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*The Prometheus of Paedophilia:  
Sexual Violence and Queer-Making in Stephen King's 'The Library Policeman'*

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the causal relationship between child sexual abuse and the child's future queerness that Stephen King posits in the plot of his 1991 horror novella, *The Library Policeman*. Specifically, it argues that readers are encouraged to view paedophilia as the 'real' horror at the core of more conventionally supernatural horrors in *The Library Policeman*. Using Holt Parker's defence of sexual constructionism and James Kincaid's investigation into the social construction of childhood innocence, I argue that *The Library Policeman* contributes to the politically-conservative project of conflating paedophilia and queer sexualities. These factors combine, I argue, to form a neat teleology that both denies the child agency and establishes queerness as the natural result of child sexual abuse—a teleology that can only be undone, in King's narrative, through an act of violence to the paedophile that both asserts the heterosexual male's activity and disavows the possibility of the child's (passive) sexual pleasure. I conclude with a deconstruction of King's text, which seeks to challenge King's posited teleological relationship between child abuse and future queerness by examining King's own appearance within the narrative of *The Library Policeman* and his disavowal of personal investment in his introduction the text.

## BIOGRAPHY

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## THE PROMETHEUS OF PAEDOPHILIA: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND QUEER-MAKING IN STEPHEN KING'S *THE LIBRARY POLICEMAN*

Paedophiles, it seems, are all around us: if not necessarily in our suburbs, then at least on our television screens after the watershed, in the pages of the latest true-crime best-seller, rendered monstrously large in the blockbusters playing in suburban cineplexes. Why are we so obsessed with paedophilia? What impels an author, filmmaker, or dramatist to create texts that centre on the sexual abuse of children, and to what purposes might the resulting products be put?<sup>i</sup>

We might say that paedophilia is a socially-stigmatised sexuality, and that our culture needs to create a stream of demonised representations of it in order to remind both paedophiles and non-paedophiles alike of the heinous nature of the sexual offence. Such a stream of anti-paedophile cultural products would function—alongside the more traditional means of surveillance employed by law-enforcement agencies and vigilante groups—as a kind of Foucauldian panopticon<sup>ii</sup> or Althusserian ‘Ideological State Apparatus’<sup>iii</sup> that keeps paedophiles in their ‘proper’ place through both the official gaze of the state and the unofficial (yet no less powerful) gaze of Western culture in general.

This is indeed a reasonable answer; however, it misses a fundamental point about paedophilia. Many other forms of human sexuality are despised, ridiculed and demonised, yet we very rarely see media representations of them. Let us consider the following, from the American sex columnist Dan Savage (here replying to a reader who has taken him to task for not considering the possibility of an animal consenting to sex with a human): ‘Yes, yes, I know: A mind is like an umbrella—it only works when it’s open. But if you’re going to have a closed mind about just three things, fucking animals, molesting children, and eating poop are good picks, don’t you think?’<sup>iv</sup> Yet while most of Savage’s readers would not question the moral equivalence of bestiality, coprophagia and paedophilia, we see very few popular culture representations of the former two. Bestiality, for most Australians, seems restricted to poor-taste jokes about New Zealanders’ sex lives; coprophagia to episodes of *South Park* and aspersions about the (supposedly) German taste for *schieße* films. Neither of these subjects has garnered an extensive body of critical or philosophical literature.<sup>v</sup> Paedophilia, on the other hand, is the subject not only of a large body of critical literature across a range of disciplines; it is also the subject of many fictional representations across a broad spectrum of genres and media. A quick survey of films released in the past few years demonstrates our culture’s obsession with paedophilia—Nicole Kassell’s *Hard Candy* (2006), David Slade’s *The Woodsman* (2004), Todd Solondz’s *Palindromes* (2004), Gregg Araki’s *Mysterious Skin* (2004). In the light of such a deluge of paedophile fiction, we must ask the question: what makes the vast majority of us—who feel no sexual attraction to children—seemingly unwilling consumers and creators of paedophile fiction?

