

The Reflection of Self in Postmodern Labyrinth: An inquisitive Study in Stephen king's The Mist and Misery

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KEYWORDS

Moral Ramification,
Knowledge, Power
Struggle, Self.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates Stephen King's postmodern books Misery and The Mist, emphasizing how they examine the self in connection to literature and reality from a postmodern perspective. Misery lacks supernatural themes, in contrast to previous King works, and instead presents a conventional story that is chamber play-like in its suspense and restraint. Both the books challenge conventional ideas of authenticity, uniqueness, and authority in writing and reading by highlighting the power struggles and tensions between the individual and the community through a variety of techniques. Misery and The Mist present opposing perspectives on the nature of the ego, its place in the postmodern maze of crises and uncertainties, and the moral ramifications of one's decisions and deeds through their stories.

1. Introduction

The idea of 'self' in Stephen King's work, *The Mist* (1980), the protagonist encounters a terrible and perplexing circumstance that tests their sense of self, morality, and survival, making the story complicated and nuanced. *The Mist* can potentially be viewed as a work of postmodern fiction since it makes use of various elements that define this literary style including fragmentation; ambiguity intertextuality, "... as Heidi Strengell notes in one of the few full-length critical studies of King, 'Most of King's novels and stories are generic hybrids'" (Sears 5); and metafiction, "King establishes a link between his real readers and his fictional number-one-fan, adding a metafictional dimension to his text" (Korinna 136).

The Mist is a metafictional work because it highlights both its own fictionality and the narrative process. For instance, the protagonist and narrator David Drayton addresses the reader right away at the start and the conclusion of the novel, stating that he is jotting down his account of what occurred in a notebook and that he is unsure of how it will conclude. He also makes observations on the tropes and expectations associated with horror fiction, including the usage of monsters, tension, and gore.

It investigates how many characters respond to extraordinary situations and how their decisions either disclose or alter their sense of self. *The Mist* is another disjointed piece that portrays a confused and chaotic universe that defies explanation and consistency. The narrative is broken up into a number of chapters with a variety of names and emotional undertones, from hilarious to sorrowful. As a result of their conflicting and inconsistent personalities, motivations, and behaviours, the characters are likewise disjointed. For instance, the protagonist David Drayton makes an effort to retain his humanity and reason in the face of terror by guarding his son and developing relationships with other survivors like Amanda and Brenton. He also makes an effort to escape the grocery store, where they are imprisoned by the mist and the animals it hides. The religious fanatic Mrs. Carmody, "who is the clear representative of the of right-wing Christian fundamentalism" (Magistrale 358), on the other hand, gives in to craziness and fanaticism by claiming that the mist is God's wrath and that human sacrifices are required to placate Him. She manipulates and holds many of the scared and helpless shoppers under her control, fostering a cult-like environment that breeds violence and anarchy.

Because it makes allusions to and takes ideas from various books and genres, including science fiction, fantasy, horror, and mythology, *The Mist* is also an intertextual work. For instance, the mist itself is the product of an unsuccessful military experiment, a recurring theme in science fiction literature. The creatures who rise from the mist draw inspiration from many different genres, including Greek mythology, Ray Bradbury's *The Fog Horn*, and cosmic horror by H.P. Lovecraft.

King's governmental representatives and political agents are directly responsible for pursuing recklessly the dual genies of science and militarism, and they bear further culpability for heightening already dangerous situations in their misguided efforts to cover up mistakes, in their denial of responsibility, and in their failure to help citizens cope with the aftermath. (Magistrale 358)

A lot of things are left unanswered and a lot of options are left open in *The Mist*, making it another confusing masterpiece. There is never a complete explanation for or resolution to the origin and nature of the mist and the animals. As the survivors in the store establish alliances, conflicts, and hierarchies based on their views, values, and personalities, the fate of the characters and the world are likewise ambiguous and susceptible to interpretation. Additionally, the self is moulded by social interactions and group dynamics. For instance, Jim Grondin, the bag-boy, turns into a villain and a traitor due to his fear and treachery, but Ollie, the assistant manager, becomes a leader and a hero for his courage and abilities.

The story's conclusion is particularly murky since it doesn't offer the protagonist or the reader a clear resolve or sense of closure. *The Mist* investigates how many characters respond to extraordinary situations and how their decisions either disclose or alter their sense of self. This is demonstrated in the story's unexpected and sad finale, as David makes a choice that will haunt him for the rest of his life. In the end, *The Mist* implies that the self is not a permanent or stable entity, but rather a fluid and adaptive one, capable of changing for the better or worse depending on the circumstance and the decisions one makes.

Misery (1987) by Stephen King is a postmodern examination of the idea of self and the connection between the writer and the reader; "King expresses his need of recognition by using the writer-protagonist of *Misery*, Paul Sheldon, as his mouthpiece ..." (Strengell 263). The United States published it first in 1987. The book was a finalist for best novel at the World Fantasy Awards. After a vehicle accident, Paul Sheldon, a popular author, is taken hostage by Annie Wilkes, who calls herself his "number one fan," in the story. *Misery* Chastain, Annie's favourite character, is revived in the new book Paul is required to write after killing her off in the previous one. Paul's battle to live and escape Annie's control is also a battle to restore his own identity and creative independence, which Annie's obsessional demands have warped and defiled; "You killed him, Paul said. His voice sounded dim and ancient. She smiled uneasily at the wall. Well, I guess it was something like that. I don't remember very well. Just when he was dead. I remember that. She smiled" (Yadriha and Mariana 9).

