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English

Bloody Horror!

The Symbolic Meaning of Blood in Stephen King's *Carrie*

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Abstract

In the novel *Carrie* by Stephen King, there is an abundance of symbolism. There are glaring references to religion and young adult rituals of freeing yourself and King hint at traditional folkloric fantasy, such as Cinderella. This essay focuses on the motif of blood in *Carrie*, its symbolic meaning and its connection to the Gothic. In the novel, King deploys this symbolism in three key parts. The analysis in this essay indicates that blood symbolizes power, repentance and identity in *Carrie*.

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Introduction

Since childhood, horror has been part of most people's lives. Even Disney movies have a bloody past. In *Cinderella*, the stepsisters cut off their toes and get their eyes poked out, *Sleeping Beauty* is raped and the punishment for the evil stepmother in *Snow White* is to be put in hot iron shoes and dance until her death. The question is why these horrific stories fascinate us so? In this essay, I am going to answer part of that question, but mainly focus on the topic of blood and horror, in particular Gothic horror in the novel *Carrie* by Stephen King. The aim is to find out if the blood in *Carrie* has a symbolic meaning, and if so how does King convey this, in order for the reader to better understand the symbolic importance of blood in *Carrie* against the backdrop of the genre conventions of Gothic horror.

One of the most important theorists in the field, relevant for this essay is Kristeva and her analysis in *Powers of Horror* (1982) as well as Barbara Creed's interpretation of it in *Horror and the Monstrous- Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection* (1993). Kristeva writes about the maternal figure and what she describes as "abjection". Abjection, in my interpretation, is the part of us that we do not want to acknowledge, parts that are taboo, sinful or forbidden. The pinnacle in *Carrie*, arrives when she and Tommy are dripping wet in pig blood, symbolizing menstrual blood, signifying horror, shame and humiliation. In *Carrie*, it is partly the mother that stands for the symbolic: she defines women's sexuality as evil and menstrual blood as evidence of sin (Creed, page 52). The mother is included in Kristeva's terminology of the abject. She is rejected the moment she gives birth, the child then struggles set itself free from the mother. Carrie tries to become separate being from her mother, however she fails and ultimately succumbing to the mother's archaic beliefs about blood being a sign of sin, yet it is only through blood one can find repentance. She allows her mother to strike her in the back with a knife, thus killing her. Carrie then dies for her sins.

My claim is that King uses the motif of blood in *Carrie* as having symbolic meaning and is connected to the Gothic. In the novel, King deploys this symbolism in three key parts. The analysis in this essay indicates that blood symbolizes power, guilt, repentance and identity in *Carrie*.

J. Hills Miller states in *Critical Terms for Literary Studies* that any form of narration can be said to be a way for individuals to assert themselves in any (given) culture (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, p 66). With narration, through narration and fiction, the reader is able to come to an understanding about human life, and perhaps, even invent its meaning (68). In the case of horror, the morbid stories may invoke a sensation of pleasure in the reader, a perverse thrill in experiencing and breaking taboos and viewing what should be hidden and is forbidden. Today the Gothic is stretched over several different genres and it might be difficult to clearly point to what Gothic really entails. From the ancient haunted house in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to the alien invaded spaceships in *Alien* (David Fincher 1992) there is not a single attribute that can be solely ascribed to the genre alone.

However, even though the texts described as being Gothic are not at all identical, they all have some common characteristics - motifs or traits that make it possible for the reader to identify them as related to the genre. Catherine Spooner argues that Gothic fiction refers to a genre that Walpole once called a hybrid of "two kinds of romance: the ancient and the modern" (Spooner, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, 2013 page 294). In addition there is a tradition of the Gothic being narrated through "found footage" meaning a text or film that appears to be a genuine documentation of a real event. For example, in Horace Walpole's first story *The Castle of Otranto*, he pretends to be a translator antique Italian texts. This tradition carries on through novels such as *Dracula* and indeed *Carrie* where the risk of the narrator being unreliable is high.