This paper sets out to interrogate this question, at least in part, by examining Stephen King’s novella *The Library Policeman* and its authorial foreword. In doing so, I will examine the broader issues that come together to make paedophilia resonate so strongly within contemporary Western culture: namely, the social construct of the child, the eroticism of innocence, and the erroneous yet persistent belief that child abuse—specifically same-sex child abuse—is the crucible in which adult homosexuality is forged. In this neat teleology, homosexuality is the natural outcome of child sexual abuse, and thus all or most homosexuals wish to sexually abuse children in order to make more homosexuals. Needless to say, this teleology casts children in the passive role of victim, thus stripping them of agency. In the case of *The Library Policeman*, the adult who has survived child sexual abuse is passive and queer—‘ruined’ by his traumatic encounter with a paedophile. King offers a solution: the ‘ruined’ adult male can be healed through an act of redemptive violence against the paedophile; one that affirms the heterosexual adult’s agency and denies the possibility of the child’s sexual pleasure. While such an analysis of the novella would indicate that the homophobic and heteronormative elements of this teleology resound with contemporary audiences, I will conclude by arguing that King’s own cameo appearance *within* the narrative of *The Library Policeman*—a meta-fictional appearance that shatters the narrative’s realist form—may inadvertently deconstruct his narrative’s own teleology.

### CONSTRUCTIONISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The relationship between childhood experience and adult sexuality—a relationship that strikes to the core of debates about paedophilia—comes from a combination of two distinct theories. The first is the constructionist notion of sexuality; the second is the persistent (and invented) notion of childhood innocence. I will deal with these in turn, and then examine how the two combine to create our culture’s contemporary fear of paedophilia.

In discussing what sexual constructionism means, we must first distinguish the differences between what is

considered constructionism in an academic context, and what passes for constructionism outside of this context. The two share the same basic premises, but the latter is not argued with the same level of critical rigour and is thus likely to be misunderstood or misapplied. It is precisely from a misapplication of constructionism that the myth of the predatory ‘homosexual paedophile’ gains much of its currency.

Holt N. Parker, in his article ‘The Myth of the Heterosexual: Anthropology and Sexuality for Classicists,’ launches into a spirited defence of constructionism against its perceived flaws. Central to his argument is a distinction between *emic* and *etic* categories—terms derived from the linguistic concepts of phonemics and phonetics. For Parker, our current conception of a binary pair of sexualities—that is, hetero and homo—should be understood as an *emic* concept. He states:

Like phonemes, emic categories exist only inside of a single culture. I cannot, for example, in any meaningful way claim to be a shaman or *berdache* ... an emic category may fulfill the structural requirements of another culture’s concept, but that does not necessarily make the two identical or even comparable.<sup>vi</sup>

As with many other proponents of constructionism,<sup>vii</sup> Parker contrasts the ancient Greek binary of passive-active with our own system of homo-hetero in order to demonstrate some of his fundamental points. Thus he says, ‘The lines that distinguish one category from another may be drawn on completely different axes. By the fifth time we make the qualification, “The Greeks hated homosexuality but only in the passive form” ... it ought to be clear that we are not talking about homosexuality but passivity.’<sup>viii</sup> He is also at pains to emphasise that:

An emic category may lump together what another culture keeps rigorously separate. From the Greek point of view, our emic category ‘homosexual’ lumps together perfectly normal men who wish to bugger boys with disgusting κίναδοι who wish to *be* buggered by men ... Or else an emic category may separate what another culture considers a distinctive unity. From the Greek point of view we make some sort of incomprehensible distinction between perfectly normal men who bugger boys and perfectly normal men who bugger women.<sup>ix</sup>

While emic categories are ontological—they exist on a fundamental level in law and society—etic categories are not. Parker’s example is the Western distinction between a ‘leg-man’ and a ‘breast-man.’

These are concepts within our culture—there are magazines and websites devoted to these tastes—but they do not exist on the same ontological level as homo and hetero. ‘Leg-man’ is not the opposite of ‘breast-man.’ If a friend tells me he is a ‘leg-man,’ and I later find out that he has been admiring a woman’s breasts, I would not wonder why he had changed, how he had hidden what he *really* was. I probably would not even notice.<sup>x</sup>

In simple terms, Parker argues that our culture’s emic classification of sexuality is not the same as many other cultures’ classifications, and that what may appear to us as a fundamental, ontological part of sexuality—namely, the gender of our sexual object-choice—is, at best, an etic category of other cultures’ understandings of sexuality. Thus, as Halperin notes, Athenian ‘sex effectively divided and distributed its participants into radically distinct and incommensurable categories (‘penetrator’ versus ‘penetrated’), categories which in turn were wholly congruent with superordinate and subordinate social categories.’<sup>xi</sup> Nowhere in Athenian sex was the gender of the penetrated an issue—what was at stake was the penetrated’s social standing, which had to be below the penetrator’s. In this context—one in which what we would call homosexuality is understood as something else entirely—we can perhaps better understand Michel Foucault’s infamous assertion that ‘Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on “contrary sexual sensations” can stand as [homosexuality’s] date of birth.’<sup>xii</sup>

