

“Sour Ground”: Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary* and The Politics of Territory

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“What wear and tear, what useless irritation, we could spare ourselves if we agreed to accept the true conditions of our human experience and realise that we are not in a position to free ourselves completely from its patterns and rhythm! Space has its own values, just as sounds and perfumes have colours, and feelings weight” (1).

So claims Lévi-Strauss in his classic anthropological work *Tristes Tropiques*, regretting Western society’s loss of a sense of territory that the Amazonian tribes he visits have maintained. Yet the power of space and territory can be felt strongly in horror fiction, particularly in the work of Stephen King, and amidst the corruption and violence that pervades his “bad places” can be detected a strong sense of the power of place. This is emphatically not to suggest that King’s writing betrays some kind of hidden New Age spiritualism, but rather to point out that places are symbolically imbued with social, historical, and political values in a way that lends wider relevance to narratives that might otherwise be too easily dismissed as apolitical or inconsequential. *Pet Sematary* (1983) most definitely falls into this category.

Pet Sematary is the story of a young couple who move to a new house in Maine to raise their two children. Behind this house, they soon discover a cemetery for pets that the local children have made, including a sign with the misspelling that lends the novel its title. When the family cat is run over, however, Louis’s neighbour Jud shows him another burial place to put the body, past the cemetery and into the wilderness where an older burial ground lies, one whose strange power becomes apparent when Louis’s cat wanders back into his house the next day. The cat, however, has been changed by the experience, and becomes a sinister force in the house. With fatal inevitability, Louis’s son is next to be killed by the busy road that cuts past the house and he is compelled by his grief to make what the reader knows will be the fatal error of burying the body in the supernatural burial ground. The plot itself appears to be little more than a spun-out version of W.W. Jacob’s “The Monkey’s Paw” (1902) (2), yet King’s novel reveals its true concerns not through the bare bones of plot, but through the way in which he represents the nature and politics of land.

Pet Sematary, like most of King’s work, can too easily be dismissed as apolitical. The theme of an ancient Indian burial ground is by now a horror cliché, yet the political nature of the theme should not be disregarded in a reading of the novel. Horror fiction is often read in the Freudian terminology of anxiety, but in King we can see an author who is fully aware of his own “anxieties”, indeed citing their purgation as an aspect of horror that may be said to have worth, here discussing film:

I believe that the artistic value the horror movie most frequently offers is its ability to form a liaison between our fantasy fears and our real fears. I’ve said and will reemphasize here that few horror movies are conceived with ‘art’ in mind; most are concerned only with ‘profit’ in

mind. The art is not consciously created but rather thrown off, as an atomic pile throws off radiation. (3)

King himself wouldn't claim to write purely for profit but retains a sincere commitment to storytelling, yet it is not outrageous to suggest that he also has his own work in mind when describing horror films as "throwing off" elements of anxiety. Aspects of King's work can be said to reside in this slightly vague wasteland between conscious awareness of his own fears and an unconscious reflection of those of society.

From the late 1960s onwards, inspired by the successes of black civil rights campaigners, Native Americans began to speak up on behalf of their troubled communities. During the 1970s these protesters used copies of old treaties as the basis for restitution and won significant settlements in states such as Alaska, Massachusetts, and Maine (4). Maine, of course, happens to be the home of Stephen King and the setting for much of his fiction, including *Pet Sematary*. King explicitly brings the Native American land debate into the narrative. When the family move into their new idyllic home, one of the most striking things about it is what lies beyond the house itself: "I know it sounds funny to say your nice little house there on the main road, with its phone and electric lights and cable TV and all, is on the edge of a wilderness," Jud Crandall tells the family, "but it is" (5). This land, like any other wilderness, is far from being without ideological value. The land is undergoing a dispute from the local native tribe:

Beyond the house was a large field for the children to play in, and beyond the field were woods that went on damn near forever. The property abutted state lands, the realtor had explained, and there would be no development in the foreseeable future. The remains of the Micmac Indian tribe had laid claim to nearly 8,000 acres in Ludlow, and the complicated litigation, involving the Federal government as well as that of the state, might stretch into the next century. (6)

This is all based on actual events, and in fact the tribe was awarded federal recognition in 1991, bringing with it a nine hundred thousand dollar grant to repurchase tribal land (7). King, then, is not just using the Native American theme as a device for introducing the supernatural, but plants an awareness of genuine political issues in the mind of the reader from the start (8). If we accept the conservative or bourgeois model of the horror novel in this case, then we might expect King to use tribal supernaturalism as the source of his terrors without recourse to such socially relevant details. On the other hand, the novel makes no apologies for representing only the perspective of the middle-class white narrator as cultural outsider to tribal beliefs. Clearly, there is something significant to be exposed in King's discourse of land.

