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A Requiem for Ray Brower: Encounters with Death in Stephen King's "The Body"

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**A REQUIEM FOR RAY BROWER: ENCOUNTERS WITH DEATH IN
STEPHEN KING'S "THE BODY"**

A Thesis Presented

by

Keith Philip Silva

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Specializing in English**

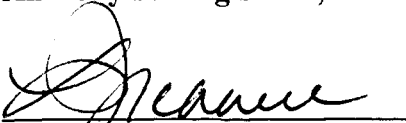
May, 2002

Accepted by the Faculty of the Graduate College, The University of Vermont, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts specializing in English.

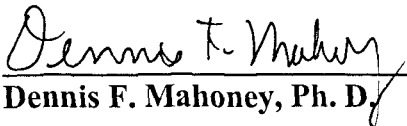
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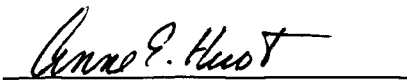
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For Marlana, always Marlana

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There are very few people in this world as extraordinary as Lisa, her intelligence, her verve for teaching, and her understanding of English literature (not to mention her impeccable taste in music) are unequaled by most human beings. Simply stated, Lisa Schnell makes anyone she meets a better person.

In light of the theme of this project, it is fitting that I first met Tony Magistrale in a snow-covered graveyard on a gloriously overcast day. Since that day Tony has been my "Chris Chambers." When I needed to write, he sent me out of his cozy environs with a wave of his hand: "write, go, write, write!" When I needed to laugh, he did his very fine Stephen King impression. Tony introduced me (literally) to Stephen King and he was always willing to share with me his stories and opinions on everything from the paintings of Hieronymous Bosch and the music of Lita Ford to the "Curse of the Lamonica." Tony, thank you, thank you for all of it. Lastly, a special thanks to Roman, a cat, who tried to sleep while I tried to write.

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"To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death." (Frankenstein 43)

Boswell: But is not the fear of death natural to man?

Johnson: So much so, Sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away thoughts of it.
(Boswell's Life of Johnson 2: 93)

Requiem aeternam dona eis / Domine Et lux perpetua eis. ¹

**I. "I don't think I want to hear no horror stories."
("The Body" 377)**

**"Then what happened?"
(389)**

In the middle of their odyssey to find a corpse, four would-be literary critics (Gordie, Chris, Teddy, and Vern) -- scholars *at* and *of* the lowest rank -- sit around a campfire and discuss the narratology of a tale they have just heard, "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan." The teller is twelve-year-old Gordon "Gordie" Lachance. The plot is as simple as its uncomplicated title suggests: an overweight boy, Davie "Lard Ass" Hogan, -- "a kid our age," Gordie says -- exacts revenge on the population of his hometown for years of mental abuse. Hogan's weight, however, is not due to a gluttonous lifestyle; instead, it is caused by a physiological defect, "weird fuckin glands," says Lachance. To implement his plan, Hogan breaks from the traditional manner of serving revenge cold and instead makes a very deliberate choice to gain the upper hand on his tormenters by delivering his style of justice in a manner that can only be best described as slightly warmed-over. The stage for Hogan's coup de grace takes place on a dais set for an annual pie-eating event -- the grand culmination of "Pioneer Days" -- held in the fictional town of Gretna, Maine. This year's official pie is blueberry. The contest begins and Hogan takes an early lead on the four other contestants, including defending champion and town favorite, Bill Travis.

As the tension of the story increases and as "Lard Ass" crunches up crust and sucks down gooey blueberry filling, Lachance explodes his narrative with an authorial break: "I must interrupt for a moment to tell you that there was an empty bottle in the medicine cabinet at Lard Ass Hogan's house. Earlier, that bottle had been three-quarters full of pearl-yellow castor oil, [. . .] Lard Ass had emptied that bottle himself" (386). Lachance's narrative and Lard Ass Hogan's revenge achieve a twin climax as a torrent of half-masticated blueberries erupts out of Hogan's mouth and covers Travis, which sets off a chain reaction of vomiting throughout the crowd of spectators gathered for the event. Lachance allows Hogan to marvel at the gastrointestinal symphony of sight, sound, and stench that has been created before he sends Hogan home, where he "goes upstairs to his room, locks the door, and lays down on his bed" (389). In a flourish of success and satisfaction at a good tale well told, Gordie downs "the last swallow" of a Coca-Cola, tosses it into the woods, and the aforementioned discussion ensues.

Teddy -- who has been listening attentively and at times has even cheered Lard Ass on -- asks Gordie: "then what happened?" (389). Confused, Gordie tells Teddy that he does not know what happened, but Teddy continues to press him: "What do you mean, you don't *know*?" (389). Gordie, now frustrated with Teddy's lack of appreciation for the subtle nuances of plot and narrative discourse, responds, "It means it's the end. When you don't know what happens next, that's the end" (389). Vern -- who earlier mentioned that he had a cousin with the same weight problem as Hogan -- is equally unsatisfied with Gordie's ending and demands to know: "How'd it come out?" (389). Chris -- at whose suggestion Gordie told the story -- interjects to explain to Vern and Teddy that they need to use their imaginations. Amid cries of blasphemy from Teddy and Vern, Gordie tacks

on a less open-ended conclusion in which Hogan's father beats "the living crap" out of him and the townspeople add "Puke-Yer-Guts" to their stash of abusive epithets that get leveled at master Hogan. Unfortunately for Gordie, the attempt to pander to his critics falls on deaf ears and the debate ends when a disappointed Teddy whines: "that ending sucks" (389). To which Gordie can only offer a weak consolation: "That's why I didn't want to tell it" (389).

I chose to begin this project with a reading of "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" and the debate that takes place after it because I believe that each scene represents a paradox emblematic of "The Body" itself. Both scenes embody literary themes such as survival, a struggle for power, and confrontations between the self and "Otherness" that complement the larger story about the search to find a corpse. Viewed together, they illustrate that this is a text in which there is much less going on above the surface than below.

On the surface, "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" is crude and sophomoric; it reflects a sense of humor and a style of justice that would only appeal to the mind of a twelve-year-old boy. "All that pukin was really cool," (390) Teddy tells Gordie, to which Vern adds, "really gross." As I hope I have demonstrated so far, neither Teddy nor Vern are the closest of readers. Lost in all the "pukin" are three very complex themes, first, there is the struggle of an outcast against a social environment that unceasingly torments him. Second, because of the abuse he suffers, Hogan can no longer repress his anger and, third, as a result he chooses to assert control over the situation which manifests itself as a return of vengeance on the population of his hometown for the years of harassment and abuse.² Perhaps Teddy and Vern would have appreciated these subtleties of this story if "Lard Ass" had used a gun or the power of telekinesis, instead of bile and bits of

blueberry.³ I would argue that "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" is Greek tragedy (can you say purgation?) as seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old boy; it is a tale of bold justice and antediluvian, visceral revenge.

The word "crude" could also be used to describe the ostensible debate that takes place immediately after Gordie concludes his tale. Just as "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" is more than an entertaining yarn about puke and pie, the discussion that it engenders extends well beyond the bounds of mere pedantry. Instead of uncovering themes of the outcast and a history of abuse, it speaks in another voice entirely, one that ranges from the metafictional to the metaphysical.

In its rawest form, this discussion is modeled on the basic construct on which all literary theory is based, the tripartite relationship between author, text, and reader. Its function here is as a primer for literary criticism drawing a parallel to the reader of "The Body" (not to mention this thesis) who is engaged in the action of reading and interpreting as well. Not only are these four twelve-year-olds on their way to see a corpse, but they are also without question, a veritable hothouse of literary criticism. Given this distinction, it should come as no surprise that the issue being discussed lies at the very center of any narratological exegesis: what constitutes "the end" of a text? What "life" does "Lard Ass" have now that his story has reached not just "an" end, but "the" end? How do we as readers react to an ending that we were unprepared to hear? From this perspective, it is not difficult to see how the metafictional quickly becomes the metaphysical.

The larger issue at stake here is the unknown. In this context, Teddy's question ("then what happened?") becomes a direct address to the final unknown in life, death. Gordie's

answer offers no explanation although he is correct: "when you don't know what happens next, that's the end" (389). Not to be outdone in succinctness -- but certainly in its lack of subtlety and grace -- is Teddy's plaintive declaration: "'That ending sucks,' Teddy said sadly" (389). Teddy's puerile prose aside, I have to agree with him. That particular ending tends to often disappointment. In Teddy's words and emotion, I hear the echoes of spiritual ennui and modernist dread that T. S. Eliot expressed in "The Hollow Men": "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper." If this is the way the story (life) ends, then perhaps Gordie was right; perhaps it should not have been told in the first place -- but it was told, and there is the rub. Beginnings engender endings, simple as that. Regardless of this plain fact, however, the "end" cannot take place without the beginning and vice versa; therefore it follows that there can be no death without life, no life without death. "The Body" is a story about death, but it is death as seen from the perspective of those who are still among the living. Death may be destined, unavoidable, but it can only exist if it is complemented by life. The only comfort from the sterility of death is found actions of life.

I will return to these intractable paradoxes of death and life, the known and unknown, and moments of childhood trauma throughout this project. Like Gordie, Chris, Teddy and Vern, I am on an odyssey of sorts as well, a search that is charged with finding ways of answering and interpreting Teddy's question. What happens next indeed?

* * *

Published in 1982, "The Body" is one of the four novellas that comprise Different Seasons. Subtitled *Fall from Innocence*, it is the oldest of the four stories in the collection and as King says in his Afterword, "'The Body' was written directly after

'Salem's Lot (King's second novel, written circa 1973)" (522). The reason for the seasons, according to King, is to answer the question: "Is horror *all* you write? When I say it isn't, it's hard to tell if the questioner seems relieved or disappointed" (519).

Although later he does admit that "elements of horror can be found in all of the tales [. . .] that business with the slugs in "The Body" is pretty gruesome, [. . .] sooner or later, my mind always seems to turn back in that direction, God knows why" (522). Devoid of any palpable supernatural cliches (psychic seers, malicious forces, haunted houses, etc.) common to most horror tales as well as King's own fiction in the early eighties, "The Body" would seem to provide inquisitors with a viable answer to their question. King's overwhelming need, however, to demonstrate to these critics and his legions of fans that he could write something other than horror seems to me to have greatly influenced many of the interpretations this story has received.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the 1986 film adaptation of "The Body," *Stand By Me*. In the special edition DVD release of the film, co-screenwriter Raynold Gideon says "it ["The Body"] sounded like either a sex film, a bodybuilding film, or another Stephen King *horror* film" (my emphasis).⁴ Aside from some tense and rather terrifying moments (the aforementioned leeches and the spectacle of the train dodge come to mind) the filmmakers accomplished their goal of making a non-horror Stephen King movie.⁵

The tendency to erase or to overlook "The Body," and instead allow it to be usurped or buried by its sub-title, *Fall from Innocence*, in one way or another is a common trait in the criticism that the novella has received as well. After all, on its most basic level, "The Body" is as it appears: a classic tale about a boy's coming-of-age in rural America, a neo-

Huck Finn for the baby boomer set. It is a story that is almost completely plot-driven with just enough horrific turns to remind the reader that, after all, this is a story that comes from the mind of Stephen King, the twentieth century's guru of the *macabre*. Appropriately enough, it is exactly this same enigmatic word, "*macabre*," that I believe this novella seeks to explain.

The word "death" occurs sixty-eight times in "The Body."⁶ This toll may seem too obvious to relate in a story about the search for the corpse of one boy (Ray Brower) as told by another boy (Gordie) whose older and only brother, Dennis "Denny" Lachance, was recently killed in a jeep accident; however, Dennis Lachance and Ray Brower are only two of the story's dead.