In order to question the ideas of authenticity, originality, and authority in literature, the novel makes use of a number of postmodern techniques, including metafiction, intertextuality, and unreliable narration. Metafiction describes the self-referential element of a work of fiction that highlights its inherent fictionality and blurs the lines between fact and fiction. Linda Badley thinks the novel as an "allegory of writing out of bodily misery" (Badley 6), as it mostly focuses on Paul's ongoing anguish, torment, and gradual ascent out of the fog of pain, regaining his sense of self and the will to live. Paul thinks of himself as a mind-controlled being, but he is constantly reminded throughout the story that he is still a creature of the body. Annie adds remarks and there are typos and phrases that have been crossed out in Paul's latest book, *Misery's Return*, which is displayed as a manuscript inside the book. Paul's autobiography, in which he reflects on his literary career and personal life, is also included in the book. Through the use of several narrative levels, Paul's public persona as a well-known author and his innermost self as a flawed human being is contrasted.

Intertextuality is the usage of quotes or references from other texts inside the book, which fosters a conversation between other literary works and casts doubt on the notion of originality. Paul, for instance, makes several allusions to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* throughout the book, comparing his predicament to that of Prospero, the banished magician who used his craft to subdue his adversaries and reclaim his rightful position. Paul also draws parallels between his imaginary world and Stephen King's own literary universe by making references to other works by the author, including *The Shining* and *The Stand*. When a narrator's credibility or impartiality is questioned or undermined, it is referred to as unreliable narration. This makes the reader doubt the veracity or authenticity of the account. Paul's account of events in *Misery* is inaccurate because he is impaired by drugs, pain, and terror, all of which alter his perspective and recall of events. Additionally, he acknowledges fabricating or leaving out information in his autobiography, which calls into question his credibility and honesty as a storyteller. Additionally, Annie's voice, which denotes her own perception of reality and Paul's work, frequently interrupts or contradicts Paul's narration. With no respect for the author's or the text's original intentions or meanings, Annie assumes the role of a reader who imposes her own expectations and preferences on them.

The postmodern investigations of the ego and the dynamic between the individual and the communal in Stephen

King's books *Misery* and *The Mist* take place within the backdrop of a postmodern labyrinth. A complicated and chaotic scenario or setting that defies logic, order, and meaning is referred to as a "postmodern labyrinth", and it questions the identity and morality of the characters who are stuck or lost in it. Both books feature heroes who are imprisoned in harsh circumstances and must contend with physical and psychological dangers that threaten their sense of self and moral principles. Novels, however, also offer many viewpoints on the nature and function of the self in the context of others and the wider world in the postmodern labyrinth.

After a vehicle accident, Annie Wilkes, Paul Sheldon's "number one fan" (King 6) imprisons him in the novel *Misery*. Misery Chastain, Annie's favourite character, is revived in the new book Paul is required to write after killing her off in the previous one. Paul's battle to live and escape Annie's control is also a battle to restore his own identity and creative independence, which Annie's obsessional demands have warped and defiled. Individuality, autonomy, and artistic expression are what characterize Paul as a person, and Annie's imposition of her own beliefs and standards on him and his work puts these things in jeopardy. The self of Paul is also contrasted with the self of Annie, who is characterized by her fanaticism, insanity, and brutality, making her a risky and unpredictable foe; "According to Kathleen Margaret Lant, Annie giving Paul injections and making him swallow pills (often thrusting her fingers into his mouth) also evokes the image of rape" (Lant 174; Korinna 119). In *Misery*, Annie's house, a remote and cramped setting that separates Paul from the outside world and condemns him to Annie's whims and torments, serves as a metaphor for the postmodern labyrinth. Paul's most recent book, *Misery's Return*, which is a forced and artificial construct that deviates from his initial aim and vision for the piece, is another example of the postmodern labyrinth. In *Misery*, the postmodern labyrinth tests Paul's understanding of who he is as a writer and a person and makes him to face his own insecurities, uncertainties, and flaws.

A strange mist envelops the town in *The Mist*, bringing with it lethal animals from another dimension, trapping commercial artist David Drayton, his son, and other survivors in a supermarket. In addition to fighting for his life and the life of his kid, David must also fight to save his humanity and sanity in the face of the monsters that lie in the mist and among the populace. The stupidity, brutality, and selfishness of some of the other survivors, notably Mrs. Carmody, a religious fanatic who incites violence and hysteria among the group, test David's sense of reason, compassion, and responsibility. The self of Mrs. Carmody, who is a dangerous and powerful leader due to her enthusiasm, paranoia, and manipulation, is also compared with the self of David. The mist itself, an enigmatic and unpredictably occurring phenomenon that obscures reality and causes dread and uncertainty among the populace, serves as a metaphor for the postmodern maze in *The Mist*. The supermarket, a commonplace location that sparks strife and confusion among the survivors, is another example of the postmodern labyrinth. In *The Mist*, the postmodern maze tests David's sense of himself as a father and a citizen and pushes him to make morally challenging choices.

In conclusion, the postmodern novels *Misery* and *The Mist* investigate the idea of the self in connection to literature and reality within the framework of a postmodern labyrinth. "Misery is different from other King novels since it lacks any supernatural phenomena: it is a mainstream novel, very restrained ... yet full of tension, almost like a chamber play" (Korinna 7). In order to show the power dynamics and tensions that exist between the individual and the communal, both books employ a variety of strategies that call into question the ideals of authenticity, originality, and authority in writing and reading. The two books also offer opposing perspectives on the nature of the ego, its function in the postmodern maze of crises and uncertainty, and the moral ramifications of one's decisions and deeds.

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