What may surprise those who have studied the constructionist/essentialist debate is that, thus far, I have not mentioned the issue of aetiology. This is for a good reason—simply put, constructionists do not, or *should* not, explain what *causes* homosexuality (you will notice that the question of what causes heterosexuality is rarely, if ever, asked). In this I follow Foucault, often credited as the ‘father’ of constructionism, whose only response to the question of whether homosexuality is caused by genetic predisposition or social conditioning was a flat ‘no comment.’<sup>xiii</sup> In the same vein, Parker rebuts the essentialist thinkers who claim that the ‘gay gene,’ if discovered, would disprove constructionism: ‘even if there were a gene for homosexuality, even if a desire for one sex over the other were hard-wired into the brain ... none of this would make a scrap of difference to the way one was sexually categorized in Greece or Rome.’<sup>xiv</sup>

This is important to note because the idea of constructionism *outside* the academy concerns itself mostly with the issue of aetiology. Constructionism, in popular thought, takes the ‘nurture’ side in a ‘nature versus nurture’

debate over sexuality. This shallow understanding of a 'socially-formed' sexuality soon degrades to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called 'the blithe ukase that people are 'free at any moment to' (i.e., must immediately) 'choose' to adhere to a particular sexual identity (say, at a random hazard, the heterosexual).'<sup>xv</sup> But perhaps more worrying than the simplistic notion of sexuality as a 'choice' is the cod-psychoanalytic notion that the only way a rational adult could choose homosexuality is if they have been molested as a child.

## THE INVENTION OF INNOCENCE

In order to understand this, we need not only understand the common misapplication of constructionism, we need also understand our culture's prevailing notions of childhood and innocence. I will not go into great depth here—I would like to direct those who wish to know more about these arguments to Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* and James Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence*. I do, however, wish to make two points: 1) that childhood, much like sexuality, is a social construction that has changed greatly over time (this is not to deny the existence of actual children, but to argue that, much like homosexuality, what childhood means and how children are expected to behave has changed over time); and 2) that, as part of this change, Western societies have constructed a notion of childhood innocence and actively inculcated it within actual children.

The idea that children may not be naturally innocent strikes many of us as indecent. After all, most of our culture's paeans to childhood also pay tribute to the prelapsarian notion of innocence: we need only think of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and its depiction of blessed children, who are favoured precisely because of their innocence.<sup>xvi</sup> Yet we need look no further than Ariès's description of the sexually-charged infancy of Louis XII to understand that, in pre-modern Western societies, a child's supposedly natural state was immodesty, not innocence.<sup>xvii</sup> Modern readers may well be shocked by the frankness with which the young prince's genitals are discussed, let alone the frequency with which they are touched by his nanny, governess, and mother. At this stage, as Ariès notes, 'the idea did not yet exist that references to sexual matters ... could soil childish innocence, either in fact or in the opinion people had of it: nobody thought that this innocence really existed.'<sup>xviii</sup>

One of Kincaid's key assertions in *Erotic Innocence* is that adults actively inculcate innocence in children, and this inculcation is structured around what the child *cannot* (or *should not*) know or do. Innocence is, therefore, a series of 'evacuations, the ruthless distribution of eviction notices.'<sup>xix</sup> Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley give a more detailed account of this process in their reading of Thomas Laqueur's *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*:

It is hard to tell whether texts like *Onania* presumed to prolong an innocence somehow presumed to have already existed. However, one interesting fact about the text's evolution stands out: the more *Onania* circulated, the longer it became, because letters of testimonials from women and men, young and old, were continually added to it. If youth could testify to their having been cured of masturbation in such letters, their newly found innocence often looked back awkwardly at a prior state of sexual experience.<sup>xx</sup>

Thus we can see how neatly our culture's notions of childhood innocence fit with the kind of popular constructivism Sedgwick discusses. The child's (constructed) state of innocence means it is a *tabula rasa* upon which 'healthy,' 'normal' adult heterosexuality comes to be written. Conversely, in this understanding, adult homosexuality must have been inscribed on the child in some manner, and, unsurprisingly, that inscription is often constructed as traumatic.