Gordie reads, "He Stomped the Pretty Co-Ed to Death in a Stalled Elevator," in the pulp magazine, *Master Detective*, when Vern arrives at the treehouse to tell Gordie and the other boys that he overheard his older brother Billy and Charlie Hogan (no relation to Lard Ass) talking about finding Brower's body in the woods "down the Back Harlow Road past the cemetery" (311). According to Teddy, the Back Harlow Road "comes to a dead end by the river" (313). Before Gordie heads off with his friends, he goes home to find his father watering a garden in which "everything in it was dead" (317). While at the Florida Market buying food for the trip, Gordie is recognized as "Denny Lachance's brother" by the proprietor, Mr. Dusset, who in reference (reverence) to the deceased, recalls for Gordie that, "the Bible says: In the midst of life, we are in death" (353).⁷ While this moment serves as another tally in the number of the story's "total deaths," it is also an example of Gordie's initial unwillingness to discuss the inevitable.

When Dusset asks Gordie if he is in fact Denny Lachance's brother, Gordie answers the question, but adds: "Denny, he —" (353). I believe this pause can be read as Gordie's unwillingness to admit that his brother has died. Dusset finishes Gordie's thought for him: "Yeah, I know. That's a sad thing kid" (353). Denny's death is connoted, but the actual word "died," or "dead" is never used. Whenever Gordie references his brother, his language always implies that his brother is dead, but he seems unable to use the word that would actually confirm the "end" of his brother's life. When Dennis's death is first mentioned, Gordie says, "in April, my older brother had been killed in a Jeep accident." (307) At the funeral, Gordie remembers feeling that he "couldn't believe that Dennis was gone, [or] that a person who had *touched* [King's emphasis] me *could* [my emphasis] be dead. It hurt me and it scared me that he could be dead" (307).

I read Gordie's use of the word "could," and his reluctance to use the word "dead" to describe his brother, as emblematic of the Januslike nature (the paradox) that inhabits the whole of "The Body" -- an underlying notion that the bodies of "The Body" exist in a subtext that for whatever reason cannot be openly stated, but only implied. The use of the word "death" and the images of death that I have pointed to in the text (not to mention Gordie's relationships to the dead characters of "The Body") borders not only on an obsession with death, but also on a obsession to return to events in the past and individuals that are specifically associated with death. If this is a death-haunted tale, than it is also a tale of eerie obsessive return to the dead and to death itself.

I would argue the text itself conveys a sense of being haunted, more specifically of being death-haunted; and that this proclivity becomes a quasi-praxis, a set of implied rules, that shapes how the text has been read and interpreted. No matter how pervasive

themes of death, obsession, and return may be in this text, there exists in many of the interpretations -- such as in the film adaptation -- a penchant to hide or possibly delay the exposition of the dead body and stave off discussions that directly confront death and mortality (or obsession, for that matter) in exchange for a more tangible, less horrific topic such as a young man's coming-of-age. Like Gordie's unwillingness to acknowledge Dennis's death, I believe critics and scholars have chosen to also adopt this same spirit to "imply death" rather than to confront death face to face in their interpretations -- a choice which often leads (leaves) "The Body" alongside the journey of experience. No matter how or to what degree death is acknowledged, it covers "The Body" like a pall.

**"There's a high ritual to all fundamental events, the rites of passage [. . .]"
("The Body" 415)**

These words are from a moment in the text that occurs right before Gordie and his friends discover Brower's body; the *Ur*-passage, if you will, that most critics reference when discussing the journey-quest motif of this story. Placed at this precise moment in the text, it is a not-so-subtle wink to the reader that what is about to happen is as significant as other life-defining moments such as taking oaths, getting married or being buried. It is also, perhaps, the one supernatural element in the story, a moment that is described as "the magic corridor where the change happens [. . .] because the rite of passage *is* a magic corridor and so we always provide an aisle" (415). In King's *oeuvre*, this so-called "magic corridor" (journey-quest) is a road well traveled -- perhaps the equivalent of an eight-lane superhighway. In his 1989 interview with Stephen King published in Stephen King: The Second Decade, Tony Magistrale asked King about this particular aspect of his work: "I guess the American myth that I grew up with requires

journey westward. Moving west meant growth, change, a break with the past. [. . .] My characters head west because Americans have always headed west, and that's where the mystery is" (18).

Critics have responded strongly to the quest motif in King's work, and found it to be a viable interpretation for "The Body" as well. The initial exemplar of this particular line of investigation was Douglas E. Winter, who in 1982 wrote the essay "The Night Journeys of Stephen King." This essay was later expanded and used by Winter as the Introduction to his very popular and influential, study of each of King's novels, short story collections and film adaptations published or released before 1987, Stephen King: The Art of Darkness. In this introduction, Winter contends that in shorter stories like "The Reach" and in novels such as The Stand, The Shining, and The Dead Zone, King reenacts, "the American nightmare -- the terror-trip experienced by Edgar Allan Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, Herman Melville's Ishmael, and a host of fellow journeyers: the search for a utopia of meaning while glancing backward in idyllic reverie to lost innocence" (2). Due primarily to the amount of material Winter chooses to cover, "The Body" receives no more than a cursory glance. Although he praises "The Body" as "the centerpiece of Different Seasons" (120), he does not explain why he gives it this distinction in regard to the other three stories in the collection.⁸ Winter whittles his interpretation of "The Body" down to three main points: autobiography, "wistful nostalgia," and King's obsession with the adult's need to return to events in their childhood to confront them and by doing so understand the person she/he has become. At no time in his examination does Winter mention Ray Brower by name. Given the popularity and influence that Art of Darkness has had on the critical response to King's

work, it strikes me as odd and a bit coincidental that Brower's role in "The Body" has never really gained much critical attention. Sarcasm aside, it is unfair and perhaps somewhat too heavy-handed to hang Brower's body like the proverbial albatross around just Winter's neck.

For more theoretical analysis of the text, -- but still not yet veering too far from the "quest" -- I would like to turn to readings by Arthur Biddle and Leonard Heldreth. Both treat Brower by name at least (even though they both cite Winter as a source), and both use psychoanalytic theory with which to ground their readings of "The Body."

In his essay, "The Mythic Journey in 'The Body'," Arthur Biddle applies Jungian psychoanalysis and the archetypal pattern used by Joseph Campbell in his landmark work The Hero With a Thousand Faces to show how all four boys, but "especially [Gordie] recapitulates the timeless rites of passage that order human experience" (84). Although Biddle's argument is sound, he is limited somewhat by his decision to model his reading so closely on Campbell's monomyth. Biddle does investigate the issues of death, survival, and the relationship between Gordie and Chris, all of which he acknowledges are central to the text, but what he is concerned with here is how these themes conform to his argument and Campbell's heroic model.⁹

Holding fast to the theme of rites of passage is Leonard Heldreth, whose "Viewing the Body: King's Portrait of the Artist as Survivor" examines the journey-quest as a means to survive death and eliminate adolescent fears of "bodily sensations, the physical self and the dangers that beset it [the human body]" (64). Heldreth uses analysis done by psychoanalytic critic Langdon Elsbree on archetypes rather than the primary texts themselves -- due in part, Heldreth says, "because it [Elsbree's analysis] carefully

summarizes these patterns as they appear in literature and emphasizes that relationship of literature to life, exactly the relationship King and his narrator Lachance emphasize in the story" (74). Regardless of its emphasis on life, Heldreth does see in the story's subtitle the religious parallel between the boy's loss of innocence and "the fall of Man and the punishment of that fall by death" (65). He even admits that "at the literal level [this story] is a journey to see death" (65), but Heldreth adds at another level, "a level below their conscious thought is the archetype of the journey" (65). Heldreth may be willing to recognize the dead body lying on the surface of this story, but it serves his argument only as a corporeal way station along the journey to experience.

There is one other criticism that Heldreth levels at "The Body" that I would like to use as a point of departure that will allow me to circle back to my discussion about death and the dead in "The Body" and leave the journey-quest behind. Although Heldreth admits that issues of body consciousness and "its sensations, vulnerability and ultimate termination" are the focus of horror literature, "The Body' is not a horror story" (64).

In the critical research performed on "The Body," the journey has been done to death. I have chosen, however, to devote a great deal of this chapter to discussing it because of its importance to the overall plot of the story. I am willing to acknowledge that it is almost impossible to discuss "The Body" without following the well-worn course of a journey-quest. After all, the story itself is deliberately designed along that path, which by its very nature presupposes a number of "falls" from innocence. Devotees of Joseph Campbell would probably argue that this is because of the primal nature of the journey -- an experience that has been stamped into human experience; one that is as central as life and death.

As I have shown in this trek through the previous criticism of this text, there are numerous life and death experiences that occur within "The Body," and so far the interpretations of these life-changing moments have all followed one particular avenue of approach, the journey. The "aisle" of inquiry that I purpose to travel deviates from those previously discussed by choosing to look at what has been overlooked or entirely ignored, namely the inherent elements of gothicism that exist in "The Body" and the body itself -- the dead boy lying in a "marshy, mucky tangle of undergrowth," ("The Body" 419) Ray Brower. Arguing to prove aspects of horror in a story by Stephen King would at the outset seem like an oxymoron, but as I have demonstrated in my reading of "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan," paradox is commonplace in this story, familiar ground, one might say, on which "The Body" rests.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how King incorporates tropes essential to gothic horror literature to expose "The Body." Paramount of all gothic figures is place. I cannot think of a more appropriate name to set a gothic horror tale than within the borders of a town called Castle Rock. A hamlet haunted not by the undead so to speak, but by the living; a place filled with the secret sins of an indifferent and a violent population.

The importance placed on place in a gothic narrative also implies the proximity of one body to another. This relationship is often established in a confrontation between a known or self -- Gordie Lachance -- and an unknown or ""Otherness"." Sometimes described in other theoretical terms as the "monster" or double, gothic "Otherness" in "The Body" is represented by the trinity of Dennis Lachance, Ray Brower, and Chris Chambers.¹⁰ Each of these characters doubles Gordie at different stages of his life and

provides for him an understanding about his own mortality, while at the same time confirming his role as a survivor.

Gothic "Otherness" is not only confined to people and place, but extends to frontiers within the self as well. "The Body" is as much about the physical journey to view death as it is about the various internal odysseys that Gordie undergoes as he begins to understand the limits of his own life. Gordie's survival skills stem from his ability to write. Not only has this talent allowed him to fashion a life for himself, -- as Gordie says, "it still freaks me out to put those words 'Freelance Writer,' down in the Occupation blank of the forms you have to fill out" (450) -- but it has also allowed him to develop the necessary fortitude to cope with the traumatic events of his childhood. It is through [his]story that Gordie is able to take control over his emotions and essentially plot his own life.

Gordie's retelling of the search for Ray Brower occurs twenty-two years after the events that are described in the story.¹¹ Another "Otherness" results as the past is pulled into the present, thus creating a gap or a fracture in the historical record. The "known" is represented by Gordie's memories. The "unknown" on the other hand gets figured out in Gordie's exposition of these events; not only their pertinence to the story (the historical record), but also what they mean, what they represent to Gordie in the present. In this context, Gordie's vocation as a writer makes him more than just a chronicler of the past, it also provides him with a way to understand the past in an attempt to prepare for another "unknown," the future. This call for preparedness through the interpretation of the past places Gordie in the role of a quasi-prophet. In a direct address

to the reader, he refers to himself as "the Ancient Mariner at thirty-four, with you, Gentle Reader, in the role of the Wedding Guest" (414).