Tony Magistrale (9) recounts asking King in 1984 how living in Maine affects his writing: "He replied that 'there's a Maine very few outsiders ever get to know. It's a place of rich Indian lore, rocky soil that makes it difficult to grow things, and incredible levels of poverty. Once you get out

from behind the coastal resorts, the real Maine begins” (10). What King could mean by the “real Maine” is interesting. One possibility is that this statement reflects his particular brand of perverse humour, that in the increasingly homogenised and sterile society we live in, the only truly interesting, or perhaps “real” things left are to be found in the darker crevices of life. Taken this way, King’s fiction can be seen as an attack on the totalising influence of media representation. There is an inherent scepticism, both in his statement about the “real” Maine, and in the insistence of his narratives to disrupt enlightenment ideals of rationality. The conservatism that King professes, then, is not so much skewed towards reinforcing social norms but rather more like the conservative voice of George Orwell in 1984. The Party, King insists, cannot lay absolute claim to history. Suppose, he suggests in *Danse Macabre*, “that when the creator of horror is finally stripped all the way to his or her core of being we find not an agent of the norm but a friend (11) – a capering, gleeful, red-eyed agent of chaos?” (12). King’s statements, made in the same book, seem contradictory, claiming that he may be conservative or chaotic. He demands that what is abjected by the mainstream (poverty, killing, the pagan past) will make its return in one form or another, thus affirming as Poe did in “The Tell-Tale Heart” that the truth will out, while also conceding to the idea that there may be no fundamental truth at all. “What about that possibility, friends and neighbours?” (13).

The desire to create something fixed and certain is borne out in *Pet Sematary*, and specifically in the home in which Louis invests his hopes for the future. Everything about his new life suggests certainty and security, as opposed to the recurring daydream he has of ditching his family and running off to Florida to work as a medic in Disneyland. His job as college doctor offers steady money, the routine of his evening beer with Jud Crandall lets him think of the old man as a father figure, and his pleasant new house becomes that most comforting of places, home. The comfort and security of Louis’s new life is reinforced incessantly on the reader by the repetition of the theme of home throughout the first part of the novel. Some of the closing lines of the chapters are as follows: “That was how they came to Ludlow” (14), “It was time to go home” (15), “He tacked the memo up and went to bed” (16), “‘Yes,’ he said. Home sounded good to him” (17). These sentimental returns to familiarity at the end of each chapter impress on the reader Louis’s sense of contentment. Not only does the security of home feature highly on Louis’s agenda, however, but his wife and daughter seek out certainty in their own ways, most notably with regard to death.

The most obvious way in which these characters seek certainty is to banish the notion of death from the family home. Rachel, Louis’s wife, refuses to deal with death in any way after a traumatic childhood when she watched her sister slowly die of spinal meningitis. Ellie, their daughter, is five years old and only confronts death for the first time when she sees the pet cemetery and worries that her cat is going to die. Louis finds his own certainty about death in the medical facts that he has learned as a doctor and subscribes to the view that death is a natural part of life. Rachel, on the other hand, becomes almost hysterical when confronted with the idea. Louis refers to her behaviour as her “death-phobia” (18). Old Jud Crandall’s wife Norma comments that:

‘It’s not such a bad idea to be on nodding acquaintance with it. These days ... I don’t know ... no one wants to talk about it or think about it, it seems. They took it off the TV because they thought it might hurt the children some way – hurt their minds – and people want closed coffins so they don’t have to look at the remains or say goodbye ... it just seems like people want to forget it.’ (19)

The idea that such an acceptance is missing from the modern American psyche is partly what informs Goddu’s critique of American gothic. Discussing St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), she notes a passage where the narrator discovers a tortured slave suspended in a cage:

Located in a clearing enclosed by shaded woods, the caged slave makes manifest the horror of slavery that the sunny South conceals from the public. Moreover, by fusing contradictory categories, this scene of live burial makes the familiar frightening. The tortured slave is located in the proper pastoral setting but not in his regular place: instead of tilling the ground, fertilizing it with his sweat, he is suspended above it, staining it with his blood. Half-dead and half-alive, a rotting corpse and a Christ figure, the caged slave embodies the abject, ‘the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite’ that disturbs ‘identity, system, order’. (20)

