

Carley Bonk

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### Slow Creeping Chaos Breeds Mind Monsters

*The Shining* is a true tale of terror that gives validity to the fact that the most frightening monsters we may face are the concoctions of our own unstable minds. Stephen King's novel is gripping from start to finish, bringing heart-racing moments to the reader through a broken family's perspective - adding another level of fear and sadness to this dark tale of seclusion. Reading the thoughts of a gifted child like Danny - the boy of a broken couple with nowhere else to go and nothing else to do but either crash and burn or try to heal - makes the novel that much more of a page turner. There is seemingly not much hope left for this family, a mother who has hardened her heart from years of dealing with Jack's excessive drinking has left Wendy to become a shell of what she once was. Jack's constant need to play the victim has left him to shrug off his responsibilities. Danny, stuck in the middle of this storm has inevitably lost his innocence, through his extrasensory abilities, the supernatural threat of the Overlook Hotel and the tangible outbursts of his alcoholic father.

Reading horror through a child's perspective is not just scary, it's gut-wrenchingly sad. The way that King wrote Danny's mixed thoughts keeps the reader intrigued, especially his unique way of trying to work through foreign ideas a five-year-old wouldn't understand - like the thoughts of sex, divorce, suicide and eventually murder. Danny has a special gift, which is at the very core of the novel - he *shines*. This ability to read the thoughts of those around him pushes his innocence away, because Danny becomes exposed to not just adult interactions, but the intimacies of adult thoughts, like his parents considering divorce, his father thinking about

suicide or Ms. Brant, a patron of the Overlook Hotel on closing day, and her dirty thoughts that she'd like to "get in [the bellboy's] pants" (99).

He must learn to use context clues to decipher these broken thoughts in order to better understand the world around him, like building a puzzle with a few pieces missing. These thoughts, obviously meant to be private, shines a light on the darker side of humanity – and even more so when it is seen through the eyes of a child. He also learns quickly that he is unable to have many of the questions that stems from these experiences answered, because he doesn't want to upset his parents for peeking in on their thoughts, albeit involuntarily. He's learned this from asking questions of his mother that he did not know would be upsetting, because of his inexperience of human interaction that comes from being so young.

Danny also sees vivid dreams of what may come and is guided by his "imaginary friend" Tony. This "friend" is usually seen waving at a distance, his features unclear to Danny, making it difficult for him to make sense of who he may be, and whether or not these visions can be trusted as foresight of the future. He shows him scenes of what is to come if his abusive, drunk of a father moves their family to the secluded Overlook Hotel in Colorado for a job as its winter caretaker - and it isn't a rosy scene. When Danny is in Dr. Edmond's office in Sidewinder following his wasp stings, he hears Tony saying over and over again "this inhuman place makes human monsters," (208) a phrase he doesn't understand due to a lack of context, but soon discovers through experiences within the hotel that steal his innocence away even more. Danny often becomes upset from these visions, sensing the darkness of their nature as they progress. Before they even leave for the Overlook, Danny pleads for Tony to release him from the darkness:

“Crash. Crash. Crash. Splintering wood. A bellow of rage and satisfaction. REDRUM. Coming. Drifting across the room. Pictures torn off the walls. A record player (?Mommy’s record player?) overturned on the floor...A shaft of light coming from another room, the bathroom...the medicine cabinet mirror like a red eye, REDRUM, REDRUM, REDRUM – ‘No,’ he whispered. ‘No, Tony please –’ And, dangling over the white porcelain lip of the bathtub, a hand. Limp. A slow trickle of blood (REDRUM)... (oh please, Tony, you’re scaring me)...” (47)

These visions and dreams are often full of violence, rage and gore mixed in with the familiar, like his mother’s record player and albums he’s heard her play before scattered amongst the chaos. The premonitions give him anxiety about moving to the secluded Outlook, a situation entirely out of his control. He learns early on in his new home to use his shine to look out for bad thoughts in his family’s minds and bad places where he feels unsafe from the ghostly threats the hotel has bred over years of hosting unsavory visitors. They never really left, caught in the web of the Hotel’s darkness.

Danny, previously the victim of his reckless father’s drunk, blind violence experiences turmoil no child should have to deal with, especially a child with extra-sensory perception. Despite his father breaking his arm at three-years-old, Danny still loves him unconditionally, always looking forward to their time together - making this downward spiral all the more devastating to a young mind still trying to figure out the basics of humanity. The broken arm is a major metaphor within the novel. The bone, King describes, isn’t just a physical injury, but a heavy blow to the family dynamic as a whole. This is not a memory that will be forgotten...