At the beginning of his career King did not associate his work with the Gothic genre, King identifies the genre in *Danse Macabre*, (1979), one of his nonfiction works on horror in different kind of media, as a "governess -in- the- haunted-house fiction that was popular in the 1960s". King contributes to the Gothic with his body of work which centers itself on the same cultural anxieties that are troubled in the Gothic tradition, inventing new ways to express monstrous otherness. With *Carrie*, King was able to reinvent the Gothic mode (which Walpole started with his novel that is considered to be the first Gothic text ever written). Thereby, King was able to again popularize the Gothic genre for a mass

readership (Williams382).

Carrie can be seen as a horror story which includes Gothic elements such as “found footage”, unreliable narrators and the mixture of the ancient and the modern. The fanatic religious beliefs of the mother mixes with the relaxed atmosphere that exists in Carrie’s school. *Carrie* is written in several different point of views, and there is no evidence that what the characters perceive is the truth. John Sears argues that, "King's fiction shares the epistemological anxiety about writing itself that has haunted Gothic fiction and its dubious functions in conveying and perhaps constructing `reality` "(Williams, *Encyclopaedia of the Gothic*, 383). This means that *Carrie* questions its own authenticity and challenges the taboos. In addition, it encourages the reader to confront them and make an impact in their life. Imagine the most famous picture of Carrie, laying in the school showers, terrified, blood running down her legs and her classmates throwing sanitary pads at her; or, Carrie standing on stage at her prom, newly crowned prom queen, being drenched in pig blood in an vindictive attempt to humiliate her by her peers, or perhaps when Sue Snell the heroine/victim escapes from the horrendous actions only to realize that she is no longer or never was pregnant by feeling her menstrual cycle kicking in. In these instances, the blood is a prominent motif representing otherness, guilt, power and redemption, forming a narrative which draws upon the tradition of the Gothic. I argue that Carrie’s power stems from her menstrual blood, which is an abjection and a taboo subject, infers that *real* power is something to be feared.

Carrie was Stephen King’s debut novel and it was an instant success. It did well with teens and adults who knew what it was like to be an outsider (Olsen, *The Daily Mail* April 4th 2014).

The novel is in its essence a story about a young high school girl with the usual coming of age tropes. Carrie comes from a very strict Christian home with an extremely controlling mother. She has been treated poorly by her mother and periodically locked inside a closet forced to pray for her sins. Carrie has always been the butt of her classmates’ jokes and when she at the age of seventeen gets her first menstrual cycle in the girl’s bathroom at her high school, her peers start

to ridicule her and throw tampons at her, shouting demeaning words. Carrie then becomes frantic. She does not know or understand what is happening to her. When the teacher comes to her aid, she lashes out, making a lightbulb explode. Following this incident Carrie starts to notice that things start to happen according to her will. With her new abilities Carrie is able to stand up to her mother at last and stop the abuse at least at home.

One of Carrie's tormentors, one of the girls who threw tampons at her in the showers, Sue Snell, eventually starts to feel bad about what she put Carrie through. She decides to try to make up for her behavior by convincing her boyfriend Tom Ross to ask Carrie to the prom instead of her. Carrie reluctantly accepts, a gruesome prank is played on her, and she gets a bucket of blood poured over her. Thinking it has all been a set up from the start, Carrie takes revenge on everyone in the school gymnasium by using her newfound telekinesis power, locking them in and burning them alive.

After her rampage through town, Carrie returns home where her mother waits for her. The mother manages to stab her daughter in the back, convinced that she is possessed by the devil. Before she dies, however, Carrie is able to kill her mother, again through using her telekinetic powers. Scared and abandoned by the one who should take care of her, namely her mother, Carrie dies in Sue's arms.

Background

Novels and fictions are sometimes considered to be a relative safe forum for the readers to test current assumptions and norms of their culture, a place where criticism can be voiced without the fear of the reader being excluded for voicing these concerns. In other words, fiction allows for the testing of norms and enjoying the ab-normal and “forbidden” that sometimes unsettles the norms. There are several deeper functions to narratives and reasons why we need them; ancient Greeks viewed their tragedies as a form of therapeutic purging of negative thoughts, emotions and feelings. By bringing these negative emotions forward, they prepared themselves for similar situations in real life. In this way, a narrative may act as a form of medicinal remedy, a possible way for the reader to experience emotional and psychological trauma in a safe environment and thus be prepared for them if or when they occur in their real lives. (*Linguistic Terms for Literary Studies*, p 67).