The importance that this text fixes on a state of preparedness -- or more importantly on the lack thereof -- will be the locus for the final chapter. Like Biddle and Heldreth, I too will use psychoanalytic theory to discuss this text, but instead of relying on the writings and archetypes of Jungian analysis, I will turn to Freud and look to Beyond the Pleasure Principle, specifically his treatment of patients suffering from traumatic neuroses. The neurosis Freud refers to is a condition brought on by an unexpected event such as an accident, the individual survives, but she/he sustains an injury to psyche which will forever remain unhealed. The event often reoccurs in the subconscious, in dreams, as the person's mind reenacts the event in an attempt to recover what has already been lost. In short, the psyche was unprepared to survive. The fact that the individual did survive (rather than die in which all of this becomes a moot point) short-circuits the mental processes of the brain and causes it to try to return to the state of consciousness before the life-threatening event took place. The psyche returns to this moment in a act of self-preservation trying to prepare itself for what can never be recovered or only revisited again and again through the vicious cycle of trauma.

To understand how Freud's theories on trauma translate to literature, I will use work done by Cathy Caruth in her book Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. By asking what it means for "consciousness to survive" rather than what it means to physical survive a near death experience, Caruth creates a matrix for reading past events involving death and life as a history of trauma. The fact that Gordie's mind was unprepared for Dennis's death drives him to unconsciously seek out death again in

the form of Brower's corpse. By literally staring death in the face, Gordie is attempting to claim the innocence/experience that he lost when Dennis died. In this way, Gordie's talents as a writer do not confer on him the status of a hero; but rather he becomes the victim of a trauma that will forever remain unhealed. Gordie writes "The Body" (again revisiting the deaths of Dennis and Ray Brower) only after reading that Chris had been stabbed to death while waiting in line at a fast food restaurant. Unlike in the past, when he was unable to confirm the end of his brother's life to Mr. Dusset, the thirty-four-year-old Lachance says to the reader: "Chris died almost instantly" (450).

A requiem is intended to venerate the dead, but it is only through the intercessions and intentions of the living that the deceased may find repose. At one point in the retelling of his trip to the Florida Market and the encounter with Mr. Dusset, Gordie says "only the one who actually went is still alive" (415). Thus it is only through the voice of Gordie, the one who is still alive, that the tales of the dead can be told. The elegiac awareness that pervades this story celebrates the lives of the dead, but confirms the ineluctable fact that the temporary freedom from death is life.

**II. "You always know the truth, because [. . .] there's always a bloody show."
("The Body" 336)**

**"Surely no hometown boy could have done such a dreadful thing."
(The Dead Zone 73)**

Simply stated, Castle Rock is a bad place. The Dead Zone formally introduced readers to this landscape of despair through the eyes of a good-cop-bad-cop, Deputy Frank Dodd.¹² To the constituency of Castle Rock, Deputy Dodd is a hometown boy made good, who has risen through the ranks of the local constabulary -- "he's crossing over

next November to run for municipal chief of police, and he'll do it with my blessing," (259) Sheriff George Bannerman tells Johnny Smith, the psychic seer and protagonist of The Dead Zone. Smith has been petitioned by Bannerman to help catch a serial killer affectionately called the "CASTLE ROCK STRANGLER" by the local and state press. For the six female victims who have been raped and murdered in Castle Rock, -- the latest victim, a grade-schooler, Mary Kate Henderson -- the identity of the Castle Rock Strangler is all too familiar, Frank Dodd. In a psychic flash, Smith sees Dodd in a shiny raincoat holding up "a stop sign on a stick," (259) as he crosses children from the elementary school to the town library. Smith also learns, though he does not fully disclose the information to Bannerman, that Dodd's psychotic behavior is linked to mental and sexual abuses that Dodd suffered at the hands (literally) of his controlling mother. Bannerman is shocked at Smith's allegation that Dodd is responsible for the murders, but before too long sheriff and psychic walk the two blocks from the police station to the "neat New England saltbox" (268) Dodd shares with his mother. It is in the upstairs bathroom of this house where Dodd is apprehended: a sign written in lipstick reading "I CONFESS" hangs around his neck, "a package of Wilkinson Sword Blades on the edge of the washbasin [. . .] the blood from his severed jugular vein and carotid artery had splashed everywhere" (272).¹³ After this "bloody show," Johnny Smith leaves the town of Castle Rock, and it and its residents pass out of The Dead Zone.

Like his literary progenitors, Hawthorne, Lovecraft, and Faulkner, Stephen King has also found a region -- a home, if you will -- for much of his fiction. He has populated dozens of (fictional) small Maine towns like Derry, 'Salem's Lot, and Castle Rock with numerous malevolent forces and evil doers. Along with Derry, (the setting for two of

King's "doorstopper" novels, IT and Insomnia), King habitually returned -- that was until the publication of Needful Things in 1991 -- to the landscape of Castle Rock to reexamine the many real and imagined "horrors" of small town life.¹⁴ In "The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic," Eric Savoy explains the importance of setting in gothic literature: 'American gothic' does not exist apart from its specific regional manifestations; the burden of a scarifying past is more typical of New England and southern gothic [. . .] yet common to all is a narrative site that tends to be an epistemological frontier in which the spatial divisions between the known and the unknown, the self and the Other, assumes temporal dimensions. (6)

Setting aside, what distances Castle Rock from other King haunts is that it is the prototype for all of King's other imaginary Maine microcosms.¹⁵ In Chapter One of this project, I noted that "The Body" was written around 1973, but not published until 1982. According to Douglas Winter, "The Dead Zone was written in 1976 and 1977" (85) and published in 1979. Chronologically, this makes "The Body" the first story in the Castle Rock cycle, a town and a community that King will revisit for almost the next two decades. Even though readers did not learn about the horrors of small town life in Castle Rock until The Dead Zone, the themes that that particular section of the novel explores such as "Otherness", secret sins, and parental indifference/violence towards children -- all themes that mark "The Body" and other early King works such as Carrie and 'Salem's Lot -- would seem to be fully developed at the very beginning of King's career. Could these settings and themes that seem so central to King's body of work have started with this one story about four boys in search of a dead body?

What I would propose is to look at the town of Castle Rock as if it were a "haunted house" thus adding a more gothic shade to "The Body" than has been painted by other critics.¹⁶ I feel that it is also interesting to note that King's return to this familiar ground, to recall and retell its stories is in many ways another symptom of trauma; (I will discuss this autobiographical analogue shortly under the section heading "Which boy do you mean?") To get more of the dirt[y secrets] of Castle Rock beneath my fingernails, I have chosen to focus on one nasty place in particular, the Castle Rock Dump. There may be an elegiac tone to "The Body," but there is very little joy let alone praise that can be lauded on the residents of Castle Rock.

**"[. . .] filled with American things that get empty,
wear out, or just don't work anymore." ("The Body" 345)**

In his book Stephen King: The First Decade, Carrie to Pet Sematary, Joseph Reino gives a good close reading of the number of secrets woven into the fabric of "The Body." Throughout the course of his essay, he unearths the following catalog: "parents are not informed of the twenty-mile adventure to find a dead body [. . .] rival gangs [Ace Merrill's gang of older boys and Gordie et al.] are unaware of each other's plans [. . .] Billy Tessio does not realize his whispered conversation with Charlie Hogan is overheard by his despised brother [Vern]" (131).¹⁷ Reino begins this discussion by pointing out that it is another "secret" that serves as the opening scene for the entire narrative -- a treehouse "made of scavenged planks, splintery and knotholed, the roof of corrugated tin sheets 'hawked from the dump' [. . .] this secret place contains yet another secret place, a 12 X 10 inch compartment under the floor" (130 - 131). Reino goes on to discuss the harmless kinds of "secret" adolescent activities that go on within the treehouse like

looking at "girlie books" and "playing cards." He observes that the location of the treehouse is not so much a secret hiding place, (like the cave where Tom and Huck discover the stolen gold in the Adventures of Tom Sawyer) but a "necessary refuge from the irrationalities of Castle Rock parents" (131).¹⁸ I believe Reino's observation is correct, but what I find even more interesting about this hideout is that it is composed of materials taken out of the very place and from the very people that the boys are supposedly being "secreted" away from in the first place, Castle Rock. These *are* twelve-year-old boys, after all, and this *is* their clubhouse; however, like the apartment the Torrance family shares at Overlook Hotel in The Shining, the treehouse too serves as a refuge from the elements of the outside world. The walls in each place, each "house," however, cannot protect all the inhabitants that dwell within. As I will demonstrate shortly, just like Jack Torrance, the potential for self-destruction abides within each of these four boys as well.

Staying with that ill-fated Stovington, Vermont clan for a moment, if the Torrances are supposed to be King's study of the breakdown of the nuclear family, then the residents of Castle Rock are in a state of full-blown nuclear winter. As Tony Magistrale observes in Landscape of Fear, survival in Castle Rock is achieved through a vulgar aberration of natural selection: "In the Castle Rock wasteland, it is people like Ace and his gang, consumers in the most appalling sense of the word, who survive: feeding upon the weakness, the genuine emotions, or the fears of other human beings, they move like profane machines of flesh, using and breaking, and discarding all that get in their path" (93). Many of the adults -- in addition to the older boys -- that Gordie and his friends encounter throughout the story are either cruel, like Miss Simons (the teacher who frames

Chris for taking the milk money from school), Mr. Dusset (the proprietor of the Florida Market who tries to cheat Gordie by overcharging him), and Milo Pressman (the dump-keeper); or like their parents, indifferent or utterly violent.¹⁹ Before I take on the task of moralizing about the poor parenting skills exhibited by the mothers and fathers of Castle Rock, I would like to spend a moment looking at the keep of Milo Pressman, the Castle Rock Dump. Behind its "six foot security fence" ("The Body" 345) there exists a very clear example of just how much of the town resides within Gordie and his friends.

After scaling the fence, Gordie recalls the dump as being "one of my strongest memories of Castle Rock" (345). He equates its appearance to that of a surrealist painting, "to my child's eye, *nothing* in the Castle Rock Dump looked as if it really belonged there" (345, original emphasis). Among the wildlife, rusted cars, and bric-a-brac of a consumer culture, stands "an old-fashioned water pump — the kind from which you had to call the water with elbow-grease [. . .] the paint had been rubbed off by the thousands of hands that had worked that handle since 1940" (345). As "a flood of clear water" sluices out of the pump, each boy takes a turn immersing his head beneath the "shockingly cold water" to drink and be refreshed. Not only are the boys surrounded by the castoffs and the refuse of Castle Rock, but Castle Rock is now, literally inside each one of them. I would argue that the Castle Rock dump is symbolic of the emotionally dead and rotted nature of the town itself, and of its residents as well. If so, then perhaps the aquifer that flows beneath the town nourishes the adults with a kind of spiritual decay, while at the same time drowning their children. The water that flows out of the dump's pump is only one of a number of symbolic ways in which water and water imagery are used throughout the text. In order to bring this argument about the use of the "haunted

house" motif in "The Body" home, I would like to look at one more way water feeds into this discussion.