Take, for example, arch-conservative columnist Linda Bowles's discussion of the links between paedophilia and homosexuality:

Why do many homosexuals defend pedophilia? The reason is obvious: The boy who has been sexually gratified by an adult male is a prime candidate to a same-sex orientation when he becomes an adult. Pedophilia is a gateway to homosexuality and bisexuality. Keep in mind that homosexuals are made, not born.<sup>xxi</sup>

While many other discussions about the supposed links between child sexual abuse and later homosexuality are not as blunt as Bowles's, they nonetheless employ her combination of popular constructivism, cod-Freudianism,<sup>xxii</sup> and the notion of childhood innocence. I will now turn my attention to example of another text that follows this pattern: Stephen King's novella *The Library Policeman*.

## THE LIBRARY POLICEMAN

The protagonist of *The Library Policeman*, Sam Peebles, is a realtor and insurance salesman based in the

fictional town of Junction City, Iowa. A perpetual bachelor, he has been on a few dates with his typist, Naomi Higgins, but things have soured between them. At the novella's opening, he is asked to deliver a speech for the local Rotary club. He prepares the speech and reads it to Naomi. Naomi suggests that Sam borrow *The Speaker's Companion* and *Best Loved Poems of the American People* from the Junction City library in order to improve the speech. When Sam arrives at the library, he has a strained encounter with the librarian, Ardelia Lortz, whom he instinctively dislikes. Regardless, he borrows the books, and, having successfully delivered the speech, accidentally leaves the books in his recycling bin, after which they are pulped. Having failed to return the books, Sam is visited by a supernatural Library Policeman, a lisping, trench-coated figure who threatens him and demands that the books be returned. He returns to the library in order to pay for replacement books but finds that the library has changed dramatically—a low ceiling and new lighting have been installed, and none of the staff have heard of Ardelia Lortz.

Some investigation leads Sam to Dirty Dave Duncan, a recovering alcoholic who has encountered Ardelia in the past. Ardelia, it seems, had killed several children in the area thirty years beforehand before hanging herself. Dave tells his own story of how Ardelia led him to alcoholism, and how she is, in fact, a supernatural being who uses a proboscis to feed on the 'special tears' of children—a secretion that Dave surmises is the pure essence of children's fear, which she obtains by reading terrifying revisions of fairy-tales to children. She is not dead, rather 'hibernating,' and has apparently chosen Sam's body as her means of returning to the world.

But this supernatural story is not the real horror of the novella. Instead, we discover that, as a child, Sam was anally raped outside of the library in St Louis by the same lisping, trenchcoated Library Policeman that demanded he return the books. This traumatic experience sets the pattern for Sam's perpetual bachelorhood. It is important to note here that Sam is not explicitly homosexual—instead, the 'queerness' that results from his sexual abuse is a failed heterosexuality, and impossibility to form traditional heteronormative and homosocial kinship bonds.<sup>xxiii</sup> He reflects on this as he glances at Naomi:

She glanced at him, and for the second time he found himself amazed by the foxlike, fragile quality of her beauty, and unable to understand why he hadn't seen it before today.

*Well, you dated her; didn't you? You must have seen SOMETHING.*

Except he hadn't. He had dated her because she was pretty, presentable, unattached, and approximately his own age. He had dated her because bachelors in cities that were really just overgrown small towns were *supposed* to date ... if they were bachelors interested in making a place for themselves in the local business community, that was. If you didn't date, people ... some people ... might think you were

(a poleethman)

a little bit funny.

*I WAS a little funny, he thought. On second thought, I was a LOT funny. But whatever I was, I'm a little different now. And I am seeing her. There's that. I'm really SEEING her.*<sup>xxiv</sup>

The bracketed words '(a poleethman)' occur whenever Sam is threatened by the Library Policeman throughout the narrative, demonstrating King's understanding of child sexual abuse as an experience that disrupts the otherwise linear temporalities of adult existence. Having been abused as a child, according to King, means that Sam is in a permanent state of developmental arrest, and is always teetering close to the brink of a regression into his ruined childhood. There are several instances of this throughout the novella, but the encounter in which the Library Policeman menaces Sam in his own kitchen perhaps illustrates this best:

Sam Peebles, darling of the Junction City Rotary Club, wet his pants. He felt his bladder let go in a warm gush, but that seemed far away and unimportant. What was important was that there was a monster in his kitchen, and the most terrible thing about this monster was that Sam almost knew his face. Sam felt a triple-locked door far back in his mind straining to burst open. He never thought of running. The idea of flight was beyond his capacity to imagine. He was a child again, a child who has been caught red-handed

(the book isn't *The Speaker's Companion*)

doing some awful bad thing. Instead of running

(the book isn't *Best Loved Poems of the American People*)

he folded slowly over his own wet crotch and collapsed between the two stools which stood at the counter, holding his hand up blindly against his head.