Here Goddu uses Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* to invoke the notion that what is abjected in the national consciousness is a state of ambiguity that presents an irresolvable challenge to the mythical ideals of the Enlightenment. Leslie A. Fiedler famously describes the American novel as being obsessed with death: “However shoddily or ironically treated, horror is essential to our literature [...] Through these gothic images are projected certain obsessive concerns of our national life: the ambiguity of our relationship with Indian and Negro, the ambiguity of our encounter with nature, the guilt of the revolutionist who feels himself a parricide” (21). It is tempting to apply Fiedler’s conception of the American novelist as the white male suffering the anxiety of racial conflict and the sexually dysfunctional legacy of Puritanism to writers such as Stephen King, but this picture will have to be adjusted to account for the massive social upheaval that informs American society after the 1960s. Fiedler goes on to argue that:

The American writer inhabits a country at once the dream of Europe and a fact of history; he lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence – on the ‘frontier,’ which is to say, the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face. To express this ‘blackness ten times black’ and to live by it in a society in which, since the decline of orthodox Puritanism, optimism has become the chief effective religion, is a complex and difficult task. (22)

The past century has seen advancements in technology that have saved lives, time and effort, while at the same time destroying traditional jobs and giving us the threat of global annihilation. Huge steps forward in civil rights, media communication and youth culture have liberated and excited many, while confusing and alienating others. Uncertainty is the byword of the late twentieth century, and as

H.P. Lovecraft comments, “uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities” (23).

Thomas L. Dumm points out that, “Etymologies suggest that fear once meant the experience of being between places of protection, in transit, in a situation analogous to the condition that is commonly referred to in contemporary ethnographic literature as liminality” (24). This idea of being in between places of safety, which can apply equally well to paradigms of knowledge as physical places, helps to explain the discourse of social change and the fear it causes. It is in a situation between places of safety that Louis finds himself once he crosses the deadfall between the “Pet Sematary” at the back of his house and the ancient burial ground beyond. The journey to the burial ground is marked in several different ways by a blurring of boundaries. Louis is haunted by the journey through the woods, which serves as a kind of uncanny junction or barrier not so much between “this world” and the “afterlife”, but between Louis’s mode of thought and the tribal, pagan past, which is demonised within the narrative. Louis’s condition of being between places of safety is an uncanny juncture where a tribal mode of knowledge surfaces and the supernatural becomes the benchmark for the world to make sense, despite his scientific protestations.

Lévi-Strauss, in “The Structural Study of Myth”, argues that all myths come from external experience and in fact, “the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and [...] the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (25). His emphasis, then, is on the way in which myth can be used to describe the world, differences in mythical thought being explained by specific local circumstances. Land and location are what is important to the formation of ideas, religious, mythological, or otherwise. What Louis confronts in *Pet Sematary* is the idea that land has its own memory, and even power. There is a telling conversation early in the novel when Louis and Rachel look out over the land that sits behind their new home:

‘You can see everything.’ Rachel said in a low, awed voice. She turned to Louis. ‘Honey, do we own this?’ And before Louis could answer, Jud said: ‘It’s part of the property, oh yes.’ Which wasn’t Louis thought, quite the same thing. (26)

The question is whether or not they belong in this place. After an argument with Rachel, Louis broods on the way she had slept on her own side as far away from him as possible: “Territory is that which defines all else, hadn’t he read that in some college history course?” (27). The importance of territory is emphasised by the way in which King deals with the spaying of Church, the family cat. Neutering the animal is necessary so that it doesn’t want to cross the busy road, but Louis is filled with regret that the operation will “lessen the cat, turn him into a fat old tom before his time” (28). This literal castration anxiety he feels for the cat is a product of his own unconscious fears. Baudrillard points out that, “Animals have no unconscious, because they have a territory. Men have only had an unconscious since they lost a territory. At once territories and metamorphoses have been taken from them – the unconscious is the individual structure of mourning in which the loss is

incessantly, hopelessly replayed – animals are the nostalgia for it” (29). Louis’s pity for the cat represents not so much an act of empathy but an expression of this nostalgia for territory that lurks in the part of his mind that dwells in the wilderness.

