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A Struggle Between Moral Agencies of Human Beings in Stephen King's *Desperation*

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Abstract:

The renowned horror maestro Stephen King has created several spooky stories that explore the darkest corners of the human brain. A compelling story that tackles themes of terror, redemption, and the ability for both good and evil is “*Desperation*,” one such work. The 1996 King’s book *Desperation* takes readers on the gruesome journey of a small group of tourists to a mining village that is abducted by an evil spirit, “Tak”, as they seek to travel via a piece of US Highway 50 in desolate Nevada. The novel describes the frantic conflict between “David Carver” and “Johnny Marinville”, who stand for good spirits, and “Tak”. The dilemma of good and evil will be examined in this article, along with the book’s representation of terror, examination of atonement, and underlying philosophical implications.

By using vivid imagery and relentless pacing that keeps readers on the edge of their seats, King deftly creates an atmosphere of dread and tension; he also stages a sequence of grisly occurrences, from mysterious deaths to horrifying transformations, on the macabre stage of the town of *Desperation*. King examines the idea of fear as a spark for change and self-discovery via these gruesome experiences. *Desperation* also explores themes of redemption and the possibility of salvation in the face of omnipresent evil. The story’s characters are forced to face their worst wants and anxieties, which forces them to make tough decisions and face their frailties. King offers a provocative examination of the human capacity for good and evil, as well as the possibility of redemption even in the face of unfathomable horror through his vivid writing and masterfully built characters. *Desperation* is a testament to King’s ability to capture and unnerve audiences, leaving them with lasting concerns about the nature of the human spirit and the forces that form our lives.

Keywords: Good, Evil, Religion, Existence, Horror, Faith.

Introduction:

The renowned horror maestro Stephen King has created several spooky stories that explore the darkest corners of the human brain. A compelling story that tackles themes of terror, redemption, and the ability for both good and evil is *Desperation*, one such work. The 1996 King's book *Desperation* takes readers on the gruesome journey of a small group of tourists to a mining village that is abducted by an evil spirit, "Tak", as they seek to travel via a piece of US Highway 50 in desolate Nevada. The novel describes the frantic conflict between "David Carver" and "Johnny Marinville", who stand for good spirits, and "Tak". The dilemma of good and evil will be examined in this article, along with the book's representation of terror, examination of atonement, and underlying philosophical implications. God is shown to have absolute control over the demigods of the abyss. In the preface a passage from the *Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie is used: "The landscape of his poetry was still the desert ..." (S. King, *Desperation* 1). The protagonists are completely dependent on one another to survive since they are cut off from society and outside assistance amid Nevada's desert. The protagonists' seclusion and the significance of their personal decisions are made more apparent by the desert location. The survivors finally form a group and put their lives in danger to battle and defeat Tak, despite the desire to flee and save themselves.

The Dilemma of Good and Evil:

"When the traitors realized that he was a kindly man, and I who took no reprisals, they carried out every kind of atrocity" (E. King 180). *Desperation* is primarily a horror book that transports readers to a nightmare setting where terrible forces rule. By using vivid imagery and relentless pacing that keeps readers on the edge of their seats, King deftly creates an atmosphere of dread and tension; he also stages a sequence of grisly occurrences, from mysterious deaths to horrifying transformations, on the macabre stage of the town of *Desperation*. King examines the idea of fear as a spark for change and self-discovery via these gruesome experiences. The earliest indication of biblical references may be found in the subtitle of Part I, which states, "the house of the wolf and the house of the scorpion"; Biblically wolf and scorpion both have been negatively attributed. The primary troublemaker in the book, corrupt police officer Collie Entragian, is shown and described as a wolf. He is an official, that looks like a wolf, and he owns the town of *Desperation*. The wolf dwells in the home of *Desperation*. Johnny Marinville describes his physical appearance by noticing "Mr. Policeman, what big teeth" (S. King, *Desperation* 88) he has. The dishonest police

officer promises Johnny Marinville about issues with uncertainty, identification, and car accidents and he can sense that because “I am a wolf” (S. King, *Desperation* 90). This assertion greatly disturbs Johnny Marinville. A person can't be both a man and a wolf simultaneously without something being off. Collie Entragian is either afflicted by the demonic spirit (According to Mathew's Bible) of the devil or he is kidding. Collie Entragian continues, to prove his evil and corruption, he adds: “No God in France, either, Trooper. Take it from me. Just Cinzano and escargots and women who don't shave their armpits” (S. King, *Desperation* 164). Another example of evil characteristic is Tak has eyes and ears all across the town thanks to its army of coyotes, scorpions, and other desert dwellers. The soul of the person whose body Tak occupies leaves the body. Tak's overpowering strength causes the body to disintegrate, with the insides turning to mush and blood oozing from every opening.