(the book is)

'No,' he said in a husky, strengthless voice. 'No, please—no, please, please, don't do it to me, please, I'll be good, please don't hurt me that way.'<sup>xxv</sup>

Thus, in King's narrative, we can see that the experience of child abuse is both narrative *and* anti-narrative—it is a puncturing moment of pure present tense that disrupts the past tense of the supernatural framing narrative.

Bruhm and Hurley identify a similar logic informing Peter Straub's short story 'The Juniper Tree,' whose protagonist is also a man who has been sexually abused as a child: 'Memory, that narrative link to his childhood experience, disrupts into fragments. So "stuck" is the narrator in this pedophilic past that his adult life is all but destroyed: he can find his history only in fits and starts.'<sup>xxvi</sup> In the face of remembered paedophilic abuse, narrative sense becomes topsy-turvy, and tenses invert themselves: it is worth noting here that the action in *The Library Policeman's* 'present' is narrated in the past tense, while Sam's flashback to his childhood rape is narrated in the present tense.

### THE REDEMPTIVE VIOLENCE OF HETEROSEXUALITY

However, King offers his protagonist a means to recover his childhood self and, in so doing, heal himself to a functioning heterosexuality. In Sam's case, he must do two things: disavow the possibility of his childhood self finding pleasure in his sexual abuse, and assert his heterosexual masculinity in a symbolic act of violence against both the Library Policeman and Ardelia.

King's approach to writing Sam's nascent heterosexuality ignores the creative writing program dictum to 'show, not tell'—we are told that Sam is 'certainly aware of two things: that he was falling in love [with Naomi], and that Dave Duncan knew it.'<sup>xxvii</sup> Similarly, after Sam and Naomi have been whisked to Des Moines by air in order to purchase the missing books, the pilot, Stan Soames, tells us that 'the only thing prettier than a girl after her first plane ride is a girl after her first—'<sup>xxviii</sup> (a speech act that figures the act of heterosexual defloration as the telos of Naomi and Sam's budding romance). Importantly, though, these comments are both placed in close proximity to instances in which Sam gradually uncovers the 'truth' about his sexual abuse, indicating that, for King, Sam's process of reclaiming his heterosexuality is closely linked with a process of mastering his own past.

The signifier of Sam's abuse is red licorice—'which he had never eaten and always hated.'<sup>xxix</sup> The taste of red licorice rises in Sam's mouth during his encounters with or memories of the Library Policeman. We soon find out that, prior to his rape, the child Sam had eaten red licorice: 'I used to *love* this stuff,' he tells Naomi. 'Now I can barely stand the smell of it.'<sup>xxx</sup> Red licorice thus functions within the narrative a symbol of childhood innocence lost, a fact that Sam makes explicit before his confrontation with Ardelia: 'It's a by-God symbol of all of the things my Library Policeman took away from me—the love, the friendship, the sense of belonging. I've felt like an outsider *all my life*, and never knew why.'<sup>xxxi</sup> Sam then reflects that, if the licorice is resignified, it could become an effective weapon (his model here is the cross, which kills vampires despite being only 'two sticks of wood or metal set at right angles to each other').<sup>xxxii</sup> Naomi suggests that he needs to resignify the licorice with the 'opposite of fear,' which is, apparently, 'Honesty and belief.'<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Armed with his 'honesty and belief,' Sam returns to the library with copies of *Best Loved Poems of the American People* and *The Speaker's Companion*, a five-dollar note to pay his late fee, and a ball of red licorice. In a protracted action scene, Sam uses the books to break the Library Policeman's nose, and then finishes him off with a symbolically castrating knee to the groin:

The Library Policeman screamed.

'You can't!' it screamed. 'You can't hurt me! You're afraid of me. Besides, you liked it! You *LIKED* it! YOU DIRTY LITTLE BOY, YOU LIKED IT!'

'Wrong,' Sam said. 'I fucking *hated* it. Now take these books. Take them and get out of here. Because the fine is paid.'

He slammed the books into the Library Policeman's chest. And, as the Library Policeman's hands closed on them, Sam hoicked one knee squarely into the library policeman's crotch.