Although water plays a less "direct" role in the scene that takes place on the train trestle -- the trestle runs over the Castle River, therefore the boys are never in direct contact with the water -- it does figure symbolically as a crossing; another example between a known (Castle Rock) and an unknown (the forest on the opposite side).²⁰ The trestle represents an umbilicus to the town of Castle Rock, the last connection between it and the world outside its borders. Like other "haunted houses" such as the Overlook Hotel or Poe's House of Usher, Castle Rock does not suffer well the departure of those who try to escape its confines. Instead of having to collapse in on itself like the Usher's mansion or blow itself up like the Overlook in order to impede the progress of the escapees, the evil forces that dwell within Castle Rock send a speeding locomotive to try to run the boys down and kill them. In what he describes as his "first and only psychic flash," Gordie leans down and grabs onto the rail and feels the thrum of the oncoming train: "There was only that to advertise its imminent arrival. An image of Ray Brower, dreadfully mangled and thrown into a ditch somewhere [. . .] reeled before my eyes. We would join him, or at least Vern and I would, or at least I would. We had invited ourselves to our own funerals" (371). As Chris and Teddy watch from the safety of the other side, Vern and Gordie have to literally run for their lives. Fortune smiles (this time) on each boy as they are able to avoid death and "escape" Castle Rock. Once the train has passed, Gordie says he felt "like a soldier coming out of his foxhole at the end of a day-long artillery barrage" (373).

In a "post-train" self-analysis, Gordie says, "my body felt warm, exercised, at peace with itself [. . .] I was alive and glad to be" (374). Arthur Biddle comments specifically on this moment of catharsis to point out that Gordie's encounter with death gives him "a new sense of wholeness and well being [. . .] he has confronted the worst fears of his subconscious and the threat to his emerging ego and survived" (89). Biddle's observation is correct and although only Gordie's thoughts are heard, can the reader presuppose that the emerging egos of Vern, Chris, and Teddy have survived as well?

It occurs to me that this scene is about fate as well -- Gordie's vision of Ray Brower would seem to confirm this idea -- in which case the scene becomes less about survival and more about deferment of the inevitable. Gordie's surname, Lachance, is another paradox in this story; an indication by King not only the role that "chance" plays in Gordie's life, but also the fate that awaits him (and subsequently all living things) in the end. In contrast to the "fortune" of Lachance is the stranglehold implied by Chris's last name, Chambers, another possible cue from King that Chris will never really escape the doom of his family and of Castle Rock let alone life.²¹ Sometimes the metaphorical "speeding locomotives" of life can be avoided and sometimes they cannot, it is as simple and as sobering as that. In the end no matter how fortunate we are, everything's eventual, and fate will catch up with all of us. I am reminded of what Teddy so eloquently stated, "that ending sucks."

For three of these four survivors, there is no physically "escaping" from Castle Rock, and for "the one who is still alive[Gordie]" there is only continual deferment. To this point I have only observed the brutal nature of the metaphorical body of Castle Rock.

I would now like to turn to the nurture (or lack thereof) of these four boys to examine the doom and despair that haunts all their houses and seals the fate of all their lives.

**"I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve."
("The Body" 351)**

Framed by the adult Gordon Lachance's narration, "The Body" recounts four days in 1960 (Friday, September 2 through Monday, September 5), that Lachance and his three friends (Chris Chambers, Teddy Duchamp, and Vern Tessio) spent in a search for the corpse of Ray Brower, a "kid our age" who lived in the town of Chamberlain, "forty miles or so east of Castle Rock" (308). Sometime during the day of August 30 -- "three days before Vern came busting into the clubhouse" (308) -- Brower went out to pick blueberries and has not been seen or heard from since. After sketching out the events of Brower's disappearance and the extent of the search for his body by local authorities, Gordie morbidly adds, "they were already dragging the ponds in Chamberlin and the Motton Reservoir" (308).

The boys learn the details of Brower's disappearance from listening to the radio: "when the news came on we usually switched some mental dial over to Mute. [. . .] But we all listened to the Ray Brower story a little more closely, because he was a kid our age" (308), the same phrase ("a kid our age") used by Gordie to describe Lard Ass Hogan. In the epigraph that opens "The Body," the elder Lachance makes a point to say, "*I was twelve going on thirteen when I first saw a dead human being*" (301 original emphasis). For Gordie and his friends age is defined as a progression toward or within a close proximity to the age of thirteen; an age in which each boy believes he will be

recognized not so much as a mature adult, but older; or at the very least, no longer viewed as a child by others in his family and community.

A character's obsession with maturation or "going on thirteen" is quite commonplace to say the least in a bildungsroman. However unremarkable this quality may be in such a story, there still exists in Gordie's mind a recognized spatial distance between these two epochs; an interstitial gap between the known and unknown. The fact that this late summer "fall from innocence" occurs in the very winter of each character's childhood -- except for Brower who will remain a twelve-year-old boy forever in Gordie's memory -- is central to this story not only because it represents a loss of innocence, but also because it establishes a confrontation between a known and an unknown or "Otherness".

"Otherness" is defined by Eric Savoy, quoting from Louis S. Gross's Redefining the American Gothic as: " 'the singularity and monstrosity of the Other: what the dominant culture cannot incorporate within itself, it must project outward onto this hated/desired figure' " (5). Another "Otherness" projected into the phrase "twelve going on thirteen," is a maturation of the physical self as well; in a way, the implied subtext of any "coming-of-age" story is the beginning of the end, a slow (hopefully) approach towards death. The phrase "a kid our age" and "coming-of-age" become a synecdoche, and also another paradox.²² If to "age," or to be "going on thirteen," is understood as growing older or maturing somehow, than it presupposes a progression through life, which will inevitably lead to decay and eventually death of the physical body. The "hated/desired figure" that Gordie and his friends find out on the Back Harlow Road represents not only what "could" happen to them in their lives, but what will happen to all of them (and us) in the end.

The way in which the boys learn the whereabouts of Brower's body comes from Vern, who serves as a harbinger throughout the story.²³ While looking for a quart jar of pennies he had buried four years earlier under the porch, Vern overhears his brother Billy and Charlie Hogan talking about stumbling across a corpse they presume to be Brower's out on a country road in the neighboring town of Harlow: "It was that kid they been talkin about on the radio,' Charlie said. 'It was sure as shit. Brocker, Brower, Flowers, whatever his name is' " (311). Charlie's (in)ability to remember the name of the missing boy parallels the anonymity Gordie and his friends all share within their own families and their community.²⁴ Similar again to Lard Ass Hogan, each boy is a social outcast and, like Brower, -- who is anonymous in both death and life -- each boy has been forgotten in one way or another; Gordie and his friends are the preterite, the "passed over" of Castle Rock.²⁵ When Vern asks "you guys want to see a dead body?" (307), what he really wants to know is if they want to see one of their own.

As the adult narrator introduces his friends to the reader and recalls his own childhood memories, he mentions at least one act of abject cruelty that each boy endured within their own families. Gordie identifies himself as "the Invisible Boy," his anonymity due primarily to the fact that earlier in April his older brother Dennis (the Lachance's favorite son) died in a jeep accident during Army Basic Training. Since then Gordie's parents have become even more apathetic to their younger and now only son, a point that Gordie makes quite clear when he stops off at his house before heading out to search for Brower: "I remembered that my mom and some of her hen-party friends had gone to Boston to see a concert. [. . .] And why not? Her only kid was dead and she had to do something to take her mind off it" (317). Gordie's self-appellation as "the Invisible Boy" seems ironic

within the context of the story since he portrays his parents as almost ghostlike figures themselves. At the times in which they do appear, it is only to chastise Gordie or wax melancholic about Dennis before disappearing again out of the text. Dennis's death may be the shroud that covers all the lives of the Lachance family, but Gordie's parents too have become like specters haunting their own house.

The Lachances' indifference to their younger son is reflected in the parenting habits of the Tessio family as well. Unlike Gordie's older brother, Vern's older brother, Billy, is very much alive if for no other reason than to physically abuse Vern. Like the Lachances, the Tessio parents are seen in a similar half-light. Vern's father is a faceless mill worker, while his mother uses her son's meager possessions (comic and joke books, and the treasure map Vern drew up to find his buried pennies) to start a cook fire one morning with no mind paid to her son at all. Just before Gordie tells everyone the Lard Ass Hogan story, Vern recalls with great verve how at a similar county fair he once spent all of his allowance to put his "whole family in that jail on wheels they have, even fuckin Billy" (378).

The indifference shown to Gordie and Vern by their parents is at least somewhat better than the outright violence experienced by Teddy and Chris. Gordie tells how Norman Duchamp burned both of Teddy's ears into grotesque "lumps of warm wax" (304) on a woodstove for breaking a plate when Teddy was eight.²⁶ In spite of this, Teddy still worships his father for his acts of wartime heroism -- "Teddy's dad had stormed the beach at Normandy" (305) -- and goes with his mother every week to visit his father at the VA hospital.

Chris Chambers, on the other hand, "hated his father like poison" (315). Gordie says that Chris was "marked up every two weeks or so" (315). Chris matter-of-factly talks about his father's alcoholism and the abuse he and his family suffer when his father is on one of his "mean streaks." Chris also has an older brother, Richard "Eyeball" Chambers, who, like Vern's brother Billy, lives to terrorize him, while another older brother is in jail for the rape and assault of a woman. Given his family's notorious reputation -- "poor white trash; shanty irish" (446) -- the community of Castle Rock has written Chris off as another of one "those no-account Chambereses" (316).²⁷

Like Chris, Teddy, Gordie, and Vern, Ray too is "marked up." It is unknown whether Brower suffered the same abuses in life as the other boys in the story, but when the boys find him, he bears the most serious wound of all. He has literally been cast out of all known worlds, passed over and left to rot. When he sees Brower's body, Gordie says, "the train had knocked him out of his Keds just as it had knocked the life out of his body" (421) I believe that Brower serves as the ultimate character who is passed over in this story, which, if for no other reason, makes him a powerful and symbolic presence within the text.²⁸ He embodies all the "Otherness" that Gordie and his friends cannot incorporate within themselves. His body takes on a talismanic quality for the boys while on their journey, a journey that becomes a pilgrimage, Ray's bruised and sallow flesh becoming in a way their Canterbury. Brower is the avatar of the story's subtitle; a martyr for the loss of childhood innocence each boy will experience as they come in contact with his corpse. The indifference that he experiences is not necessarily from his town, his parents or his siblings, but from the man-made (the train), and the natural worlds (the woods). To see Ray Brower in "The Body" is to acknowledge "Otherness". On its own,

this knowledge is helpful to understand the gothic quality of this story, but it must then be incorporated into the self to recognize the parallels that draw in the reader -- fiction's ultimate goal.

So far, I have discussed the quality of "Otherness" in this text as it pertains to the indifference that each of these boys has suffered from in their lives and in the world around them. I would like to "double" up on this theme of "Otherness" to reveal how it has also informed the critical debate over "other" prominent topics in the text, namely autobiography and nostalgia. Like the emphasis that has been placed on journey in "The Body," these two issues have (so far) been taken at face value with very little attention paid to their relevancy regarding their Gothicness.

**"Which boy do you mean?"
("The Body" 436)**

For many critics, the issue of autobiography has become almost as central to a discussion about "The Body" as the journey-quest itself. Take for example Linda Badley's 1996 essay "Stephen King Viewing the Body" published in the 1998 collection on King done for the Modern Critical Views series edited by Harold Bloom. According to Badley, two events that occurred in King's childhood -- the desertion of his father when King was two, and another incident two years later in which King (supposedly) witnessed a friend killed by a passing train -- combine, says Badley, to shape "King's metafiction" and the 'King myth' that informs popular culture. The first of these [metafiction] was 'The Body' " (164). Badley's interpretation of autobiography as it relates to "The Body" was not the first of its kind: in Art of Darkness, Winter dubbed Lachance "a *doppelgänger* for Stephen King" (120) and Reino cites the one-hundred-and-

ninety-three word epigraph of the story as "so intensely personal" that it overshadows even the straight autobiographical sections of King's non-fiction horror manifesto, Danse Macabre. Reino describes Gordie as a "papery thin" mask for King, and goes on to state: "more than once -- by including adaptations of previously published short stories [such as "Stud City" and "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan"] and by concluding the novella with blatantly autobiographical snatches -- the problematic psyche of Stephen King breaks through" (127). Reino's comments are accurate, but overstated. On the other side of this debate is Heldreth, who takes the opposite point of view of Reino, Winter, and Badley when he says "concluding that Lachance is King would be tempting but unnecessary" (73). For Heldreth, the focus should not be on finding the fact in the fiction, but understanding how through fiction "King and other writers help to break down the loneliness of life and even death" (74).