“the snap of the bone had not been loud, not loud, but it had been very loud, HUGE, but not loud... A clean sound with the past on one side of it and all the future on

the other, a sound of breaking pencil lead or a small piece of kindling when you brought it down over your knee. A moment of utter silence on the other side, in respect to the beginning future maybe, all the rest of his life.” (23-24)

This is the start to the end of Danny’s innocence, at the age of three, Danny’s home life is a disaster, where his loved one hurt him and his mother now hates his father for it. It is difficult for a child to understand a situation like abuse, because there isn’t a clean-cut explanation for it. A 2008 study conducted by the Take Two program, “a Victorian statewide developmental therapeutic service for child protection clients... who have suffered serious abuse and neglect” mentioned that “the earlier in life the abuse and neglect occurs the more pervasive and severe can be the harmful impact” (Briere 1992; McFarlane & de Girolamo 1996) hinting that Jack’s abuse could have a resounding impact throughout Danny’s life. Danny is the brunt to the blows of his drunk father, so frustrated with his own shortcomings and damaged from his own abusive childhood, that he takes it out on his son.

The entire time reading this tale, one can’t help but think - *no child should have to deal with these monsters!* The worst of it is that Danny is getting bombarded on multiple fronts, the supernatural entities swarming the hotel and the relentless fear of abuse from his father. The damage of these situations on a young mind is described in a vivid metaphor by Wendy, “he’s like one of those suitcases they show on tv, run over, dropped from planes, going through factory crushers.” (479) Halloran also sees this injustice of Danny’s experience, “there’s some things no six-year-old boy in the world should have to be told, but the way things should be and the way things are hardly ever get together. The world’s a hard place, Danny.” (658) What makes this story work so well, what allows King to get your heart racing, give you goosebumps and put you at the edge of your seat isn’t just blind scares - it’s sadness. King forces you into Danny’s shoes -

the most helpless position in the novel. Danny is only a child, he can't just leave, he can't explain his thoughts to anyone, he can't say that he won't go. He is forced into this position by so many factors out of his control - and he has the perception to see what will come of it. Trust and comfort, two core values that are immensely important to the development of a child at his age, are completely absent from one of his main influences - his father.

One's heart aches in trying to understand why such a young child should have to carry such heavy weight on his shoulders. It aches even more when it's realized that there was no explanation for this tragedy. Children experience horrific things every day in the careless and blind chaos of this world - things that have no explanation even from adults. A critique written by Sara Martin Alegre in the *Atalantis Journal* sums up King's use of the "sacrificial child" in American society well, "King's fiction is morally ambiguous about the father and child relationship because King may put his finger on the dark areas of the American lifestyle but lacks an answer as to how American society could protect its own children from the horrors adults inflict on them." (Martin Alegre, 2001) King's ability to give a face to blank, shapeless evil - the face of someone who a child should be able to love and trust as a victor against the evil in this world - a father, is all the more frightening. Danny is sure to suffer nightmares from this drawn-out horror show for the rest of his life.

Stephen King completely wrecks the idea that childhood is a time to look at the world in a sense of wonder and amazement. The end of the novel is perhaps the last nail in the proverbial coffin of Danny's innocence, when he witnesses the gruesome end of his father, or what used to be his father. Danny's response is not that of a child, but someone weathered beyond their years from fear and pain,

“‘You’re not my daddy,’ Danny told it again. ‘And if there’s a little bit of my daddy left inside you, he knows they lie here. Everything is a lie and a cheat... You’re *it*, not my daddy. You’re the hotel. And when you get what you want you won’t give my daddy anything because you’re selfish... For the first time in his life he had an adult thought, an adult feeling, the essence of his experience in this bad place – a sorrowful distillation: (*Mommy and daddy can’t help me and I’m alone.*) (631-633)

Danny realizes the most devastating thought a child every could, one that makes him an adult way before he is meant to be – he recognizes he is all alone. Following his brave verbal attack against the hotel that has taken his father from him, he witnesses a terrible scene. The young boy sees the man, or evil entity, turn the mallet it was about to use on Danny on itself – bashing in its face so badly that “Blood splattered across the wallpaper. Shards of bone leaped into the air like broken piano keys” (634). And that scene, in all its bloody and gory glory, added years to Danny’s maturity, snatching away the last bit of childhood he may have had left. Danny’s world is anything but whimsical, and his second sight allows the reader to see that the Overlook is a trap, keeping us turning the pages and still wanting more even as the Overlook is going up in flames.

Blog Post - [A look at a loss of innocence in Stephen King's "The Shining"](#)

#### Works Cited

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