The wilderness here is associated with a primal past as well as an idealised notion of the Native American as “noble savage”. Roderick Frazier Nash argues that it was European civilisation that brought the idea of the wilderness to America:

We should pause to recognize that at the time of European colonization, there were already hunting and gathering people in the New World who did not recognize the wilderness/civilization distinction. Indeed, ‘wilderness’, may, in retrospect, be the wrong word to characterize North America at the time of European contact. But the colonists did use it, and they carried the full set of pastoral prejudices. Living on the edge of what they took to be a vast wilderness, they re-experienced the insecurities of the first farmers and builders. There was, initially, too much wilderness for the appreciation. Understandably, the wild people of the New World seemed ‘savages,’ and their wild habitat a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and transformation in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity. (30)

Louis is not necessarily a representative of early colonists, but an awareness of this background is lurking in his consciousness, especially in the light of the Native American land debates going on in Pet Sematary’s time. Most notably, the old-fashioned prejudice of the Native American as morally inferior has been replaced with the equally false ideal of the “noble savage”. More importantly, however, the civilisation/wilderness distinction exists as an idea that informs the way he comes to think about the patch of ground that lies beyond his family home. Rather than being representative of a genuine cultural distinction, this archetypal “bad place” represents a loosening of categories that Louis, as symbolic family man and capitalist, fears. The theme of tribal superstition is introduced as a means of articulating these fears to the reader.

Every horror story needs some kind of monstrous Other to provide the threat, and while in Pet Sematary the fear King plays on is ostensibly the return of the dead as monster, there is also a symbolic Other that appears in shadowy form throughout the story, that of the Wendigo. The Wendigo is a North American tribal spirit that is said to possess those who eat the flesh of another human (31). In the novel, the Wendigo never explicitly appears, but lurks in the woods as a threatening figure in the background: “It was a sound like nothing he had ever heard in his life – a living sound; a big sound. Somewhere nearby, growing closer, branches were snapping off” (32). The Wendigo here is flesh and blood, but undefined, a figure that is monstrous through its indeterminacy. As such, the Wendigo represents a blurring of boundaries between what is rational and what is superstitious, what is natural and unnatural. It is fitting, then, that the creature inspires cannibalism, an extreme breakage of physical and moral boundaries. It is important to note King’s emphasis on the fact that the Wendigo is behind everything, that it has conspired circumstances to come about the way

they have, because this means it has power, and power over land is everything. The Wendigo is, in a way, representative of the Native American tribes who occupied this land before European settlers, certainly if we accept the idea that the tribal mode of knowledge is demonised in the novel. Susan Stewart, writing about the popularity of the freak show in the late nineteenth century, claims that the freak, often racialised as in the case of Siamese twins or Irish giants, can be thought of as standing in for a colonised culture:

The body of the cultural other is by means of this metaphor both naturalised and domesticated in a process we might consider to be characteristic of colonization in general. For all colonization involves the taming of the beast by bestial methods and hence the conversion and projection of the animal and human, difference and identity. On display, the freak represents the naming of the frontier and the assurance that the wilderness, the outside, is now territory. (33)

The taming of the wilderness was the primary concern for settlers in the New World, and the legacy of this sits heavily on modern shoulders. It is no wonder that in the context of a time when guilt over the grabbing of native land becomes a topic of political importance that the figure of the Wendigo, a symbol of the monstrosity of the untamed, should rear its head as a reminder of the fear that underpins the very basis of mainstream American society.

The Wendigo is a figure of boundaries transgressed. The living and the dead, reality and unreality, one body from another in connection with the great taboo of cannibalism, a tangible possibility in the Northern wastelands where the myth originates. The very physicality of the creature is ambiguous, and in the novel it is implied variously that it possesses people, that its touch turns them into cannibals, or that it is an independent creature roaming the woods. In between civilisation and wilderness, it performs the role of a boundary in the Heideggerian sense: “A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding” (34).

Deleuze would recognise it as becoming-cannibal. In this literary juncture a mythological beast performs the role that the notion of identity plays in the world; that of codifying the flow of desire. Here, the Wendigo represents an absolute limit:

In the first place, desiring-production is situated at the limits of social production; the decoded flows, at the limits of the codes and the territorialities; the body without organs, at the limits of the socius. We shall speak of an absolute limit every time the schizo-flows pass through the wall, scramble all the codes, and deterritorialize the socius: the body without organs is the deterritorialized socius, the wilderness where the decoded flows run free, the end of the world, the apocalypse. (35)

Wilderness and Civilisation are nothing more or less than social constructs designed to regulate the flow of power in a certain direction. The Wendigo here erupts from the text as the by-product of this system. Territoriality imposed on an uncodified nature is a temporary fiction that is dazzling in its seduction yet not immune from ill effects.