Granted, there are numerous parallels between King and Lachance in "The Body" that are almost impossible to ignore.²⁹ Although I side with Heldreth on this issue, I believe that Reino is (at least) somewhat correct in his assertion that this brouhaha was caused by the "problematic psyche of Stephen King." I would like to take a moment to look at the "train incident" referenced by Badley to show how it can be interpreted as something more than autobiography in the guise of fiction and vice versa.

In chapter four of Danse Macabre -- the aptly titled (especially in light of this discussion) *An Annoying Autobiographical Pause* -- King mentions taking part in a panel discussion in 1979 about horror literature. In response to a question about King's ability to recall terrible or frightening memories from his childhood, he told the audience how when he was "barely four," a boy he was playing with was "run over by a freight train

while playing on or crossing the tracks" (83). In an attempt to ward off the kind of psychoanalytic analysis he knew his confession would bring, at the very end he added that the story came to him second-hand from his mother and that he himself had "no memory of the incident at all" (84). King explained his reasoning for sharing this anecdote and the immediate reaction he received: "I offered my train story mostly so the questioner wouldn't be totally disappointed [. . .] to which [fellow panelist] Janet Jeppson (who is a psychiatrist as well as a novelist), said: 'But you've been writing about it ever since.' " Here was a pigeonhole where I could be filed . . . here was a by-God *motive*. I wrote 'Salem's Lot, The Shining, and The Stand because I saw this kid run over by a slow freight in the days of my impressionable youth" (84).

I offer this biographical aside not to perpetuate this already influential legend or to further blur the line between King and Lachance as other critics have chosen to do. Instead, I interpret King's "train story" as just that, a story. I would argue that King is fascinated, perhaps even self-obsessed, with the act of writing and with his own ability to write and to tell stories. In his interview with Magistrale in 1989, King states: "What I have written about writers and writing in the last five years or so has been a real effort on my part to understand what I am doing, what it means, what it is doing to me, what it is doing for me. Some of it has been out of an effort to try and understand the ramifications of being a so-called famous person or celebrity" (Second Decade 11). Aside from his prolific output of work over the past thirty years, King has given hundreds of interviews in which he is incredibly forthcoming (as he is with Magistrale) about what inspired a particular story or how much of his own personal experience he draws from when it comes to his writing.³⁰ Perhaps not since Dickens or Twain played to packed houses on

their respective speaking tours around the world has an author been as popular or more accessible to the media, and to the public at large than Stephen Edwin King. If King were trying to exorcise his fears -- or as Winter says quoting from an interview he did with King in 1982, "go back and confront [his] childhood, in a sense relive it if [he] can, so that [he] can be whole" (120) -- the figure of "the writer" would be a logical choice for him. The best example of King's passion albeit obsession with writing can be found, coincidentally, in yet another interview, the oft-quoted interview by Eric Norden for "Playboy" magazine in 1983. When asked about writing, specifically writer's block, King begins his answer by stating that although he has come to terms with his childhood fear of death, he has not yet "come to terms with [. . .] just drying up as a writer. Writing is necessary for my sanity. As a writer, I can externalize my fears and insecurities and night terrors on paper [. . .] And in the process, I'm able to 'write myself sane,' as the fine poet Anne Sexton put it" (36). Through characters like Gordie Lachance, Paul Sheldon in Misery, or Bill Denbrough in IT, King "writes himself sane" by self-consciously examining the effects of writing on his own psyche and in his own life, which for Badley and others is the terminus of the discussion. If "story" is king, however, and if the King-as-Lachance contention has any bearing on "The Body" at all, I believe, it is because it is an example of a figure of the gothic story, "the double" *writ large* -- a trope that perhaps more than any other haunts this tale.

In his essay "The 'Uncanny,'" Sigmund Freud takes what he refers to as an "aesthetic" turn away from theorizing about psychoanalysis to discuss the subject of the uncanny, which he defines as "undoubtedly related to what is frightening — to what arouses dread and horror" (219). Before I read the "dread and horror" of "'The Uncanny,'" I would like

to look at two footnotes that reinforce my earlier discussion about "dread and horror" surrounding the haunted and secret nature of Castle Rock.

The first footnote of "The Uncanny" is a definition by editor, James Strachey, of translation of "uncanny" from German to English. Strachey says, "the German word, translated throughout this paper by the English 'uncanny' is 'unheimlich,' literally 'unhomely'" (219). Freud's etymological discussion of the German words "heimlich" (homely) and "unheimlich" (unhomely) or "uncanny," uncovers an interesting contradiction of meaning. "Heimlich," Freud says, "on the one hand means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. 'Unheimlich' is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of 'heimlich,' and not the second" (225). Strachey's footnote about the secretive meaning of "heimlich" states: "According to the OED, a similar ambiguity attaches to the English 'canny,' which may mean not only 'cosy' but also 'endowed with occult or magical powers'" (225). Castle Rock embodies each of these definitions, contradictory or not. Secrets are legion and any kind of "home life" that any of these boys have is a cruel joke that must be endured. The only semblance of a loving or caring environment is one that the boys must carry on in secret among themselves. The word "homely" is also another appropriate description for a town that resembles a charnel house rather than an idyllic New England mill town. It is hard to find anything "beautiful" in a countryside that is filled with the broken bones and maimed flesh of children. The irony of Castle Rock is that it is a place to call home, but it is a home where the mill chokes the air with smoke and poisons the river with waste. As unhomely

as Castle Rock may be for these boys, it is only one example of an "uncanny" presence mirrored in "The Body."

Returning to Freud and his discussion about the uncanny -- sans semantics -- is "The Sandman," by E.T.A. Hoffman, the text Freud chooses to read in light of his ideas and theories about the uncanny. Freud concludes that the "uncanny" factors of this story stem from the fact that the main characters look alike, and are therefore "doubles."

"Doubling," Freud says, extends beyond physical appearance or mere look alike, "there is the constant recurrence of the same thing — the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes" (234).

Gordie is not so much doubled in "The Body" as he is trebled. First by his dead brother, Denny, and then by his friends, in particular Chris Chambers, and lastly by the body of "a dead kid," Ray Brower. The resemblance between Gordie and Denny is an obvious one, "you look just like Denny," George Dusset says to Gordie, "people ever tell you that? Yuh. Spitting image." ("The Body" 353). As far as the people of Castle Rock and Gordie's parents are concerned that is where the resemblance between the two begins and ends. Chris sums this attitude up best for Gordie when he says, "I know about you and your folks. They don't give a shit about you. Your big brother was the one they cared about [. . .] your dad doesn't beat on you, but maybe that's even worse. He's got you asleep" (392). Chris's use of the word "asleep" is a happy coincidence considering Freud's interpretations of "The Sandman;" but it is appropriate as well to Gordie's relationship to Dennis. Gordie may be put into a metaphoric sleep or trance due to his father's lack of encouragement, but it is Gordie's double, Dennis, who is asleep for eternity. This theme of "eternal rest" versus life represents a continuing contrast

throughout Gordie's life. His life is doubled first by Denny's death, and then by Brower's corpse -- another body, that is at eternal rest before the story even begins -- and finally the text balances Gordie's life by the deaths of his other doubles, his friends -- Vern, Teddy, and Chris.

I have already discussed the use and reuse of the phrases "kid our age" and "twelve going on thirteen" and each boy's anonymous or outcast status in his family and/or in the community at large. In addition to these shared traits, each boy and each family for that matter, comes from a similar socio-economic background as well. Although the Lachances may seem to be financially better off than the other boys' families -- "neither Vern's folks or Chris's had a phone -- Gordie makes it clear that, "none of us came from the upper crust" (315). These are disenfranchised boys born into families that are unable emotionally to provide for them or prepare them at all for any life outside of the only one they have ever known. The only birthright these boys have is the horror of apathy and despair. "*Life's a gyp, you know it?*" Chris says, "I mean, look at us" (391).

The one characteristic that sets Gordie apart from his friends and family is, of course, his creativity and his ability to tell stories. In 1960, however, he is still a "work in progress" and has yet to distinguish himself as much of anything let alone a writer. His future life as "the best-selling novelist who is more apt to have his paperback contracts reviewed than his books" (335) is still many years away.³¹ At the point he goes off to find Brower, Gordie's loyalty still firmly lies with his friends.

This attitude becomes apparent in Gordie as he and Chris discuss Gordie's storytelling ability and the fast approaching school year. As Chris tells Gordie, by next summer their little gang of four apart: "That's how they [teachers, etc.] got it set up, you'll be in the

college courses. Me and Teddy and Vern, we'll all be in the shop courses playing pocket-pool with the rest of the retards making ashtrays and birdhouses" (392). Despite Chris's efforts to encourage him, Gordie is not ready to accept this reality: "Fuck the stories. I'm not going in with a lot of pussies. No sir" (392). At this point in their lives, Chris substitutes for Dennis and also for Gordie's emotionally dead father, a role that will be reversed later when Gordie becomes Chris's mentor through High School. Chris says what Gordie needs to hear, even though it will be twenty-two years before he understands just how important Chris's words are: "God gave you something, all those stories you can make up, and He said: This is what we got for you, kid. Try not to lose it. But kids lose *everything* unless somebody looks out for them and if your folks are too fucked up to do it then maybe I ought to" (original emphasis 393). I do not think it is pure coincidence that Chris makes an allusion to God in his criticism of Gordie's loyalty to his friends; because later on it will be through the "sacrifice" of Chris that Gordie will finally gain insight and understand the importance of life in the face of death.

I am getting a little ahead of myself here because there is another double that I still need to mention that also helps in Gordie's development: Ray Brower. Like Chris, Brower acts as a double that prepares Gordie not for his future life necessarily, but for his inevitable death. In Freud's analysis, the double stands for more than just a group of common characteristics. It also plays a role in the development of the individual's ego throughout their life. As a person develops, she/he is able to "criticize the self and exercise censorship within the mind" (235). Once this stage is reached, Freud says, "the double reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (235).

With his back metaphorically and literally turned to Brower, the thirty-four-year-old narrator recounts the uneventful return of he and his friends to Castle Rock -- "Double-time," (434) he remembers Chris saying to spur the group on. While he reflects on this return, Gordie says, "there were things that bothered me about the body of Ray Brower—they bothered me then and they bother me now" (435). He runs through a "Socratic" stream of questions -- everything from the exact angle that the train must have hit Brower to knock the shoes off his feet to where the blueberry pail that he was supposedly carrying with him might have ended up -- a question that haunted Gordie in 1960 and one he still struggles with now as he writes his memoir. Gordie says he becomes frenzied when he thinks about returning to the "old discontinued GS&WM line" (436) to find Brower's long-forgotten and lost berrying pail. In Gordie's mind, the pail becomes a symbol for all that was lost when he and his three friends discovered the body of Ray Brower. Gordie says, "that boy was *me*, I think. And the thought which follows, chilling me like a dash of cold water, is: *Which boy do you mean?*" (436). If he can pull this pail out of time and hold "that pail in my two hands, I guess—as much a symbol of my living as his [Brower's] dying, proof that I really do know which boy it was —which boy of the five of us" (437). Instead of asking himself which boy it was, perhaps Gordie should be asking himself if something can be recovered that was never even lost in the first place?

