Uris. He has, just like all of them, encountered the monster at least once. But, when the rest of them decided to share their experiences and seek comfort and understanding in their friends, he refused. It was as if he did not want to talk about it, because talking about it made it real for him all over again, and all he wanted to do was forget that he ever faced the monster. Initially, he was so scared that he did not even want to join rest of the club in facing It, but eventually he decided to go, and the terror and horror he experienced there scarred him for life. When they left the sewers in 1958, it was Stan's idea to cut their palms and make a blood oath that they will come back if It ever returns. However, Stan made a move as to cut his wrists instead of his palms during the ritual, (King 140), which would prove to be a key figure of foreshadowing. Ironically, when Mike calls Stan in 1985, Stan commits suicide by cutting his wrists, writing "IT" in his own blood on a wall. Evidently, he could not face his fears, which ultimately led to his suicide, and made him the only member who did not make it back to Derry. This goes to show that Stan, just like all the other characters, found himself so traumatized by the events that he buried the fear and memory of it. Once the memory of the fear relapsed, despite not remembering the specific circumstances of the previous encounter with the monster, he committed suicide instead of facing the fear again.

The Losers Club's bullies, the Bowers Gang, also did not face their fears, and they tried to come off as brave or even grown up, but in reality, they were children who were very afraid of the monster lurking in Derry. Only the leader, Henry Bowers, managed to keep his fears contained and not show that he is afraid, but that also became the reason why It used him, in a way, as a weapon. Henry was actually It's instrument, an instrument of evil. It manipulated him to instill fear into the Losers Club, since they were all bullied by him and

were scared of him, even as adults, knowing he was insane. On certain occasions, even Henry's friends, Belch and Victor, were afraid of Henry, having realized that he is very violent and irrational, and that if they do not stop him, he could commit murder in a blink of an eye. When he attacked Ben, they thought that he was going to kill him, but they were too afraid to react and stop Henry:

He saw that both Belch and Victor had stopped laughing. They looked nervous...almost scared ... All of a sudden they don't know what he's going to do, or how far he might go. However bad you thought things were, that's how bad they really are...maybe even a little worse. You got to think. If you never did before or never do again, you better think now. Because his eyes say they're right to look nervous. His eyes say he's crazy as a bedbug. (King 199)

After torturing and bullying almost everyone from the Losers Club, Henry killed his father because a voice in his head, which we later find out was It's voice, told him to do it and provided him, in a way, with the switchblade knife with which he committed the crime. Even Belch and Victor started to worry that Henry had gone insane, noticing that he had become **increasingly more** sadistic and ruthless. When they encountered It in the sewers under Derry in 1958, It appeared in the shape of Frankenstein's monster, and decapitated Victor, and mutilated Belch's face. Henry managed to escape from the sewers, but the shock of seeing his friends being slaughtered drove him insane. He was convicted of his father's murder and of the murders of several town children. It used Henry as a convenient tool against the Losers Club as well. Henry was sent to scare them, with the hope that Henry's attempts to kill them would drive the Club away from Derry, so that It could continue with his murderous cycles. Children can sometimes be victims of the evil entity or of the adults, and sometimes they are even "innocent creatures possessed by evil itself" (Bulejková 12). Ultimately, Eddie kills Henry in self-defense, and it is clear to the cast that It had been behind Henry's brutal actions.

In 1893, in the introduction to his work *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud identified the repressed itself as a foreign body. Hysterical symptoms replay certain original trauma as a response to an accident, and the memory of the trauma "acts like a foreign body which, long after its entry, must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work (Freud, qtd. in Halberstam 19). In other words, the original trauma remains foreign in both body and mind, and remains active in both, until it is revealed in therapy. The foreign disturbs our body, but remains unrecognized by the mind, which keeps the trauma "alive" within us (Halberstam

19). Stan's trauma continued to trouble him, because he did not talk about his fears and did not go to therapy to help him deal with it.

2.4. Coming of Age

Author Kenneth Millard defined the coming-of-age novel as

a narrative in which its protagonist progresses from naive or callow youth towards a sense of a mature adult consciousness and fulfilling social integration. The narrator finds their self and their sense of a proper place in society, as a consequence of working through the challenges of adolescence. (Millard 154)

It can also be defined as a coming-of-age novel, because it follows the lives of two groups of children who are haunted by It, the Losers Club and the Bowers Gang. The author describes the way they think, talk about the world around them, their possible future plans, the way they perceive their families and fellow townsfolk.

The author gives us an insight into the thoughts of the grown up Losers Club, namely, when they all remembered what it was like to be a child, and the fear they had experienced back then. This memory enables them to wake up the child within themselves, which becomes a weapon in their fight with It:

The energy you drew on so extravagantly when you were a kid, the energy you thought would never exhaust itself – that slipped away somewhere between eighteen and twenty-four ... It was no big deal; it didn't go all at once, with a bang. And maybe, Richie thought, that's the scary part. How you don't stop being a kid all at once, with a big explosive bang, ... The kid in you just leaked out, like the air out of a tire. And one day you looked in the mirror and there was a grownup looking back at you (King 743).