Jud tells Louis about the Indian ground, claiming that the Micmacs stopped coming to it because “the ground had gone sour” (36). We hear later that the tribe blamed this souring on the Wendigo, who appeared, “if the winter was long and hard and the food was short, there was north country Indians who would finally get down to the bad place where it was starve or ... or do something else” (37). This loaded statement from Jud makes clear the possibility that the Bad Place can be simply a state of the mind, and also signals the notion of cannibalism as so taboo that he can only imply it. Jud and Louis surmise that the native myths sprang up in response to feelings of guilt, and that the ground is “sour” simply because it contains the buried remains of those chosen to be eaten. Yet there is more going on in this discourse. On one level there is an apparent demonization of the native tribes and their culture, tied to the notion of ancient power in the land. When Louis sees a mass of rotting flowers washed down a drainage ditch in the local cemetery he thinks to himself, “These leavings were made in propitiation of a much older God than the Christian one [...] God of dead things left in the ground to rot. God of the mystery” (38). Yet this perspective contains in it the idea of an original truth that has since been masked by Christian colonisation. Although not explicitly stated, the novel does seem to imply that the land “went sour” about the time of European colonisation, which would make this “bad place” a product of European settlers. This corresponds to Nash’s view that the morally inferior wilderness condition of America was a product of the settler’s imagination.

Pet Sematary, then, presents an irreconcilable opposition between wilderness and civilisation. This opposition is configured as a dispute between two ways of living, that of the native tribal people who lived in a certain state of balance with the environment, and that of the European settlers, who have come to dominate the environment using the notion of ownership (39). This is clearly a one-sided contest, as the capitalist system of land ownership is firmly in place. Perhaps this does imply a sense of guilt on behalf of Louis and his family, repressed and transformed into a haunting force. Near the end of the novel, Louis contemplates a piece of wisdom passed on by Jud Crandall: “What you bought, you owned, and what you owned eventually came home to you” (40). This question of home is crucial to this debate. Although Baudrillard posits humans as nomadic creatures, uprooted from traditional lands, Edward S. Casey points out that we fear this nomadic existence, which implies the condition of being between places of safety discussed earlier:

A transitory place is better than none at all, but it only spurs on further searching for an enduring or at least reliable place. In the face of this risk, it is not surprising that human and nonhuman animals alike have come to rely on “territoriality” as a means of maintaining the stability and security of a home-place or home-region as defined by an appropriate “biotope” or “ecological niche.” The home territory embodies the plenitude that being placeless so painfully lacks. (41)

We deal with this fear by the process of house-building, then, although in late capitalist society this is something transitory in itself, exemplified by the “moving day” device used in *Pet Sematary* and many novels like it.

The home itself occupies a slightly strange place in the narrative. It is at once the most important object of attention in the novel and something that stands outwith total comprehension. When Jud Crandall tells the family that their home is on the edge of a wilderness he means it to be a strange, perhaps unsettling thought. The implication is that such a home, with all its mod-cons, is not supposed to be on the edge of a wilderness. The home becomes unheimlich in this regard; there is something not quite right. The scene at the beginning where the family drive up to their new home is supposed to be perfect, but looking back Louis has a different perspective:

The four of them settled down to spend a happy and old-fashioned Christmas. The house in North Ludlow, which had seemed so strange on that day in August when they pulled into the driveway (strange and even hostile, what with Ellie cutting herself out back and Gage getting stung by a bee at almost the same time), had never seemed more like home. (42)

This uncanny aspect of the house extends into the very way that Louis begins to see things. A scientist by training and inclination, he submits to feelings of superstition and gives anthropomorphic qualities such as hostility to random events and inanimate objects. This is associated with a stereotypical view of tribal societies. Joseph Gixti raises this point in relation to the feeling of fear:

According to Malinowski and Sartre, magic is dominant when control over the environment is weak. Magical beliefs and the (fearful) reactions which are based on such beliefs can on these terms be said to be the result of the states of uncertainty which are created by this challenge and by the negation of expectations. Feelings of fear can thus be said to derive from the conviction of loss of control and the sense of helplessness which become dominant in situations when (in Piagetian terms) the cognitive system can neither assimilate the environment into its own structure, nor adapt itself to the structure of the environment. (43)