Undoubtedly a terrible book, *Desperation* also explores themes of redemption and the possibility of salvation in the face of omnipresent evil. The story's characters are forced to face their worst wants and anxieties, which forces them to make tough decisions and face their frailties. In his examination of the possibility of goodness inside each person, King presents redemption as a potent force that may manifest itself even in the most hopeless situations. As people confront their inner demons and work to conquer them, the character arcs in *Desperation* show the possibilities for development and transformation.

Despite all the chances, Johnny was saved in the desert, where there was no cellphone service coverage, because of his faith in God. Johnny is forced to explain” pneuma, sarx, and soma” to Collie in very awkward circumstances. In light of John's Gospel, these three are explained: ”Sarx is not the body; Soma is the body. Sarx is the flesh of the body. The body is made of flesh – as the Word was reputedly made flesh by the birth of Jesus Christ – but the body is more than the flesh that makes it. The sum is greater than the parts” (S. King, *Desperation* 116). In *Desperation*, Nevada, or France, there is no God. What is present is the desire of the flesh, which includes food, alcohol, and immorality. However, the little kid, David Carver, to whom God's “genuineness was beyond question” (S. King, *Desperation* 166), is pleading with God, planning his escape from the prison, and striving to keep his thoughts clear of the policeman's godless humour; David remembers having offered prayers for the recovery of his friend Brian, who was half-dead, just like Lazarus was revived from the dead by Jesus' prayer. David Carver resists the urge to sin and earnestly prays: “Tell me what to do, God. Tell me what You want. And if it is Your Will that we should die here, help me not to waste time being mad or being scared or yelling for an explanation” (S. King, *Desperation* 196).

The ability to survive of the major characters in the book *Desperation*, especially Johnny and David, is significantly influenced by religion. As aspects of survival, *Desperation* adds spirituality to youth and knowledge. The circumstances surrounding Brian's nearly fatal accident provide David understanding of human psychology and moral decision-making, which causes David to develop an interest in religion. David's mother addresses him as "David's God-trip" (S. King, *Desperation* 48); David experiences a profound spiritual awakening soon after Brian's accident, which has an impact on his behaviour over a year afterward *Desperation*. David retires to their hiding place in the woods and prays after visiting his friend in the hospital where he is in a vegetative state: "God, make him better..." David pleads, "If you do, I'll do something for you. I'll listen to what you want, and then I'll do it. I promise" (S. King, *Desperation* 174). And God grants his request. Following his encounter, David starts reading the Bible to learn what he has promised and to whom. David recalls Bible tales throughout the book, which help him comprehend what to do and why.

In *Maps of Heaven, Maps of Hell*, Edward Ingebretsen draws attention to this relationship between terror and the sacred: "A map of Heaven could only be constructed, as it were, by inversion, beginning with Hell" (Ingebretsen ix). David's interest in religion may be understood as acting similarly to Mark Petrie's interest in horror since David might be read as a counterweight to Mark. Religion and horror both explore the duality of the human predicament and establish moral limits in various ways. Both serve to "scare the Hell out of a community" (Ingebretsen 79) by highlighting the peril of engaging in immoral behaviour. David's recollection and reliance on Bible stories are strongly related to the horror subgenre. In especially from the Old Testament, David hears many tales that describe horrifying tragedies. Furthermore, the Bible and horror both emphasize the harsh realities of this life, our mortality, the existence of good and evil inside us, and our ultimate moral freedom. King makes a similar connection between horror and religion in *Danse Macabre*, using Job's narrative as an illustration of biblical dread.