'That's for all the other kids,' he said. 'The ones you fucked and the ones she ate.'<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Thus we can see that, in *The Library Policeman*, it is not enough for Sam to violently reassert his heterosexual masculinity through an act of symbolic violence—he must also disavow any pleasure he may have had in his sexual abuse. In this way, King reinforces to our culture's oppressive identification of (passive) sexual pleasure with powerlessness—a narrative that stretches back to Hesiod. In Hesiod's account, Tiresias, having been both male and female, tells Zeus that, during sex, females experience ten times the pleasure of males. Linda Williams traces the consequences of this revelation: 'when Hera is portrayed as having the whole of the pleasure of sex, the apparent moral is that she is an out-of-control female. In contrast, Zeus's mere one-tenth of pleasure demonstrates the moderation and self-mastery that earn him the right of patriarchal authority over others ... the female loses the game of power if she wins that of pleasure.'<sup>xxxv</sup> King mirrors Hesiod's equation of passive pleasure with a lack of somatic control (and thus symbolic power) when the Library Policeman reinforces Sam's powerlessness (here figured as shame) after the rape:

*Look at you!* the Library Cop says. His face pulls together in a knot of contempt and disgust. *Look at you with your panth down and your little dingle out. You liked it, didn't you? You LIKED it!*

[...]

All [Sam] cares about now is the shame and terror and the sense of worthlessness that abide in him, and of these three the shame is the greatest. The shame is incomprehensible.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Towards the conclusion of the narrative, we discover the connection between Ardelia and Sam: Sam, having been 'hollowed out' by his past abuse, is the perfect vessel for Ardelia to inhabit. We are left with the dark implication that if Sam does not defeat Ardelia, he will go on to another city, and set up shop there as a librarian in order to consume children's fear: a supernatural twist on what Kincaid calls 'the famous (if fallacious) "cycle-of-abuse" notion, which holds that the abused are bound to abuse others when they get the chance.'<sup>xxxvii</sup> Thus it is not enough for Sam to destroy the library policeman; he must also kill Ardelia by ramming the ball of red licorice into her proboscis. Again, Sam's nascent heterosexuality is explicitly linked to the violence he visits upon Ardelia, which is, perhaps unsurprisingly, misogynistic in the extreme. King figures the interior of the proboscis as a seductive, vaginal space, with 'a pink petal of flesh opening and closing hungrily inside there. Each time it opened, it revealed a deeper darkness beyond.'<sup>xxxviii</sup> The proboscis is thus a monstrous vagina-phallus; its hungry, hymenal petal confounds the binary oppositions of interior/exterior, male/female, and penetrator/penetrated. Sam's violence must therefore reassert his heterosexual activity and his new-found role as the penetrator, the figure who would destroy the confounding hymen and make the binary pairs meaningful once more: '*Here, I've got something for you, bitch!*' Sam yells as he violates her proboscis with the licorice. '*I brought it all the way from East St Louis!*'<sup>xxxix</sup> Having re-established his heterosexual identity by disavowing the possibility of his child self's queer pleasure and symbolically restoring the seductive-yet-loathsome vagina-phallus to its properly receptive function, Sam goes on to experience the inevitable happy ending with Naomi: the novel closes with the pair literally walking arm-in-arm together towards the future, and the promise of heterosexual normality.

Perhaps at this point I can best answer my earlier question about what impels us to consume and create these paedophile fictions. As King demonstrates, our overwhelming cultural narrative about childhood and innocence is that it is a space of pure potential. The figure of the child is, in the words of Lee Edelman, 'the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention ... the child [is] the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value.'<sup>xi</sup> This value mutually reinforces both the referent and the signifier: the child becomes valuable as the embodiment of futurity. Thus paedophilia, according to our dominant cultural narrative, is the greatest crime because it spoils the limitless potential of the child and ensures that its future is either literally or figuratively queer. To return to my earlier comparison between paedophilia and bestiality: it is interesting, but not unsurprising, that when Neil Levy interrogates the ethics of bestiality, he is at great pains to ensure that his conditional support for certain forms of consensual bestiality is not read as an endorsement for paedophilia.<sup>xii</sup> Again, it is the child's *future* worth that impels Levy's conclusion that bestiality is ethically permissible but paedophilia is not. Paedophilia functions in Levy's analysis as the very limit of perverse sexuality—it is the yardstick against which all other 'perverse' sex acts are measured, and any argument for their ethical permissibility must pre-emptively defend itself against the allegation that such an argument could also lend conditional support to paedophilia. Levy's rhetorical positioning of paedophilia demonstrates that we can literally conceive of no greater crime. Thus when a paedophile spoils a child's future, either in fiction or in reality, we feel little guilt in performing acts of redemptive, vengeful violence against the paedophile—in both *The Library Policeman* or in the innumerable real-life cases of registered child sex offenders murdered by vigilante groups, we feel that the paedophile has merely been served his inevitable narrative comeuppance.