The need for narratives, and in particular horror stories, may however differ between individuals, between one person and another. What I take from a novel and what you take with you from the same novel might be polar opposites, since there is no unified homogenous need [for horror]. (*The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* 260).

Steven Bruhm offers one explanation of the need for Gothic fiction. Bruhm suggests that in order to understand this phenomenon of need, one requires to place the Gothic narration within a "number of current anxieties" that have an opportunity to either rise or dampen the current mood in the real world. To understand the allure with the Gothic, one needs to put the genre in a social context associated to current anxiety where the Gothic either makes these anxieties better or worse. Bruhm argues that *Carrie*, for instance, draws parallels with the then ongoing Vietnam War – likening the destructiveness of Carrie’s telekinetic prowess with that of the atomic bomb. Bruhm explains further, stating that Gothic theories try to connect these social anxieties of the characters with the personal narratives of the reader(s). (271)

Horror stories set out to create terrifying images of the ordinary and mundane,

to turn these safe ideas into representations of discomfort and terror. Horror has the ability to enable the reader to peek through the curtains into the everyday life of our neighbors, King has written, giving them the opportunity to see that the normal and familiar is in reality is artificial - nothing more than a front. Thus "a good horror story will dance its way to the centre of your life and find the secret door to the room you believed no one but you knew of" (329), consequently revealing our deepest fears and in doing so, thrilling us as we get a chance to experience the macabre.

As stated in the introduction, the Gothic has developed over time in such a way that it could be difficult to identify a text as belonging entirely to the Gothic genre. However there are some common themes that unified early Gothic texts and can be found as traces in modern ones: firstly it is common for the characters of a Gothic novel to reside in a strange place that is not as it should be, since there is something mysterious about it. The place can be dangerous and enticing at the same time. The setting could be in a castle in central Europe as in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, or in something seemingly benign such as a decaying mansion down the road as in *Great Expectations*. If the spatial setting can be mysterious so can the temporal setting. Gothic novels, are often set in times where there is a transition between the modern and the ancient this intersection connects two very different times and stirs opposition within the characters. *Carrie* is written in the mid 1970's in the middle of the sexual revolution and the anxiety caused by the gap between the old values, represented by Carrie's mother, and the new values of the society is palpable.

The Gothic is full of uncanny elements. The eerie elements lies in the narrative which is frightfully unfamiliar, yet at the same time there is something that is achingly familiar about it. The gothic is typically a mixture of genres. Perhaps this is why there is often a blend of technology and archaic beliefs about ghost and ghouls.

Gothic texts are often obsessed with power and the *differences* in power. The Gothic typically includes threats of isolation, whether physical isolation or physiological. Carrie is powerful yet at the same time powerless. She is isolated both at home and at school, her mother frequently locks her in the closet, as well

as excluded from any social interaction at her school.

Most Gothic novels circle around a woman in distress, such as the orphan Lucy in *Dracula*. The opposite or antagonist of these women is often a villainous criminal, such as Count Dracula who is a satanic and obscene creature who is able to break any norm (*The British Library web - The Gothic*). Carrie is both a victim and a perpetrator. Carrie is a woman in distress, yet she is no stranger to violence. Her mother punishes her by beating her and locks her in a closet and Carrie's peers are far from gentle with her. Through these acts of viciousness of others, she transforms into a villain. Since she is used to this violence, Carrie is first viewed as a victim however when she then triumphs against her tormentors, she becomes even more monstrous.