To better explore the duality of human nature and examine how religion influences a character's moral (or immoral) choices, King regularly employs religious figures and symbolism in his works. While fighting Tak and experiencing the tragedy of losing his mother and sister, David Carver resorts to Biblical prayers. He has faith in God's ability to act and in revelation, knowing that God will guide him: "God, this David Carver again" he prays. "I'm in such a mess, God, such a mess. Please protect me and help me do what I have to do. Jesus' name I pray, amen" (S. King, *Desperation* 250).

The Philosophical Implications:

Desperation explores redemption and surface-level terror, but it also poses fascinating philosophical queries about the nature of evil and the existence of a greater force. The book adds paranormal aspects, such as the wicked “Tak” entity, which questions conventional ideas of good and evil. King incorporates religious symbolism and allusions throughout the story, provoking readers to think about the possibility of divine intervention and the strength of faith in the face of evil. King encourages deeper reflection and challenges readers to consider the intricacies of the human condition by weaving terror with spiritual issues, “[which] is a psychologically and spiritually complex matter” (Zemmelman 105).

The existential topics explored in *Desperation* include the nature of life and the quest for meaning in a chaotic universe. The novel's characters experience extraordinary situations that drive them to face their mortality and the absurdity of their predicament. In the face of extreme adversity, they wrestle with issues of free choice, individual accountability, and the search for meaning. David's acts of faith and bravery for existential crisis include his use of soap as a lubricant to escape from the jail cell, his healing of Tom Billingsley's wounds through the application of hands, his confrontation with Audrey Wyler, who was controlled by Tak and attempted to strangle him, his vision of God as a lion who provided him with instructions on how to defeat Tak, his willingness to enter the mine shaft where Tak was hiding, and his final prayer that sealed Tak inside the mine.

The trials and tribulations of the characters locked in *Desperation* serve as a particularly effective lens through which to examine issues of identity and selfhood in the book. They are forced to face their greatest fears, wants, and weaknesses as they encounter severe experiences that test their sense of self. The idea that events and decisions influence one's own identity is discussed, as well as the idea of the self and how it relates to outside situations. King examines the apocalyptic fantasy of a world on the verge of catastrophe and salvation via the conflict between Tak and David. He also looks at how free choice and human agency play a part in overcoming evil. In *Desperation*, the protagonists are forced to make morally challenging decisions that put their courage to the test. They must confront Tak's atrocities as well as their shortcomings and insecurities. They must choose between giving up and fighting back, between hope and despair, and between cursing and praying. According to King, these decisions are important not just for their personal life but also for the future of the entire planet.

Desperation explores the philosophical issue of evil by building on the notion of good against evil. Examples are the crimes that best illustrate Tak's evil nature include the murder

of Kirsten Carver, a young girl who was travelling with her family in an RV when she was killed; the use of Collie Entragian, the city's police chief, as his host body and device of death; the enslavement of Audrey Wyler, an engineer who assisted at the mine where Tak was imprisoned; the command of various creatures such as cougars, buzzards, spiders, and scorpions to attack and kill people. It calls into question the presence of evil in a universe that is said to be ruled by an all-good and all-powerful deity. The novel's protagonists experience unimaginable tragedies and are forced to contend with the existence of evil in their lives, which prompts reflection on the nature of misery, theodicy, and the boundaries of human comprehension.

Conclusion:

The haunting classic *Desperation* by Stephen King expertly mixes horror, atonement, and philosophical investigation. King offers a provocative examination of the human capacity for good and evil, as well as the possibility of redemption even in the face of unfathomable horror, through his vivid writing and masterfully built characters. *Desperation* is a testament to King's ability to capture and unnerve audiences, leaving them with lasting concerns about the nature of the human spirit and the forces that form our lives. It does this by submerging readers in a terrible world and testing their beliefs. In King's own words ... "the necessary knowledge to act morally when facing evil in real life ... that horror accepts death but celebrates life and vitality" (Davis 52). King himself asserted in his book *Danse Macabre*, "The horror [plots are] the celebration of those who feel they can examine death because it does not yet live in their own hearts" (S. King, *Danse Macabre* 199; Davis 52). On the other side, in a circumstance where there doesn't appear to be any way out or moral options, *Desperation* examines human agency and morality. *Desperation* presents a somewhat different viewpoint on the function of human agency.

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