### **KING'S CAMEO IN *THE LIBRARY POLICEMAN***

What my analysis has thus far elided, and what makes King's novella interesting, is King's own investment in producing this work of paedophile fiction. At first glance, one would be forgiven for thinking that *The Library Policeman*, with its redemptive violence the disavowal of childhood pleasure, only bolsters our culture's grand narrative of child sexual abuse. King's authorial foreword certainly reinforces this notion: he describes the narrative's genesis, which is a rather pedestrian scene in which his son expresses some reluctance to visit the library for fear of the mythical Library Police. But in the conclusion of his foreword he pre-emptively defends his decision to write about the sexual abuse of children:

About thirty pages in, the humor began to go out of the situation. And about fifty pages in, the whole work took a screaming left turn into the dark places I have traveled so often and which I still know so little about. Eventually I found the guy I was looking for, and managed to raise my head enough to look into his merciless silver eyes. I have tried to bring back a sketch for you, Constant Reader, but I'm afraid

it may not be very good.

My hands were trembling quite badly at the time, you see.<sup>xiii</sup>

Here King presents himself as the Prometheus of paedophilia, whose divine task it is to bring us the fire of this ugly but necessary knowledge, and whose prescribed punishment is to be wracked with guilt for doing so.

But this is not the only story we can tell about *The Library Policeman*. King himself makes a cameo appearance in the narrative during Sam's first encounter with Ardelia. As Ardelia explains why the children's library is decked out with frightening posters, she explains that a committee of children who visit the Junction City library have chosen them. These same children listen to the music of Ozzy Osbourne, watch *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and read works by 'Robert McCammon, Stephen King, [and] V.C. Andrews.'<sup>xliii</sup> This, Ardelia leads Sam to conclude, is because the children take pleasure in being scared. Although we later find out that this is something of a ruse—Ardelia, after all, feeds on children's fear—King's presence within the novella cannot be so easily explained away.

In his essay 'The Critic as Host,' J. Hillis Miller sketches an explanation of deconstruction as a heuristic method that radically refigures the relationship between host, guest, and parasite. Responding to M.H. Abrams' claim that a deconstructive reading of a text 'is plainly and simply parasitical' on "the obvious or univocal reading,"<sup>xliiv</sup> Miller defends deconstructive practice as precisely that which challenges, overturns, and renders indeterminable the common-sense distinction between parasite and host. Etymologically, *guest* and *host* share the same root: '*ghos-ti*, stranger, guest, host, properly "someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality."<sup>xliv</sup> When the notion of the parasite (from the Greek *para sitos*, 'beside the grain'<sup>xlvi</sup>) is deconstructed, the parasite and host become those who share the food, those who have duties to each other.

What, we might ask, is the food in *The Library Policeman*, and who is the parasite? Under the 'obvious or univocal reading,' the parasite is Ardelia, feeding off the fear she inspires in her charges, contributing nothing in return but nightmares. The food in question would obviously be fear. Yet if fear is the food, then surely King, too, is a parasite—for he, like Ardelia, uses his narrative gifts to inspire fear within his audiences, and, in a very literal, material way, he feeds from it in the form of royalty cheques. In this way, we could say that King unconsciously identifies with those who, to borrow another phrase from Edelman, 'are *not* "fighting for the children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.'<sup>xlvii</sup> Both within and without the narrative of *The Library Policeman*, King explicitly places himself in the company of such dangerous parasites.

King's cameo inside the novella also makes us aware that what we are reading is exactly that—a piece of fiction. His appearance destabilises his fictional world, revealing its constructed nature. Although his cameo is only brief—literally a one-liner—we can also see the constructed nature of the narrative in its 'heart of darkness'—the scene in which Sam recalls his childhood rape. Significantly, this scene is not narrated in the past-tense realism of the rest of the novella. Instead, like the textual irruptions that mark Sam's encounters with the Library Policeman, the scene is narrated in the present tense. Furthermore, the scene is self-consciously 'literary' and bracketed off from the rest of the narrative in two significant ways. First, it is a dream sequence. Second, and more importantly, the dream sequence riffs on the Grimm Brothers' story 'Little Red Riding Hood' in its description of events. The child Sam becomes 'Little White Walking Sam,'<sup>xlviii</sup> his abuser becomes '*The Library WOLF!*'<sup>xlix</sup> Even when King's scandalised-yet-prurient depiction of Sam's rape reaches its most bathetic moment—this being the moment where Sam fears touching his recently-violated anus lest he discover he has become 'Little Red Bleeding Sam'<sup>1</sup>—the intertextual nature of King's narration ensures that we are aware that even this scene is fictional.