There are a number of "lost" boys who double for Gordie throughout this story. What I believe King is suggesting here is not to try to put a face on this ambiguous figure, but to recognize simply that something is lost and that (maybe) it can never be recovered. The act of recovery in "The Body" occurs through the narrative of Gordie's memories which fracture history and time and provide the final gothic trope of this study.

"[. . .] the apotheosis of the memory and the time [. . .]"
("The Body" 352)

King's decision to frame "The Body" within Lachance's narration greatly enriches the metafictional overtones of story; however, it also problematizes the issues of history and memory that are created by retrospective story telling. Again, the character of Brower is allowed to leech out of the discussion as critics such as Badley and Tim Underwood rush headlong into paradox. For these critics, Brower's corpse becomes a "corporeal way station" through the halcyon days of childhood, just a stop along the road to experience.

In his essay "The Skull Beneath the Skin" published in Kingdom of Fear, Tim Underwood dismisses Brower's body as "just the story's catalyst, something to initiate a Huck Finn odyssey into the woods" (258). Underwood goes so far as to make the flip assessment that, "in *The Body* (and in his subsequent novel Christine), King gives us both morbid humor and madcap lament" (260). Ultimately, Underwood says, this is "really a story about Gordie's buddies, about nostalgia and camaraderie" (260). As for the issues of death and mortality raised by "The Body," Underwood is unconvinced. He fails to find anything that suggests there are any "solutions or alternatives to this sad situation, just a few laughs along the way" (258).³² The intractable paradox that Underwood finds himself at when he chooses to discuss the nostalgia that this story invokes in this way, is that he forgets about the indifference and violence visited upon all the boys in this story including Brower. The "sad situation" that Underwood mentions, I feel, is a very euphemistic way of passing over issues that this text raises the physical and mental places these boys are from not to mention the issues of life and death that are so apparent. Please understand that I do not think Underwood is trying to suggest that there is

anything humorous or "madcap" about a boy killed by a train, Teddy's ruined ears, or Gordie's status in his own home as the "Invisible Boy." As I have stated earlier, "The Body" rejects sentimentality in favor of elegy; like "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan," "The Body" is complex, and above all, it is *more* than "just a few laughs along the way."

True, "The Body" is filled with enough sepia-tinted memories to make readers (and critics alike) forget that the good old days were not always so good. Gordie even says that "there was more to that summer than our trip across the river to look for Ray Brower, although that looms the largest" ("The Body" 351). Even as he inventories childhood memories -- from Ted Williams's batting average in 1960 and the doo-wop hits and Westerns of the late fifties and early sixties to "the machine gun roar of playing-cards riffing against the spokes of some kid's bicycle" (352) -- Gordie cannot totally repress the fears and anxieties he feels about death and his own mortality. Memories of Williams's statistics in 1960 (ironically his *final* season as a player in the Major Leagues) remind Gordie about his growing love for baseball that is overshadowed by the dangers of life and the inevitability of death: "Baseball had become important to me in the last couple of years, ever since I'd had to face the knowledge that baseball players were as much flesh and blood as I was. That knowledge came when Roy Campanella's car overturned [in 1958] and the papers screamed the mortal news from the front pages" (352). This is only one example of many in which Gordie's sunnier boyhood memories of baseball and old-time rock and roll are tempered by darker realities. To dismiss memory in "The Body" as being only about "camaraderie" and nostalgia is to deny the very complexities that order human experience.

Earlier I discussed the role played by "the kid[s] our age" in this story as symbolic of the preterite, or the passed over. In its verb form this word becomes preterition, meaning the action of looking back.³³ The backward gaze of "The Body" is not only predicated on history, but on Gordie's story -- on [his]story as well. According to Savoy, preterition is common in a gothic tale and often does take a melancholic turn. This turn, however, is not due to simple nostalgia over the loss of innocence. Savoy explains: "While gothic narrative emphatically refuses nostalgia, it seems to be the case that nostalgic representations of "America" veer toward the gothic with remarkable frequency; [. . .] this turn problematizes nostalgia's simplicity by invoking a darker register that, ironically, emerges as the very consequence of nostalgic modes of knowing" (8). Gordie's story is filled with so much pathos that even a sentiment like "I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve ("The Body" 351) seems to pale when contrasted with another fact of life that Gordie shares with the reader: "Friends come in and out of your life like busboys in a restaurant, did you ever notice that?" (447). In the spirit of full disclosure that he maintains throughout his tale, Gordie recounts the end of their fellowship and the sad fate that eventually catches up with his friends.

Chris was right about the gang's demise, but the collapse has nothing to do with ashtrays or birdhouses. Gordie recalls, "Teddy and Vern slowly became just two more faces in the halls or in three-thirty detention. We nodded said hi. That was all it happens" (447). Magistrale observes that the journey-quest empowers both Gordie and Chris to "sever their already tenuous connection to Castle Rock values" (94). The same is not true, however, for Teddy and Vern as Magistrale explains: "Ray Brower's corpse parallels Teddy and Vern's own moral 'deaths,' for upon returning from this journey they

proceed to follow in the bloody footsteps of the older boys and their Castle Rock parents" (94). In the "whatever happened to" portion of Gordie's tale, the reader learns that Vern does get out of Castle Rock, but only gets as far as Lewiston, Maine where he dies before the age of nineteen in a house fire in 1966: "someone fell asleep in one of the bedrooms with a live cigarette going. Vern himself, maybe, drifting off, dreaming of his pennies [. . .] they identified him and the four others who died by their teeth" ("The Body" 447). Bad ears, coke bottle glasses and all, Gordie recalls that Teddy does manage to graduate from high school, but dies in "a squalid car crash" (447) over in Harlow, the same town where the boys found Brower's body.

Gordie's retelling of how he and his friends spent their Labor Day weekend in 1960 is a Proustian exercise -- a memory deluge that floods back to Gordie when he *remembers* reading a newspaper headline in 1971: "STUDENT FATALLY STABBED IN PORTLAND RESTAURANT — I told my wife I was going out for a milkshake. I drove out of town, parked and cried for him" (450). It is this ten-year-old newspaper headline that announces the death of Chris Chambers, dead at the age of twenty-three. A short eleven years after Gordie say his fate doubled in the face of Ray Brower and reflected off the polished surface of his brother's coffin as it was lowered into the ground, Gordie's remaining doubles have all faded away into death.

To say that the memories that comprise "The Body" are only "wistful nostalgia" imparts a false sense of optimism on this story and assigns a cheap grace to the characters that die. Death is a fact of life, just like the facts that parents do not always love their children, adults can often be cruel and hateful, and friendships that appear at the age of twelve that would seem to last for eternity seldom do. Although "The Body" is

imbued with these elements of indifference, despair, and death, the fact remains that these are not faceless individuals or disposable moments in Gordie's life and the lives of those that mark this story. Each death (and life) is remembered and it resonates with the ones that preceded it until finally Gordie can fully realize what mortality actually means and what a joy it is to be living and alive.

This understanding only comes to Gordie over the span of many years and after at least three significant deaths that occur during his lifetime. As a whole, "The Body" incorporates three different periods of time: the deaths of Denny and Brower in 1960, Chris's death in 1971, and the early 1980's when Gordie actually writes down his story. Placed in the continuum of Gordie's life, these deaths (Denny, Ray, and Chris) take on a tremendous significance, while the gaps of time in between affix new levels of meaning and understanding to the previous event(s). Rather than using these events/deaths to confer hero status on Gordie, I would like to read them for what they represent in Gordie's life: trauma. Starting with Dennis's death through to the discovery of Brower's body and then finally to Chris, I plan to show how Gordie's narrates his life through the deaths and resulting traumas that he has experienced in his life.

III. "Why all the verbs in stories have -ed endings." ("The Body 411)

**"I wake up from dreams where the hail falls into his open eyes."
("The Body" 301)**

"The Body" opens with this poetic, but terrifying image of hail falling on and filling in the orbits around the eyes of a corpse, the description of which becomes even more unsettling due to the use of the word "hail." In a morose play on words, "hail" actually

becomes a chilling address to both the dreamer and the deceased, a clarion call towards an implacable destiny. Hail fellow indeed, but well met . . . ?

The "dreams" are those of Gordie Lachance and the "open eyes" -- once bright and shining, but now dull and lifeless -- are the eyes of Ray Brower. In his description of this moment later on in the story, it is clear to see where Gordie's fear lies: "Ray Brower's eyes had gone wide and white, starey and pupilless, like the eyes that look out at you from Grecian statuary. It only took a second to understand what had happened, but understanding didn't lessen the horror. [. . .] His clothes were also white with hail. He seemed to be lying in his own shroud" (430). The immediacy of this admission establishes two points that will dictate the action of the story to come. First, it implies that this is a tale of return and repetition, a reawakening to a life that is haunted by images of death. Second, whatever is about to be told has scarred its teller in a deep psychological manner that manifests itself in dreams. The emotions that Gordie experiences as he watches the hail shroud Brower's body unfolds through the experience of trauma. Brower, however, is only one of many bodies that Gordie gives a voice to in the course of his narrative. As I have mentioned, "The Body" is suffused with the specters of the dead, but it is only through the agency of the survivor, through Gordie, that the dead speak.

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud is faced with the problem of repetition. Repetition, his studies have shown, happens on a consistent basis as the human mind seeks to avoid the unpleasurable in lieu of what is pleasurable, hence "the pleasure principle." A good theory on paper, but one that Freud realizes is fraught with complications in its practical application to the irrepressible complexities of life. One

such complication is the "traumatic neurosis," a condition, Freud says, "which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving risk to life" (10). He observes a similar condition, commonly referred to as "war neuroses," in the soldiers returning from World War I. In this case, however, Freud says he is both enlightened and bewildered by "the fact that the same symptoms sometimes came about without the intervention of any gross mechanical force" (10). Gross mechanical forces or not, Freud notes that these experiences often reoccur in the dreams of those suffering from the neuroses. To explain this phenomenon, Freud turns to literature as he did with his investigation into the uncanny. This time he interprets an incident from an epic poem by Tasso, Gerusalemme Liberata:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armor of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusader's army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (24)

Freud interprets Tancred's actions as a compulsion to repeat an unpleasurable act, he wounds his beloved twice; the repeated action causes anguish and sorrow, rather than the expected reaction usually associated with repetition, delight. Freud uses this example to posit that those individuals who suffer from trauma may have tapped into something that "seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual" (25) than previously understood by psychoanalysts at the time. After an in-depth study into the different chemicals and processes of the brain (as they were understood by Freud and his

colleagues in the early twentieth century) Freud concludes that trauma neuroses cause "a need to restore an earlier state of things" (69) -- in essence to recover something that has been lost. It is not a physical injury, but a wound that occurs within the processes of the human mind and is therefore not necessarily healable.

In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, Cathy Caruth takes Freud's interpretation of Tasso's poem a step further to suggest that what is present in this example is a known (Tancred's compulsion to repeat) and an unknown: "the sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (2). It is at this frontier of the known and the unknown that, according to Caruth, "the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (3). Referring to the research done on trauma since Freud's findings, Caruth concludes that trauma is now understood as an event "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4).