In my reading of the novel, Carrie's power lies in her blood. Blood has historically functioned in the Gothic as a "reality with a symbolic function", that is, blood has both had a symbolic and a very real connection to power in a cultural setting (Huges, *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* 73). Michel Foucault describes in *Volonté de Savior* (1976) that blood historically symbolized an inclusive and exclusive signifier of identity (Huges 2013). Hence, blood, in Gothic texts, can have the function of symbolizing the human condition as contingent upon a sense of identity. Apart from its function as an inclusive/exclusive signifier blood can also be a representation of life and death. The representation of life/death is often shown in terms of either murder or redemption in the Gothic. Such representation of spilling blood either to revenge or repent is a recurring theme in *Carrie*. The Gothic has a history of being misogynist. The female characters are interpreted as being most interesting when they appear to suffer. Gothic literature thrives on the Western symbolic order; labelling darkness, maternity, blood, madness, and death as "female" thus rendering it "evil" (Williams, p 382). Indeed Carrie starts out seemingly a victim of Western patriarchal assumptions about the female anatomy and feminine sexuality, oppressed by her mother who give the impression to be an agent of patriarchy. Nonetheless she succeeds in rebelling within these assumptions, since her powers reside in her female sexuality which is seen as forbidden. Carrie's character development starts as "a nebbish victim" but then she "becomes a bitch goddess" who in a tantrum wreaks havoc on the whole town

because of “hormonal rage” (Bloom, Clive *Gothic Horror*, p 173). *Carrie*, like many other Gothic texts, revolves around themes of hormones, sexual desire, power and pleasure, themes that at times are difficult to explore in more realistic genres of fiction.

The monstrous Gothic gives room to explore the character of Carrie more deeply, and is relevant for my reading of the novel since the female monstrous is so connected to the abjection, otherness and the symbolism of blood.

Discussion

I

The shower

Historically, women have had little or no information about menstruation at all, since mothers in the past did not generally talk to their daughters about what it entails, and the younger generation had to share information between them. During the mid-1900's the technological advancement improved women's ability to manage the menstrual cycle (Friedenfield 2009, 242). Carrie is in the middle of this shift, her mother perceives menstruation as a sign of sin hence will not share any information about it. This explains why Carrie reacts the way she does, namely by screaming in terror and lashing out, since she has no idea of what is happening – she thinks she is dying. It is important to have this in mind, when reading the opening sequence, in order to understand Carrie's mindset. However the fact that Carrie is able to take control over the power that exists inside of her, even though her panicking because of her bleeding, can be read as Carrie taking control over something she thinks of as an uncontrollable force. Since she has no idea why this happens.

Menstruation has been considered both magical and poisonous, and there are some established anthropological theories about why; perhaps before the menstrual cycle was physiologically understood, people could not comprehend how a human could bleed for five days without dying. Menstruation may have been seen as something magical (or demonic) (Johnston, 2011, p 10). And indeed this is *how* Carrie would think is happening to her.

Leading up to the shower scene, the reader understands that Carrie is not amongst the popular crowd. She is described as awkward and clumsy and not pretty:

“Carrie stood among them stolidly a frog among swans” (10). The shower scene is described in a way which glorifies youth and beauty. Carrie, while young, does not seem to fit into the normative construction of beauty. The serene scene is abruptly changed when Carrie exits the shower. At first she does not notice what

is happening to her and she is slow to react. It is only a classmate outcry that makes Carrie react.

"The catcall came first from Chris Hargensen"" For God's sake Carrie, you got your period! ... Clean yourself up!" "Carrie backed into the side of one of the four large shower compartment and slowly collapsed into a sitting position. (...) her eyes rolled with wet whiteness, like the eyes of a hog in the slaughtering pen." (13, 15)

When Carrie sees the blood, she goes into a panic. The horror and revulsion of her peers at the sight of her menstrual blood is something that the reader is almost forced to endure. The menstrual blood is part of what Kristeva calls "abjection" in her book *Power of Horror*(1982) Abjection is a term used in Gothic studies to discuss the process by which something or someone belonging to the domain of the degrading, miserable, or extremely submissive is broken (*The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic* 2013). The female and other, the ability to reproduce and everything that being a woman entail are seen as mysterious and dangerous. This scene is written through several different point of views, not just that of the main character, but also through Sue Snell's and Ms. Desjardin's perspectives.