The most contentious point of this argument is whether or not tribal societies feel the kind of helplessness Western anthropologists have postulated, since many tribal societies live within the context of a world view that does not demand control over the environment in the same way as our own society. Nonetheless, this point is well suited to the character of Louis, who finds himself in an environment which is strange and unexpected. His expectations of safety are negated, producing the effect of fear. Gixti’s use of the word “structure” is particularly apt here, since the practice of house building shapes the world view of those who live in them. The home is supposed to act as a protective barrier, but here becomes a gateway to terror. The ultimate helplessness for Western society is a lack of authority in one’s own home (with the possible exception of one’s own body, which is why they are often conflated). Thus the home takes on wider symbolic importance as an

indication of power, which is thoroughly subverted in the text. Near the end of the novel, when all Hell has broken loose, Jud Crandall fearfully approaches the Creed home and thinks back to Victor, an injured boy who Louis couldn't save on his first day in the college emergency room:

When he saw the billows of smoke, his first thought was that this was something else to lay at the door of Victor Pascow, who seemed, in his dying, to have removed some sort of crash-barrier between these ordinary people and an extraordinary run of bad luck. But that was stupid, and Louis's house was the proof. It stood calm and white, a little piece of clean-limbed New England architecture in the mid-morning sun. (44)

It isn't empirical proof that Jud seeks as a sign of normality, but proof based in intensity of feeling. Louis's house represents an order beyond itself that applies to a mental state as much as bricks and mortar. R.D. Dripps claims that "Architecture holds authority for a culture to the degree that it provides evidence of an ordered world" (45), a theme particularly evident in Jud's line of thinking. It just so happens that on this occasion the proof doesn't hold out. On some level this is surely an attack on the culture of normality that judges rightness by the appearance of respectability, whereas in reality terrible things may be happening behind the "clean-limbed architecture". Here, Louis's house takes on an uncanny aspect by subverting its own accepted meaning. If this place does not give us the order we look for, then what place does? The house becomes a symbolic gateway to chaos, portrayed here as the return of tribal forces that are at the same time supernatural and supremely natural, that it was supposed to banish in the first place by means of its construction.

Robert C. Young discusses territorialization in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's work on capitalism. He focuses on three points that are useful ones to bear in mind in the context of the current discussion. The first implication of their critique "serves as a reminder that colonialism above all involves the physical appropriation of land, its capture for the cultivation of another culture. It thus foregrounds the fact that cultural colonization was not simply a discursive operation but a seizure of cultural (in all sense of the word) space" (46). This focus on the physical aspect of colonialism affirms cultural space as having existence and importance in itself. The second implication is that in colonialism there is often a conflict "between societies that do and do not conceive of land as a form of private property: at one level indeed, colonialism involves the introduction of a new notion of land as property, and with it inevitably the appropriation and enclosure of land. This develops into a larger system of the imposition of economic roles and identities" (47). This aspect, already discussed in terms of Pet Sematary, emphasizes not only the fundamental cultural clash that occurs due to differing notions of ownership, but also that way in which such notions affect the entire world-view of a culture, foregrounding the conditions for thought within a system, and setting limits upon society. The third implication is that, "Colonization begins and perpetuates itself through acts of violence, and calls forth an answering violence from the colonized. Here capitalism is the destroyer of signification, the reducer of everything to a Jakobsonian system of equivalences, to commodification through the power of money" (48).

Deleuze and Guattari, then, describe the process by which capitalism inscribes itself on the world and the ways in which methods of resistance make themselves apparent, although here they are fictional. It is interesting to compare Jacqueline Foertsch's claim that "cancers and viruses have both emerged to some degree as late capitalist side-effects: environmental disasters introduced to non-immune populations in the process of military-industrial exploitation of the planet" (49). Indeed, it is the later half of the twentieth century that Western society has begun to fully appreciate the negative consequences of its industrial progress both environmentally and on a human scale. This has brought an increased sense of responsibility, but with it, guilt. Responsibility and guilt are the key themes of *Pet Sematary*. Louis came close to grabbing his son before the boy ran into the path of an oncoming truck, but didn't quite make it. This nagging sense of guilt on his part is needed as a plot device if we are to accept his motivations for proceeding with the acts of grave robbery and arcane resurrection that both he and the reader know is the wrong course of action to take. Yet throughout his near-mania, Louis maintains a sense of responsibility about what he does: "Besides, he gibbered to himself, it may still come out all right, there is no gain without risk, perhaps no risk without love. There's still my bag [...] There are syringes, and if something happens ... something bad ... no one has to know but me" (50). Jud Crandall's old saying, "A man grows what he can ... and he tends it" (51), appears throughout the novel, haunting Louis's thoughts.