What interests me about Caruth's reading is the moment, the actual interstice, between the infliction (the known) of the wound and the voice (the unknown) that results from this action. If this moment or gap is exposed over a period of time, how is trauma figured forth? I would like to apply this idea to a theory of Gothic literature that is posited by David Mogen, Scott Sanders, and Joanne Karpinski in their book Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature. "Gothicism must abide," according to Mogen, Sanders, and Karpinski, "on a frontier—whether physical or psychical" (17). What occurs on this frontier can be considered gothic: "When an epic moment passes, and a peculiar rift in history develops and widens into a dark chasm that separates what is

now from what has been. [These rifts become known,] through the *inscriptions* of another history [that] breaks through into meaning" (16, my emphasis). I would like to apply the tenets of trauma as discussed by Caruth and the theory proposed by Mogen, Sanders, and Karpinski to Gordie's reactions to the deaths of Denny, Ray, and Chris.

**"There was too much Denny in it."
("The Body" 336)**

For Gordie, grave fears are nothing new. Four months before standing over the body of Brower and watching the hail shroud his body, Gordie stood at a graveside and watched as his brother's coffin was lowered into the ground. If he has already been a witness at one graveside, why does he again feel compelled to repeat the same action by taking part in the search for Brower? Speaking on behalf on his friends, Gordie tries to explain the group's (and his) fascination with Brower and with death: "We were all crazy to see that kid's body — I can't put it any more simply or honestly than that. Whether it was harmless or whether it turned out to have the power to murder sleep with a hundred mangled dreams, we wanted to see it. I think that we had come to believe we deserved to see it" (407).

Gordie's "need to see it" is a compulsion brought on by being unprepared for his brother's death. Denny is ten years older than Gordie, which is enough of a generation gap that Gordie cannot really relate to his brother. He says he had a "clinical awe" (321) for Dennis and that initially he was only "mildly shocked and mildly sad" (321) when he heard about his passing. Gordie says that he felt the same way about Denny's dying as he did when he "heard on the radio that Dan Blocker had died;" (321) and in a line that

could only be uttered by the first generation weaned on television, Gordie notes, "I'd seen them both as frequently, and Denny never got any reruns" (321).

Dennis's room holds a terrible fascination for Gordie. It exists out of time, in "suspended animation," (322) even though it has only been four months, the dates on the magazines are beginning to look "more and more antique" (322). What terrifies Gordie more than anything is what he dreams up in his own imagination. In gory detail Gordie describes seeing his brother emerge from the closet "and he would be croaking: It should have been you, Gordon. It should have been you" (322). In Gordie's imagination, Denny is essentially the childhood nightmare of the bogeyman. What I find interesting about Gordie's terrible vision, in light of trauma, is the repetition of the words "it should have been you." No b-movie bogeyman would be very effective if he did not croak a little with arms outstretched, and hand out beyond-the-grave-condemnations over and over again, but Gordie is in a way dreaming about his dead brother and in these daydreams he has him saying that Gordie should have been the one to die, not once, but twice. "Mildly shocked" or not, Gordie exhibits a compulsion to repeat, a common trait of trauma sufferers.

After the phantom of Dennis has croaked out his last word, there is a break in the main action and inserted into the text is a story reprinted from "Greenspun Quarterly issue 45, Fall, 1970. Used by permission." (322) by Gordon Lachance called "Stud City." "Stud City" is a fine piece of juvenilia about a teenager named Edward "Chico" May who dreams of taking his old Buick sedan, getting out from under the thumb of his wicked stepmother, Virginia, and lighting out for the metaphorical "Stud City" -- a dream place that is anywhere, away from his stepmother (ironically one of the places that Chico thinks

about escaping to is Castle Rock.) When Chico is not dreaming of Stud City, or deflowering virgins, he thinks about his older brother Johnny, who was killed recently at the "Oxford Plains Speedway" when a car spun out of control and collided with the car Johnny was working on. Chico thinks to himself "Well, my God. Nothing happened to Johnny that isn't going to happen to you" (324). The reason Johnny May was working at the track the night he was killed was to avoid being home alone with his stepmother. Apparently Chico's father, Sam, does not know that while he is away at work during the day, Virginia is carrying on an affair with Johnny against his will: "*she just won't stop and it's like I can't stop . . . she's always at me, you know what I mean, you've seen her*" (334, King's emphasis). In a scene out of a made-for-daytime-television melodrama, Chico storms out the house gives Johnny's Dodge one last look and heads out for the mythic Stud City.

The parallels are so obvious that even Gordie cannot help but be critical: "painfully derivative and painfully sophomoric to me now" (335). No matter how juvenile "Stud City," Gordie understands how important it is to his development as a writer. He says, "there was a kind of dreadful exhilaration in seeing things that had troubled me for years come out in a new form, *a form over which I had imposed control*" (336, King's emphasis). What Gordie reads as control I interpret as a compulsion to revisit the very moment that he watched his brother's flag-draped coffin descend into the ground. Gordie is trying to get back to the mental state before he has unexpectedly been hit with the news about his brother's death. Yes, his writing imposes control, but it is also a primal reaction to return to a mental state that has been lost and cannot be recovered.

**"Nobody dies in this story except [. . .] Ray Brower."
("The Body" 414)**

Earlier in this project I referenced Stephen King's non-fiction book on the history of horror in popular culture, Danse Macabre. The Dance of Death -- the tradition which dates back to the late fifteenth century, and not King's work from 1981 -- began, according to Bettie Anne Doebler: "as a tradition of warning and developed in so bizarre and 'macabre' a fashion that it may well have been the stimulus for the tradition of comfort which developed in the fifteenth century blockbooks and contained the visual and textual instructions for the 'art of dying well' [*ars morendi*]." (75). Doebler explains that "within the *ars morendi* tradition," (75) the *memento mori* (Remember that thou too art about to die) can be found. In English literature, and perhaps the whole of Western Civilization, the most well known example of the *memento mori*, of course, comes courtesy of a dead fool and a "mad" Danish prince. The *memento mori*, Doebler says, "when used within the *ars*, [. . .] was the first stage whereby fear was used to stimulate a man to think on his own death before it was too late" (75).

King resurrects this tradition and makes it accessible to twentieth-century pop-culture sensibility by, literally, putting shoes on its feet. With his friends standing around him and the rain thundering down, Gordie describes the position and appearance of Brower's body, drawing specific attention to the fact that, "his feet were bare, and a few feet behind him [. . .] I saw a pair of filthy low-topped Keds" ("The Body" 421). King transposes the traditional image of the skull onto a pair of sneakers: from one hollow-eyed reminder that one "had a tongue in it" (Hamlet 5.1.74) to another memento complete with tongue, eyelets, and a sole.

Biddle points out, "the Keds are a powerful symbol for Gordie -- of youth, of life, of the physical journey itself" (94). In the mind of twelve-year-old Gordon Lachance, the Keds represent the contracted nature of Brower's life: the "can't, don't, won't" ("The Body" 421). Through the agency of a pair of filthy tennis shoes," Biddle says, "Gordie finally is able to transmute death from an abstraction to a concretion and to understand it as a denial of life" (94). Like the vanishing point of the railroad tracks the boys follow into the backwoods of Maine, Gordie gains a perspective into death, but rejects it almost immediately as unnatural.

This moment happens as the boys leave Brower behind, and set out back to Castle Rock. Just as he did when he first saw Brower, Gordie describes the position of his body, but as he looks closer he begins to see the places where the train hit him, he sees Brower's bloated stomach and flies that circle around and light off his body, he smells the odor of decomposing flesh, "I pushed it away with horror" ("The Body" 434) says Gordie. Death has come a second time into Gordie Lachance's life. Again, it appears in all its glory and draped in its best finery; however, no matter how much Gordie might have thought he had in common with Ray Brower in life, he is unprepared for what Brower looks like in death. Gordie turns away and that is the last time he will see Ray Brower in the flesh.

"Chris died almost instantly"
("The Body" 450)

At the end, although Gordie remains "the only one who is still alive," Chris Chambers perhaps doubles as perhaps the closest thing to a living presence in the text. In the documentary "Walking the Tracks: The Summer of *Stand By Me*," King comments on what he felt Chris represented in the novella: "For me Gordie is more narrator than he is

heroic figure. I felt that if there was a hero, it was a tragic hero, it was Chris Chambers, and so I was more interested in seeing Chris through Gordie's eyes than I was in seeing Gordie himself" (Stand By Me).

Whether you agree with King's intention or not, to truly see Gordie through Chris's eyes is to recognize Gordie's talents as a writer: "The stories [. . .] It's like you could tell a million stories and still only get the ones on top. You'll be a great writer someday, Gordie" ("The Body" 391). Still lacking the self-confidence any writer needs (including the writer of a Master's thesis) Gordie tells Chris he does not share in his enthusiasm for either writing or his talent as a writer. Chris fires back: "Yeah, you will. Maybe you'll even write about us guys if you ever get hard up for material" (391). As I discussed earlier, Chris is a source of encouragement and inspiration for Gordie, a twelve-year-old muse. Inspiration, however, comes at a very high, but familiar cost in this story -- Chris's death in exchange for Gordie's life. In another in what is becoming a long list of paradoxes, by encouraging Gordie to write, Chris also provides him with a route (a "magic corridor perhaps) to unknowingly return to the traumas that have ordered Gordie's entire existence. If "Stud City" provided Gordie with a way to exorcise his fears about death and attempt to "impose control" (336) over his unresolved emotions over his brother's death than maybe that sense of "dreadful exhilaration" he felt was imagined. Consciously Gordie may think he is imposing control over his experiences, but subconsciously his mind has short-circuited and any return to made to "write about us guys" is a return to the traumas of his childhood.

The stories that keep bubbling to the top of Gordie's mind are the stories in which he sees the faces of his dead friends. "The Body" is as much about a boys he never knew

well, Denny Lachance and Ray Brower, as it is about a boy Gordie knew better than anyone else, Chris Chambers. It is this presence of an absence who reaches out of Gordie's memories of "long purple evenings" (351) in 1960 with "The Fleetwoods singing 'Come Softly to Me,'" (351) to remind Gordie of those mute, but ageless words spoken by the memento mori: "*Remember that thou too art about to die.*"

As a writer, Gordie inscribes the present with the memories of his past. The story that he decides to tell orbits around the axis of his older brother's death caused by an accident. To try to understand and explain his emotions over the loss of his brother, four months later he searches out death again. This time it is a boy that was accidentally struck by a train, a boy Gordie has never met in his life and only becomes acquainted with in death, Ray Brower. This time the difference between the known and the unknown is plain to see: "He was dead" (422). Because of Gordie's closeness in age and geographic location to Brower, he rejects the thought that anything like death could ever happen to him. A third historical rupture occurs when Gordie reads about another accident, this one involving the murder of his closest childhood friend, Chris Chambers. It takes Gordie eleven years to develop his writing talents before he can share [his] story with the world and finally come to terms with his fears about death and the loss he still feels over his brother's death. Gordie will never recover what was lost, the wound does not heal because it cannot. As Gordie says to his editor, Keith, "the only reason anyone writes stories is so they can understand the past and get ready for some future mortality" (411). To which I would add: while you wait for the dreams where the hail falls in his open eyes.

So am I: an epilogue

"So am I" are the last three words of "The Body," spoken by someone "who is still alive," or if you prefer, someone with whom fate has yet to call upon. On a trip back to Castle Rock to visit his father, Gordie looks passed the mills and out towards the Castle River and says, "the trestle upstream is gone, but the river is still around. So am I" (451). Before I treat Gordie's final words, I would first like to reflect on what I have previously discussed pertaining to the meaning of the word "home" in "The Body."