Through the representation of the pack mentality that develops when the girls gather around Carrie, the reader understands that they feel revulsion, pity, and disgust. Kristeva suggests that menstrual waste is not only an abjection of the horrific female but also an abjection of the mother, and the reaction of the girls can be explained as a necessary ritual of setting up and preserving social identity. The act of expulsion of bodily fluids, such as vomit, pus, shit, urine and indeed blood, is intimately connected to our social construction of what horror entails. They threaten what is symbolically constituted as "whole and proper" and fills both the reader and the characters with disgust and loathing (Creed, 51). Thus through the thrill of the horror Carrie transforms into the monstrous and threatens the identity not only of herself but more importantly, the identity of the other characters. The other characters are threatened by the implications of the abjection.

Shelly Stamp Lindsey reasons, in relation to gender and gendered sexuality, that "Not only is Carrie a female monster ... monstrosity is explicitly associated with

menstruation and female sexuality” (*Horror, Femininity and Carrie’s Monstrous Puberty*, p 36). Carries monstrosity and transformation into a villain is inexplicitly connected to her sexuality. Female monsters typically commit acts of violence as a form of revenge for past transgressions where they were victims, abused by their surroundings (Briefel 20).

It is only when the PE teacher Miss Desjardin rushes in that Carrie manages to calm herself down. It could be argued that Ms. Desjardin fills a maternal role in her life. Therefore, it may not be a coincidence that Carrie seeks comfort in Ms. Desjardin and that she is the one who succeeds in calming Carrie down just when she is in the process of setting herself free from her mother. She becomes free and matures in terms of age and puberty but she is also able to free herself by rejecting her mother’s religious beliefs. Carrie does not accept that the blood is a sign of sin. It is through blood, her menstrual blood, that Carrie begins the journey to womanhood and her powers. The blood does not only serve to illustrate the abject horror of the unclean and disgust but it is also through blood that Carrie becomes a potent symbol for the emergence of a new power that allows her to stand up for herself and find her identity.

In a way which proves that this “blood scene” there is a key moment when in the school shower Carrie’s telekinetic power first appears. In her desperation Carrie is able to make a lightbulb explode:

”There was a bright flash overheard, followed by a flashgun like pop as a lightbulb sizzled and went out” (p. 18).

The first indication on just how powerful Carrie is, occurs then when the lightbulb explodes. Of course, strange happenings have been mentioned before in the novel, but these occurrences tended to happen outside of Carrie’s control. Here, now, at the entrance of her puberty, she asserts control over these seemingly random incidents.

II

The prom

In a religious context, blood is seen as having enormous power. It is as sacred as it is taboo. Thus the spilling of this fluid is a sacrilegious act and the individual consuming or touching it is momentarily affected by the properties of the blood. The religious meanings connected to blood have a divine aspect. The Old Testament strictly forbids the ingestion of blood (Leviticus 7, 26-7).

Consequences of touching or ingesting this fluid are to acquire the qualities of it (at least for a moment) thus being as untouchable and dangerous as the blood itself (Leviticus 15, 19-24). Therefore when Carrie is drenched in pig blood she is damned and instead of losing/gaining identity by spilling her own blood, she transforms.

Sue Snell feels bad about how she treated Carrie during the shower debacle. All the girls involved get their punishment- they are to attend Ms. Desjardin's detention or face losing their right to go to the spring prom. However Sue Snell still feels that she wants to do more. To alleviate her guilty feelings she convinces her boyfriend Tommy Ross to ask Carrie to the prom instead of her. In Sue's mind, this will help Carrie to become more confident and by giving her a nice prom, Sue hopes that she will be forgiven."... I still think I've got something to make up for" (page 84). After some persuasion Carrie accepts. Unbeknownst to Sue, another girl called Chris Hargenson, did not think it fair to be punished, and is so enraged that she plots a terrible revenge. She gets some of her friends and her boyfriend Billy in on the plan. They set up the buckets of pig blood over the stage where the prom Queen and King will sit and make a device that will pour the blood on their victims. Then she gets her friends in on the prom committee so that there is no chance of Carrie not being elected prom Queen. Carrie's mother voices her concern that Carrie will be laughed at by her attending the prom, that it is only a joke. Carrie, empowered by her telekinetic powers which she has been training, stands up to her mother and pushes past her. This is where the reader gets another indication of how destructive and irrational

Carrie and her power can be. She destroys her whole living room in a fit of rage because Tommy is late.

