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An Annotated Bibliography of Stephen King Criticism

Tyler Cobabe

While Stephen King has long been a mainstay of the fiction market, his work has more recently drawn increased critical attention. As King's writings draw these responses, it is important to stay on top of the emerging critical outlook and ask questions about the focus of the scholarship. The last decade or so of criticism has seen some move away from some of King's earlier work (*The Shining*, *Carrie*, *The Stand*) and towards some of King's lesser known novels and short stories. However, it would be a mistake to totally discount the scholarly interest in those earlier pieces. There does appear to be an increased interest in *The Shining* not only as a novel but also in conversation with the Stanley Kubrick adaptation. This may give the scholarly community a clue as to where the future arguments over King are likely to focus: in film adaptation. With the publication of a book on King adaptations by one of the most recognizable King scholars, Tony Magistrale, it seems that the subject of film and King's work will be of increasing interest. The hope then may be that through a more concentrated focus on King a kind of critical consensus may form. With such a consensus the King community can more securely establish the author and his work as relevant pursuits of research and allow for future scholars to more effectively address King's writing.

Brown, Susan Love. "Babyboomer Mythology and Steven King's *It*: An American Cultural Analysis." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)* 7.1 (Spring 2008).

Brown argues that in the television movie *It* the baby boomer characters represent the neglected counterparts to the actual catalysts of the changes of the sixties: the privileged middle class. In so doing, Brown asserts that the film highlights the shortcomings of American culture and brings into question the mythologizing of the baby boomer past.

Causo, Roberto De Sousa. "Mythic Quality and Popular Reading in Stephen King's *Rose Madder*." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 44.3 (Fall 2003): 356-365.

In the article Causo explores the call of C.S. Lewis to eschew "taste" as the foundation of literary criticism and instead replace it with a focus on the mythic qualities of a given work - this opening up the field of literary criticism to more popular reading. Causo highlights the attitudes of both supporters and detractors of King and specifically focuses on *Rose Madder* in light of Lewis' recommendations.

Cocks, Geoffrey. "Death by Typewriter: Stanley Kubrick, the Holocaust, and *The Shining*." *Depth of Field; Stanley Kubrick, Film and the Uses of History*. 185-217. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 2006.

Cocks' article addresses the relationship between Stanley Kubrick and the Holocaust; a subject Kubrick never explicitly confronted in film. Cocks focuses on Kubrick's Jewish upbringing and argues that *The Shining* allowed Kubrick to demonstrate the hopelessness of the world after the Holocaust. The film, Cocks asserts, also acts as an indictment of Enlightenment values. The author also tracks some significant differences between King's novel and the director's film, including Kubrick's increased focus on racial prejudice.

Coykendall, Abigail Lynn. "Bodies Cinematic, Bodies Politic: The 'Male' Gaze and the 'Female' Gothic in De Palma's *Carrie*." *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 30.3 (Fall 2000): 332-363.

Coykendall examines the scopophilia present in numerous De Palma films, most notably in *Carrie*. The author notes the difficulty in offering valid criticism of De Palma's phallocentrism as the director's scopophilic techniques are often self-referential. Coykendall sees in *Carrie* a kind of satirical voyeurism, wherein the viewer is made a part of Carrie's humiliation and where the "male gaze" is fixed on, but also perpetuated by, female characters.

Dubino, Jeanne. "Romance Meets Horror and Thriller in the Films *Misery* and *Basic Instinct*." *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 21.1 (2000 Spring-Summer 2000): 23-48.

Dubino focuses the first half of her article on the film "Misery" and its attitude towards a culture of romance readership. She sees the film as attacking this readership for its desire to control the narrative in order to act as a vehicle for repressed desires. However, she also signals a melodramatic aspect in the film which seems to parody the melodrama also found in romance novels. Thus, the question arises as to whether the audience is viewing the film in the same way Annie reads novels. Dubino also comments on the film "Basic Instinct" and ultimately concludes that both films portray female love as destructive, reflecting the fear of the modern woman.

Findley, Mary. "Stephen King's Vintage Ghost-Cars." *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*. 207-220. Madison, WI: Popular, 2004.

Findley focuses her article on the cars that play prominent roles in two of King's novels: *Christine*, and *From a Buick 8*. Findley argues that King uses the automobile and its place in American culture as a way of examining the relationship between humanity and technology. The advancement of technology and its more mysterious aspects reflect the fear of "spiritual loss" as one confronts technological advancements. Ultimately, Findley concludes that King's characters are able to recognize the immense power of technology and the need

to control it. However, there is still the issue of whether or not his characters will do so.