Freud defined the word 'heimlich' or the English "homely" as "familiar and agreeable," but also as "concealed and kept out of sight" ("The Uncanny" 225). Without getting too bogged down in yet another etymological discussion, I would like to offer the OED definition the word "home:" "The place of one's dwelling or nurturing with conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it." As I have demonstrated in my discussions throughout this project, in the homes of many of the characters in this story, very little "nurturing" goes on. There are two exceptions, Denny Lachance and Ray Brower, but the rest and peace that they find when they return home is far from agreeable either for them or for those they leave behind. Like Teddy I keep asking myself: "then what happened?" What happens to those who die in automobile accidents, or get knocked out of their sneakers by a speeding train, or are unfortunate enough to be in the wrong fast-food restaurant at the wrong time? Lachance, King, "The Body" itself, none of these sources offers any explanation or answer to this question, nor do they provide a spiritual dimension or salvation. "The Body" is physical not spiritual. In the end, survival is not a result of heroic triumph, and there is no action that can restore innocence destroyed by experience. In the end, survival is the result of random chance

tempered in the end by fate. A requiem for Ray Brower or for Denny Lachance or Chris Chambers is not a benediction for the repose of the souls of the departed, but an orison for the physical body to finally find rest in a chaotic and seemingly uncaring "home" as ours. Perhaps the only solace, the only "home" in this maelstrom of discord is to be found in another "bawdy tale," the one that began this project, "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan." Maybe all we can do is to follow the example set down by Davie "Lard Ass" Hogan: go home, go to your room, lock the door and take comfort in the fact that as far as today goes, you are still alive; that is at least for now.

So am I: an epitaph

Throughout the arc of this project I have often reflected about my own fragile mortality. Writing for months about death and trauma will do that to a body and a mind. Am I like Gordie haunted by loved ones who have died, forever revisiting and returning to the moments I heard about the end of their lives? Yes, and no. What I have found is that I am not alone in my search to understand life and how my own death will figure into it. To my surprise, I have learned through conversations with advisors, other professors, and peers that death is not such a taboo topic. Each of these people has experienced loss and each one of them has been touched by death, and all understand that death is after all a part of life. I heard about the death of high school classmates who like Ray Brower and Denny Lachance are remembered as perpetual teenagers, preserved in a year, a time, and a moment that has long since passed. I listened as someone described to me how he watched his father take his final breath. I did not solicit either of these stories, they were simply told to me. One story that helped me to understand that "The Body" is as much about death as it is about life and survival came from (with index finger raised and

making a slight up and down motion with the tip of the finger) talking to Tony. Tony Magistrale, the advisor the thesis you have just about finished reading. At the time of this conversation, Tony's father had recently passed away -- the man to whom Tony dedicated a book that I have used, Landscape of Fear. Tony said to me, "Keith, when you lose your father, you realize you are next, not now, not today, but you are next." I have not forgotten Tony's poignant albeit grave advice and I hope it will still be many years before I truly understand what he said to me that day. While researching this project, I read, appropriately enough for my topic, King's Danse Macabre. At the end of chapter six, he too confirmed for me what Tony said. King finishes his discussion on the theme of death in American horror movies this way: "the ultimate subtext that underlies all good horror films is, *But not yet. Not this time*" (199, King's emphasis). Gordie's attempts to come to terms with the deaths of his brother, Brower, and his three childhood friends is the beginning of Gordie's understanding of not only his own mortality, but also his realization -- although traumatic -- that the temporary freedom from death is life. It is only Gordie, "the one who is still alive" ("The Body" 414) who can make the statement, "So am I." Like you, like me, Gordie Lachance knows he is going to die, but not now, and not today.

Requiem aeternam dona eis / Domine Et lux perpetua eis.

Notes

¹ Translated as "Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord / And let perpetual light shine upon them." Quotation and translation are from the web site <http://usrwww.mpx.com.au/~charles/Requiem/lyrics.htm>.

² I am reminded of the opening line of Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*: "The Thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could" (848) when I think of Lard Ass Hogan. Perhaps the blood of Montresor runs through the veins of Davie Hogan.

³ See Linda Badley's "Stephen King Viewing the Body" for parallels between "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" and Stephen King's first novel *Carrie*.

⁴ Gideon's comments are from the booklet included with the DVD and not from any of the supplemental extras included on the disc.

⁵ The movie summary that appears on the back of packaging is a perfect example of what I mean by burying "The Body." After extolling the coming-of-age virtues of the film for at least two and a half inches of copy, the very last line reads: "Filled with humor and suspense, it is based on the novella 'The Body' by Stephen King.

⁶ This total does not include the number of times words like "murder," "suicide," and "drowning" (to name a few) are used throughout the course of the story as well.

⁷ Dusset's (King's) attribution of this quotation to the Bible is inaccurate. According to *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, it is actually from The Burial Service in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Nathan Haskell Dole, the site manager at <http://www.bartelby.com/100> says "it is derived from a Latin antiphon, said to have been composed by Notker, a monk in St. Gall in 911. It also forms the groundwork of Luther's antiphon 'De Morte'."

⁸ Although I disagree with Winter's interpretation of "The Body," *Art of Darkness* stands as a benchmark of King criticism. In King scholarship, I believe respect must be paid to the fact that Winter was one of the first scholars to acknowledge both King's importance as a horror writer and his influence on popular culture in the late 20th century.

⁹ I feel that Jungian analysis of "The Body" falls short especially in Biddle's conclusion. He claims that by finding Brower's body and defeating the older gang of boys, Gordie, "the hero," somehow remedies the sterility and lack of love apparent in Castle Rock. Although Biddle does concede that this is a tough jump to make, it does resonate in Gordie's "triumph" of becoming a writer and in strengthening his friendship with Chris.

¹⁰ So as not to create a "Doris Kearns Goodwin" type debacle, my use of the term "monster" for describing the trope of the double was a suggestion made to me by my advisor Tony Magistrale.

¹¹ Gordie refers to himself as "the Ancient Mariner at thirty-four" ("The Body" 414); if he was 12 in 1960, he would be 34 in the year 1982.

¹² According to Joseph Reino in *Stephen King: The First Decade, Carrie to Pet Sematary*: "The pleasantly named town [. . .] appears in numerous short stories" (66). Based on the chronological publication of King's work -- and according to my research -- *The Dead Zone* is King's first published work in which a part of the story's action takes place in the town Castle Rock.

¹³ In the Castle Rock story-cycle, Frank Dodd has become somewhat of "folk villain." In *Cujo*, the narrator suggests that there might be "one parent somewhere in Castle Rock --

or perhaps one grandmother — who quieted kids by telling them Frank Dodd would get them if they didn't watch out, if they weren't good" (2). Another sagacious narrator in the prelude to Needful Things beckons the reader over to the bandstand where Dodd committed his first murder when he was only nineteen. The narrator says, "no one has forgotten Frank Dodd [. . .] or the dog, either, the one that came down with rabies" (7).¹⁴ In his interview with Tony Magistrale in 1989, King specifically addressed the issue of wanting to leave Castle Rock behind, he said to Magistrale: "It is time to be done with Castle Rock because it is too easy to keep coming back to it. Too easy to rehash all the things which have occurred there over the years — the rabid dog, the crazy cop, those kids who ended a summer in search of a dead body along some railroad tracks" (Second Decade 17).

¹⁵ Although by 1973, King had already written 'Salem's Lot and later he will take "a college composition written in 1967" (Winter 223) and turn in into the short story "Jerusalem's Lot" to be published in Night Shift in 1978, he has not returned to either "Lot" since.

¹⁶ I should mention that I had thought of Castle Rock as kind of a "haunted house" before reading Savoy's essay in which he places it among "Poe's House of Usher, Hawthorne's Custom House, James's house on the "jolly corner," Stupen's Hundred, Stephen King's Castle Rock" (Savoy 9)

¹⁷ For a further exposition of "The Body's" secrets, see Reino pp. 130 -134.

¹⁸ There is a cave reference used in "The Body" which may (or may not) have an interesting correlation here. Vern refers to the area under the porch of his house as his "cave" (309). In an ironic twist, Vern's "cave" does not hide his treasure, his quart jar of pennies, from anyone but himself.

¹⁹ I would be remiss if I did not mention two notable examples of sympathetic adults in Castle Rock (yes, they do exist in limited numbers however) who intervene on behalf of Gordie and Chris are Mrs. Chalmers and Mrs. McGinn. "Aunt Evvie" Chalmers, as she's known in Castle Rock, stops Ace and Fuzzy Bracowicz from beating up Gordie, while it is Mrs. McGinn who brings Chris to the CMG Emergency Room after his older brother "Eyeball" breaks his arm and "left his face looking like a Canadian sunrise" (445).

²⁰ The scene that takes place on the trestle over the Castle River alludes to at least two other "water crossings" that I can think of off-hand, namely the classical mythic waterways of the River Styx and the Lethe. The River Styx serves as the border between two worlds, the known world of the living and the unknown "underworld" of the dead. The Lethe is interesting because not only does it serve as another boundary between the dead and the living, but it is also associated with forgetfulness. Again, another rich theme in text that deserves further investigation though not here.

²¹ In his interview with Magistrale in Second Decade, King addressed the issue of the significance of his character's names: "The kid in Apt Pupil, his name is Tod, which is German for death. It seems appropriate given that he falls in with this Nazi. [. . .] I've used names as a tag since I was a writer in college" (3).

²² I am using this term as it is defined in the Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms, as "a part of something used to represent the whole, or, occasionally, the whole is used to represent a part. Example: to refer to a boat as a "sail" (395).

²³ See Biddle pg. 86 - 87 for how Vern's role as the herald of the story fits within Campbell's heroic matrix.

²⁴ This anonymity experienced by Gordie and his friends by their community at large prefigures the "Losers Club" in *IT*. A point which I believe reinforces my earlier ideas about "The Body" being a prototype for King's "small town" horror stories that set a fellowship of children against the evil forces inherent in their community.

²⁵ In theological terms, the OED <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00188183> defines preterite as "One who is passed over or not elected by God."

²⁶ In light of the discussion of trauma in my thesis, it is interesting to note that Norman Duchamp, a veteran of World War II, might suffer from post-traumatic-stress disorder. In addition to this observation, during the oral defense phase of this project, my third reader, Professor Dennis Mahoney, pointed out a connection (coincidence?) between the name "Norman" and Teddy's boast that his father "stormed the beach at Normandy" ("The Body" 359) as perhaps another example of King's playful nature with character names in this story, Lachance, Chambers, etc.

²⁷ A theme that is too deep to explore here is the relationship between Gordie, Teddy, and Chris and their respective fathers.

²⁸ Another example of the Brower being passed over is how his body is actually returned home, Gordie says, "Ace must have decided that an anonymous phonecall was the safest course, because that's how the location of the corpse was reported" (442). Even when Brower's corpse is found, it is not returned until an anonymous voice brings him home.

²⁹ See Heldreth's "Viewing the Body" p. 73 for a sampling of these King/Lachance parallels.

³⁰ In "Walking the Tracks: The Summer of *Stand By Me*," included on the special edition DVD release of the film King says, "For a long time I thought I would love to be able to find a string to put on a lot of the childhood experiences that I remember, a lot of them were funny and some were kind of sad and the people that I had known and some of the guys I had hung out with that weren't headed anywhere except down blind alleys."

³¹ In my opinion, it is this line in particular that *almost* validates the autobiographical argument posed by Winter, Badley, and Reino.

³² For someone who seems extremely critical (to the point of downright meanness) about King's work; it strikes me as curious that Underwood has co-edited two collections of essays on King's work, *Kingdom of Fear* (1986) and *Fear Itself* (1982). Incredibly (ironically?) in each book, Underwood reprints a King essay (with the author's permission no less) and includes it as the Foreword to each work.

³³ The OED <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00188186> defines preterition as "the action of passing over, or fact of being passed over, without notice; omission, disregard, neglect."

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