In order to kill the monster they have to be both grown-ups and children. Specifically, their mature age enables them to fully grasp the power of It, to see Its truest form. But at the same time, they have to recall and face their childhood memories and fear of It – they have to come back to realize how big of an influence It has had on their lives since 1958. This is made harder by one more fact: none of the cast have children, another case of possible manipulation and long-term trauma caused by It, aiming to keep each character's inner child forever forgotten and asleep. Thankfully, this manipulation fails.

Considering the fact that they had to both grow up and remain children, it could be argued that the members that form the Losers Club are actually trapped between the two stages. The key to them beating the monster could be in this very fact. Children are the ones

who are afraid of monsters under their beds, and believe in the supernatural events and horror figures. As mentioned before, children are capable of a total act of faith, and It feeds on their faith, but when children grow up, they stop believing in certain things and they no longer pose a threat to It. Mike suggests that this could be a way It protects itself, by the fact that, when children grow up, they become incapable of faith (King 908). He is also worried that It knows that they are no longer children and that It knows that they cannot beat It:

But I think It knows another secret: although It may be immortal (or almost so), we are not. It had only to wait until the act of faith, which made us potential monster-killers as well as sources of power, had become impossible. Twenty-seven years ... And when It awakes, It is the same, but a third of our lives has gone by. Our perspectives have narrowed; our faith in the magic, which makes magic possible, has worn off like the shine on a new pair of shoes after a hard day's walking. (King 908)

The Losers Club is worried that they will not be able to beat the monster, due to the fact that they actually do not remember how they managed to hurt it back in 1958 and they are no longer children. But what they do not know is that It is afraid of them, sensing that they are not as weakened as It thought: "Only now that they were coming, the fear had returned. They had grown up, and their imaginations had weakened – but not as much as It had believed. It had felt an ominous, upsetting growth in their power when they joined together" (King 1034). This power that It feels when they reunite could be connected to a certain event that happened after they fought It in 1958, that event being them all having sex with Beverly. When they left It's lair in 1958, they got lost in the sewers and started arguing. Beverly realized that all of this was because they no longer felt connected, they were no longer strong as a group. She suggested a very adult thing to do: that they all have sex with her, believing that the sexual act is an intensely intimate act that bonds people forever. She believed that the sexual act would strengthen the power of their bond, which would help them leave the sewers alive. Subsequently, the sex did unite them in their cause. However, this event could be interpreted as somewhat of an intrusion into the world of adults. Having sex represents their introduction into the world of adults, it symbolizes a kind of an initiation. This scene suggests that they are, indeed, maturing, and that maturity is an integral factor in rationalizing their fear of It, which ultimately leads to them beating It in their adulthood.

Be that as it may, Mike realizes that in order to beat It, they have to go back to being children, and It counts on them not being able to do that, hoping that their loss of innocence and purity would allow the monster to kill them as adults. Once again, they have to believe in order to regain those two crucial traits; they must have faith, as well as fear, in order to be able to see It again and confront It one last time. It wants them to come back to Derry and to become children again, as that would surely make them afraid of It once again, which the monster believes would be crippling for the characters:

And now, now that we no longer believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, Hansel and Gretel, or the troll under the bridge, It is ready for us. Come on back, It says. Come on back, let's finish our business in Derry. Bring your jacks and your marbles and your yo-yos! We'll play! Come on back and we'll see if you remember the simplest thing of all: how it is to be children, secure in belief and thus afraid of the dark. (King 908)

The concept of growing up in the novel is very complex and the discussion of the topic in the novel provides no definitive answer as to what helped the Losers Club beat It. Them being mature adults, who think rationally, helped them realize what kind of monster they are facing, and how to beat it. But then again, the childlike characteristic that they kept within them, such as believing in monsters, made it possible for them to see and kill It. The key to their success was them being stuck between the world of adults and the world of children.

Conclusion

Horror fiction evokes feelings of horror, terror, and even disgust, and Stephen King did that by writing about a shape-shifting alien that kills children, and its most famous shape is that of a clown. He describes fear in a completely new way, and makes the readers understand that there is more to fear than they thought. His descriptions of It, and all of Its shapes make us feel both entertained and scared, and that in itself changes our perception of fear. The characters in this novel all had to face It, but only few of them survived. They survived because they faced their fears and managed to kill It. This is connected with the issue of maturity and coming of age. In the two instances when the Losers Club faced the monster, they had to mature in order to overcome the paralyzing fear of It, namely through the sexual act. Almost three decades later, now being adults, they had to awake the child within them to be able to see and destroy It. The children represent something pure and innocent, and they are confronted with the monster, which is evil and impure. Once they beat It, they realized that the forgetting set in, and that they will soon go back to their regular lives and not remember a thing that happened in Derry. Even though they are saddened by this fact, they are also hopeful that they will never have to return to Derry and that It is dead forever.

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