The next couple of pages seem like a modern *Cinderella* story, where she goes to the ball with Prince Charming. Sue Short has argued that *Carrie* indeed is a *Cinderella* story. That Carrie transforming from shy girl to princess, then to female fury is in fact a *Cinderella* story with a twist (or two) (*Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage*; Sue Short, 2006). Indeed, King seems to draw on this familiar tale, for instance when Carrie and Tommy get elected prom king and queen. Even the blood plays an important part in the original story of *Cinderella*, since the evil stepsisters have to cut off their toes and heels off to be able to fit in the glass shoe, and fool the prince, that they are the one he is looking for. It is only when the prince and the step sister ride past a bird sitting in a tree, singing about blood that the prince notices this sanguine fluid dripping from their feet. Thus one can argue that the blood shed by the sisters, dripping on the ground, symbolizes their guilt and deceit and perhaps the loss of their identity. In the later part of the novel King applies this symbolic meaning when Sue discovers a dying Carrie, and later appears to suffer a miscarriage. Sue's miscarriage can be interpreted as Sue bleeding as a sacrifice for forgiveness.

Chris and Billy slippes into the prom and impatiently wait for Carrie to get on stage. Once she is there, Chris pulls the rope and the buckets fall. The blood drenches both Tommy and Carrie, though most of it falls on Carrie. This vindictiveness shown by her classmates is rooted in something deeper and more twisted than what is considered "normal"; the abjection of something other. The vindictiveness shows particularly through Billy's catcall of "Pig's blood for a Pig". In Carrie's panic and her inner dialogue the reader fully understands the horror she is put through.

... it was true, the final nightmare, she was red and dripping with it, they had drenched her in the very secretness of blood ... She could smell herself and it was the stink of blood. The awful wet, coppery smell. ...[She] tasted the plump, fulsome, bitterness of horror. They had finally given her the shower they wanted (179).

Carrie experiences the abject horror of having what is supposed to be secret (blood) and should stay hidden within, shown in public. The text suggests in its way of describing how the blood is sensed and explains why we are so fascinated by the horrors of these abjections. We associate these horrors with our senses, and in doing so, they become more real and thrilling when we experience them close up when reading without the horror actually happening to us. Horror is thrilling since it triggers a form of narrative “therapy” affecting not only our minds but also our bodies.

If the prom passage in the text is analyzed in these terms, when blood is poured over Carrie she is imbued with these qualities and thus becomes a danger to those around her, giving them a reason to reject her in fear of becoming her.

Carrie drowned in blood tries to flee but trips and falls, and, as her mother predicted, she is humiliated. Chris's plan works. Tommy gets struck by one of the buckets and passes out on the stage. In despair Carrie runs out of the gymnasium, tripping over someone's feet while leaving a trail of blood on the floor. “... to crawl along the floor with her blood-clotted hair hanging in her face crawling like St Paul on the Damascus Road...”(page 181).

In the confusing moments after Carrie’s departure, the students and the teachers try to make sense of what is happening. After some contemplation, Carrie decides (with the warnings from her mother that she would be humiliated ringing in her ears) to seek revenge on those who have hurt her. In her mind she only sees those who laugh at her, making it so that everyone in crowd is laughing at her and acting the same when in fact there are only a few who join in the mockery. She thinks “It was time to teach them a lesson. To show them a thing or two. She giggled hysterically. It was one of Momma’s petphrases” (page 182).

Carrie returns to the prom and the first action she performs is to lock all the doors that lead out of the gymnasium. Then she turns on the sprinklers. In panic someone knock over a microphone stand and because of the water lying on the ground several students get electrocuted. Some manage to escape the fire that Carrie then starts but most perish. When Carrie is done with the high school, she

continues her rampage, eventually returning home. Where she is able to kill her mother but not without getting stabbed in the shoulder.