Grindstaff, Laura. "Sometimes Being a Bitch Is All a Woman Has to Hold On To: Memory, Haunting, and Revenge in Dolores Claiborne." Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies. 147-171. Austin, TX: U of Texas, 2001.

Grindstaff explores the violence presented in *Dolores Claiborne* with the added perspective of an examination of inequalities in America - especially those that are based in gender. Grindstaff ultimately sees *Dolores Claiborne* as part of a genre focusing on women's rage. While the violence in the film leads to further destructions, and the lines between good and evil are not always clearly drawn, Grindstaff ultimately concludes that the film sides with the violent acts of the protagonist.

Hansen, Tom. "Diabolical Dreaming in Stephen King's 'The Man in the Black Suit'." *Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought* 45.3 (Spring 2004): 290-303.

Hansen argues against critics of King who see his work as simple genre fiction by offering the short story "The Man in the Black Suit" as an example of the psychological complexity of King's fiction. Hansen sees the titular man in the black suit as both the devil and a projection of the young boy who meets him. This projection becomes a kind of dark guardian angel, actually helping the young boy in his relationship with his parents as opposed to simply being a monster to be feared.

Keeseey, Douglas. "'Your Legs Must Be Singing Grand Opera': Masculinity, Masochism, and Stephen King's Misery." *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* 59.1 (Spring 2002): 53-71.

Keeseey calls *Misery* a "masochistic wish-fulfillment fantasy," arguing that it embodies a vision of the triumph of male force, but only after it has been emasculated. Reflecting on Tony Magistrale's assertion that the survival of the adult in King's fiction depends on the survival of the child inside the adult, Keeseey sees the character of Paul as masochistically creating a horrific mother figure which will allow the child/man to be forced into growth. However, Keeseey does see some complexity in Paul's victory over the mother figure, as there still appears to be some feminine qualities in the character by novel's end.

Kilker, Robert. "All Roads Lead to the Abject: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*." *Literature Film Quarterly* 34.1 (2006): 54-63.

Kilker explores the potential violence of both the masculine and the feminine as seen in Kubrick's "The Shining" as well as King's novel.

He argues that the repression of patriarchy is one source of violence in the film, but that the threat of the feminine is just as important. The power to "shine" is seen as a feminine power to be feared and ultimately shed as seen in Danny's escape from his murderous father with the use of his intellect rather than "shining." In so doing, Kilker argues that "The Shining" ultimately presents a story of the repression of femininity and the triumph of a more traditional masculinity.

Kingsley, David M. "It Came from Four-Colour Fiction: The Effect of Cold War Comic Books on the Fiction of Stephen King." *Hosting the Monster*. 197-215. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2008.

In this article, Kingsley illustrates the influence of comic book figures on the writing of Stephen King. The author lays out several comic books heroes and villains, (and their creators), demonstrating the influences of the 60's on these particular creations. Kingsley notes King's particular interest in this era and argues that King's work, like that of the comics, reflects the hopes and fears of a particular nation during a specific period. Kingsley also argues that because comics target children as their main audience, and King's work has been greatly influenced by the medium, so then King often presents his reader with the perspective and imagination of children.

Magistrale, Tony. *Hollywood's Stephen King* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Magistrale's book feature an interview with Stephen King about the adaptations of his films as well as chapters that group together the film versions of King's novels. Such chapters focus on child figures, mother/father figures, technology, and the miniseries adaptations of King's novels. With regard to each film, Magistrale offers comparisons to King's written work and a specific analysis of each film. In a unique case, Magistrale compares Kubrick's version of *The Shining*, King's miniseries version, and the novel itself. Magistrale finds much to admire in the readapted miniseries but argues that the latter portions of the film drift towards the sentimental.

Meyer, Michael J. "Stephen King's Writers: The Critical Politics of Literary Quality in *Misery* and *The Dark Half*." *Literature and the Writer*. 97-117. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2004.

Meyer's article confronts one of the ongoing debates regarding King's fiction: whether it is to be considered "serious" fiction or relegated to the paperback bins. Meyer outlines particular attitudes towards writing in King's *Misery* and *The Dark Half* and concludes that King himself identifies a similar conflict in his own writing between the "entertaining" and the "serious." Meyer concludes that regardless of the direction King moves his work, his writing is worthy of analysis due to the themes and ideas present in his work.

Palmer, R. Barton. "The Shining and Anti-Nostalgia: Postmodern Notions of History." *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick*. 201-218. Lexington, KY:UP of Kentucky, 2007.