Within the discourse of property and ownership, the human subject is inevitably drawn to projecting values upon landscapes and territory where none naturally exist. In defining their territory, the characters of the narratives discussed seek to maintain their sense of identity, the stability of which is threatened by whatever monstrous forces are introduced. Above all they desire the restoration of social order, be it for good or bad. Louis Creed wants his son back, even through magical resurrection, though he is prepared to kill the boy if he doesn't get what he expects (52). Louis, then, has not lost his sense of place entirely, but rather than seeing himself as part of his surroundings, he defines himself by the territory he controls. Territory in the novel becomes "bad" through the same process of binary categorisation that defines notions of race, exposing the assumptions thrown out by Western capitalism that are as superstitious as the beliefs it attempts to delineate itself in opposition to. *Pet Sematary* operates both on the level of exploitative horror yarn and as an insightful critique of the culture it is produced in and for. This is precisely the contradiction that underpins much of King's writing and make his work such a fascinating subject of criticism.

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Washington Square Post, 1973) p.124
2. In W.W. Jacobs, *The Lady of the Barge and Other Stories*, Book 2 (6th edn) (London & New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906)
3. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner Books, 1993)
4. George Brown Tindall & David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, brief fourth edn., (London & New York: W.W. Norton, 1984) p.1084-1085
5. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary* (London, New English Library, 1989) p.30
6. *Ibid*, p.4
7. See “Brief Synopsis of the History of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs”, in Aroostook Band of Micmacs website, < <http://www.micmac-nsn.gov/html/history.html> > [accessed 13/09/05]
8. At least, the Native American theme is fully disclosed. The spectre of Vietnam, however, could easily be said to hover in the background of this civilisation/wilderness borderline, and should be mentioned here.
9. Also, for a comparison of King and Hawthorne, see Tony Magistrale, “Stephen King’s *Pet Sematary*: Hawthorne’s Woods Revisited” in *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988) pp.126-134
10. Tony Magistrale, *Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic* p.18
11. The expected word here might be ‘fiend’. If this is King’s typo it is revealing.
12. Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*, p.444
13. *Ibid*, p.444
14. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.5
15. *Ibid*, p.37
16. *Ibid*, p.56
17. *Ibid*, p.73

18. Ibid, p.77
19. Ibid, p.52
20. Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p.20
21. Leslie a Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997) p.26
22. Ibid, p.26
23. H.P. Lovecraft, “Supernatural Horror in Literature”, in H.P. Lovecraft, *Omnibus 2: Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) pp.423-512 (p.435)
24. Thomas L. Dumm, “Telefear: Watching War News”, in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) pp.307-322 (p.312)
25. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth” (extract), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) pp.101-115 (p.114)
26. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.29
27. Ibid, p.54
28. Ibid, p.56
29. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994) p.139
30. Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven & London: Yale Note Bene, 2001) p.xiii
31. King’s source is almost certainly Algernon Blackwood’s short story ‘The Wendigo’ (1910)
32. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.372
33. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London & Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) p.110

34. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", in *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, rev. edn, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.343-364 (p.356)
35. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1984)
36. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.133
37. *Ibid*, p.153
38. *Ibid*, p.352
39. The idealisation of Native American peoples as living in absolute harmony with nature is, of course, inconsistent with facts and not far removed from the rather patronising view of the "Noble Savage". Nonetheless, it remains a powerful fictional symbol.
40. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.406
41. Edward S. Casey, *Casey, Edward S., Getting Back into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.xii
42. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.183
43. Joseph Gixti, *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989) p.153
44. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.417
45. R.D. Dripps, *The First House: Myth, Paradigm, and the Task of Architecture* (London & Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999) p.21
46. Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) p.172
47. *Ibid*, p.172
48. *Ibid*, p.173
49. Jacqueline Foertsch, *Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film, and Culture* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) p.25

50. Stephen King, *Pet Sematary*, p.375

51. *Ibid*, p.136

52. The possibility of reading *Pet Sematary* as an Oedipal parody in connection to Gage's violent reaction towards his father and Louis's authoritarian response with his medical equipment should be mentioned here.