The mother is also involved in the blood symbolism, getting a premonition of what will happen to Carrie while accidentally cutting herself. This occurs at the same time as Carrie is drowned in pig blood, and Carrie's mother thinks "Blood was always the root of it, and only blood can expiate it" (page 147). Her mother aptly expresses the theme of what transpires "...the sin had been expiated. By blood. But sin never dies" (203).

III

Sue Snell's miscarriage

There is no explicit statement that Sue is pregnant in the novel yet the text implies this. On this night she discovers that her period is late, something that has never happened before, and she fears that she is pregnant. Then, when Sue suffers what appears to be a miscarriage, the blood she sheds symbolizes a sacrifice, an innocence lost for the evil Sue was part of. All through the novel up to this point, Sue comes off as a bit naive. However, this event that follows is an eye-opener both for the reader and for Sue.

The night of the prom, Sue Snell is staying home. She and the other girls involved in the teasing of Carrie are punished by not being able to attend the prom. She is home alone, since her parents are out for the night. The reader has gotten some insight to her mind before this night. Sue has expressed concern about her relationship with Tommy, and we get some understanding of her character. She is not truly an evil person, but got caught up in the group mentality. About ten o'clock at night, when the crowning should commence, Sue gets a bad feeling, and she realizes that something is wrong. She gets in her car and drives, and somehow she knows where Carrie is. This is part of Carrie's power, the fact that she can communicate telepathically with the townspeople, which also implies that they instinctually know where Carrie is at all time. Sue finds her lying on the

road, a knife sticking out of her shoulder from where her mother stabbed her. Sue picks her up in her lap, hoping for forgiveness. There is none. Carrie dies in Sue's arms.

The disconnection from Carrie's mind makes Sue stumble off the road to a nearby field. She starts to run, from Carrie, Billy and the other victims that night. She stops suddenly with a horrifying realization; "the slow course of dark menstrual blood down her thigh" (page 227). This is a pivotal moment for Sue. Although she admits her guilt and participation in the attack in the beginning of the novel, she only now realizes that the betrayal runs deeper and her hope for forgiveness is null and void.

The implication of Sue's miscarriage, or start of her menstrual cycle, is that the act of her spilling her blood may in fact be an attempt at redemption, and perhaps more worrisome the loss of her identity, like the stepsisters in *Cinderella* unwillingly shedding their blood to show their true nature. Sue previously thought of herself as a genuinely good person with only good intentions, but the blood exposes the secrets that are hidden, the secret that even though Sue tries to make amends the betrayal runs deeper. Carrie suffered years of abuse and mistreatment both at home and in school. Sue in her naivety stayed silent and did not intervene. In Carrie's mind, and perhaps even the reader's, this makes Sue just as guilty as Chris and her accomplices.

Huges argues that blood is an including as well as an excluding factor; meaning that blood decides if an individual is suitable to be included in a certain part of society (73). In essence blood is identity. Therefore, the blood Sue loses symbolizes the loss of some part of her identity. Gone is this good and wholesome girl as she is turning into this much more complex individual not entirely good or evil, but something in-between, in other words: human.

Nothing is black or white any longer. Just as the blood transformed, and empowered Carrie it also revealed her true nature and what could be interpreted as Sue's miscarriage revealed her desperation for forgiveness and assertion of who she is. Like the stepsisters in *Cinderella*, Sue bleeds because of guilt, sacrificing the possibilities of a new life and part of her identity for forgiveness.

Conclusion

Carrie is at first glance a typical sci-fi/horror novel by Stephen King. However, I have argued that the blood convey symbolic meaning. The blood has not only a religious meaning, but also important medium to infer the characters development. The blood conveys identity, power, guilt and repentance. Yet blood, especially menstrual blood, is a subject that is often surrounded by taboo. The female body and its workings has traditionally been shrouded by misinformation, and historically been a subject that is not supposed to be discussed widely. Reproduction and the menstrual cycle has therefore been viewed as mystical and monstrous. The act of taking or spilling blood have a connection to control. Either taking control, over your own life and making your choices, or taking control from another. Spilling blood is in its essence an act of asserting power and identity.

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