Palmer sees in Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining* a kind of anticlimactic shift away from Hollywood formula. He notes that the film holds little suspense and doesn't bother much with the question of whether the supernatural occurrences in the film are real or imagined. He argues that this type of filmmaking represents, in Baudrillard's words, a "playing with the pieces" of America's cultural past. The main character, Jack, is unable to find comfort in the present of the past. Thus, Palmer asserts, Jack becomes an embodiment of the "failing artist" in postmodern culture.

Russell, Sharon A. *Revisiting Stephen King: A Critical Companion* Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002.

Russell's book chronicles the life of Stephen King and also has chapters on *Desperation*, *The Regulators*, *The Green Mile*, *Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass*, *Bag of Bones*, *Hearts in Atlantis*, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, and *Dreamcatcher*. Each chapter includes a summary of the plot, a listing and analysis of the characters, and an exploration of the novel's themes. The chapters also include an "alternative reading" of each particular novel. For example, *Hearts in Atlantis* is looked at through the lens of Vietnam narratives.

Sanders, Joe. "'Monsters from the Id!' in Stephen King's 'The Monkey'." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 41.3 (Fall 2000): 257-265.

Sanders' essay attempts to identify why King's short story "The Monkey" is so effective and why the successful aspects of the story have been difficult for critics to recognize. He addresses one of the main criticisms of the story as lacking "internal logic" by explaining why the main character of the story, Hal, might not have destroyed the toy that caused so much evil. Sanders argues that the monkey is a "monster from the id" and therefore cannot be destroyed as it is never fully revealed from Hal's perspective..

Stickler, Alissa. "Castle Rock, Maine: The Nightmare Burg of Stephen King." *The Image of the City in Literature, Media, and Society*. 105-110. Pueblo, CO: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, University of Southern Colorado, 2003.

Stickler, Alissa. "The Mid(Evil) Nightmare of Yesterday and Tomorrow: Flagg as the Immortal Monster in Stephen King's *The Eyes of the Dragon* and *The Stand*." *Year's Work in Medievalism* 17 (2002): 124-138.

In the article, Stickler examines the character of Randall Flagg in the context of Medievalism and comments on how his similarities to or differences from a traditional Medieval view of evil, witchcraft, and the devil helps to shape our view of the Middle Ages from the perspective of popular culture. Stickler specifically notes the social and economic conditions as found in the two novels as being reflective of general conditions when witchcraft was seen as a looming threat. Flagg also demonstrates similarities to Medieval conceptions of evil and witchcraft in his wielding of political power and supernatural ability. Differences also exist, especially in Flagg's independence of a more evil higher power.

Strengell, Heidi. "'The Monster Never Dies': An Analysis of the Gothic Double in Stephen King's Oeuvre." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)* 2.1 (Spring 2003).

Strengell, James. "The Ghost: The Gothic Melodrama in Stephen King's Fiction." *European Journal of American Culture* 24.3 (2005): 221-238.

Truffin, Sherry R. "'Screaming While School Was in Session': The Construction of Monstrosity in Stephen King's Schoolhouse Gothic." *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*. 236-248. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004.

Truffin's article focuses on the teacher figures in King's fiction. Specifically, Truffin focuses her argument on two novels: *The Shining* and *Rage*. In both, Truffin finds depictions of cruel teacher figures who "define instruction as violence." Truffin also discusses Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and brings Foucault's notions of power and institutions to bear on King's work. She concludes by asking whether institutions will transform themselves to make the image of school less disturbing and intimidating or whether they will simply an image only somewhat less frightening.

Williams, Linda. "Melodrama in Black and White: Uncle Tom and The Green Mile." *Film Quarterly* 55.2 (2001-2002 Winter 2001): 14-21.

Williams categorizes "The Green Mile" as belonging to the "negrophilic Tom" tradition, wherein greater deference is given to the suffering of black victims. She questions the need to demonstrate interracial love through interracial violence and argues that in black/white melodrama, the virtue of whites is paradoxically reliant on doling out punishment to blacks. Williams argues there is a need to study black/white melodrama to be able to better understand the stereotypes many operate under and ultimately understand why sympathy attends some racial suffering while other times the suffering is accompanied by hatred.

Wright, Jarrell D. "Reconsidering Fidelity and Considering Genre in (andwith) The Shining." *Stanley Kubrick: Essays on his Films and Legacy*. 136-148. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008

Wright argues that the changes made by Kubrick to his adaptation of *The Shining* are essential elements of Kubrick's brand of horror. He

goes on to discuss the content of the original reviews of the film and finds that theories of adaptation were prevalent throughout them and consisted of concerns regarding fidelity or genre. Wright various aspects of adaptation theory and concludes that *The Shining* can be considered an adaptation despite its occasional departure from the source material.