King's cameo is not merely interesting because it reveals his parasitical nature, though. In the very rhetorical excess of the child abuse scene, at the moment the 'obvious and univocal' reading of *The Library Policeman* instructs us to feel the most fear, we may think about the parasitical nature of our own emotional investment in paedophile fiction. If fear is the food of *The Library Policeman*, then we, just as much as King himself, consume it and are nourished by it. Importantly, unlike Ardelia's fictional charges, we cannot claim we are unwilling to enter into a reciprocal relationship of fear-creation with King. Therefore, King's narrative—if only indirectly—encourages us, as consumers of paedophile fiction, to question our own relationship to the cultural mass production of paedophile terror. We can only hope that the ethical value of *The Library Policeman* lies in the fact that, having begun to question our emotional investments in paedophile fiction, we don't fall back upon a teleological narrative as murderous as King's own.<sup>li</sup>

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## REFERENCES

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- <sup>ii</sup> Michel Foucault develops his notion of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), 195–228.
- <sup>iii</sup> Louis Althusser develops the notion of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy: And Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press 1971), 127–186.
- <sup>iv</sup> Dan Savage, "Bread Basket Case" (*The Stranger*, 2004), <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/SavageLove?oid=19075> (accessed February 25, 2008).
- <sup>v</sup> There are a few notable exceptions, such as Peter Singer and Neil Levy's interrogations of the ethics of bestiality, or Jack Sargeant's analysis of 'ass-to-mouth' pornography as sublimated coprophagia. See Singer, "Heavy Petting" (*Nerve*, 2001), <http://www.nerve.com/Opinions/Singer/heavyPetting/main.asp> (accessed February 25, 2008); Levy, "What (if Anything) Is Wrong with Bestiality?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (3): 444–456; Sargeant, "Filth and Sexual Excess: Some Brief Reflections on Popular Scatology" (*M/C Journal*, 2007), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0610/03-sargeant.php> (accessed February 25, 2008).
- <sup>vi</sup> Holt N. Parker, "The Myth of the Heterosexual: Anthropology and Sexuality for Classicists," *Arethusa* 34 (2001): 320–1.
- <sup>vii</sup> David M. Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?" in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1993), 416–431.
- <sup>viii</sup> Parker, 321.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.
- <sup>xi</sup> Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?", 418.
- <sup>xii</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality volume one: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), 48.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Cited in Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Parker, 325.
- <sup>xv</sup> Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 41.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Such as Tom Dacre, the foil of Blake's narrator in "The Chimney Sweeper," who is so naïve as to be comforted by the idea that his hair cannot be blackened by soot if he has none, and who comes to view the manifestly abusive situation of his employment as a form of asceticism towards God's love. See William Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper" in *Songs of Innocence and Experience, and Other Works*, ed. R.B. Kennedy (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1970), 19–20.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962), 100–127.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.
- <sup>xix</sup> Kincaid, 16.
- <sup>xx</sup> Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, "Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children" in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, edited by Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xvi.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Bowles, Linda, "Kinder, Gentler Pedophiles?" (*WorldNetDaily*, 1999), <http://www.wnd.com/index.php?pageId=228> (accessed February 25, 2008).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Freud himself was not as "homophobic" as many of his detractors claim, and does not posit such a simplistic notion of the aetiology of homosexuality. See Henry Abelove, "Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans" in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1993), 381–396.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> The term 'homosocial' is derived from Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
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- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 588–589.
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- <sup>xxvii</sup> King, 671.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 675.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 670.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.
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- xxxiv Ibid., 712–713.
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- xxxvi King, 691–692.
- xxxvii Kincaid, 12.
- xxxviii King, 718.
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- xl Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3–4.
- xli See Levy, 447: ‘the analogy between pedophilia and bestiality fails; the fact that animals, like children, are incapable of giving informed consent gives us no reason to conclude that bestiality is impermissible.’
- xliv King, 487.
- xlvi Ibid., 517.
- xlvi Cited in J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 177.
- xlvi Ibid., 180.
- xlvi Ibid., 179.
- xlvi Edelman, 3.
- xlvi King, 685.
- xlvi Ibid., 687.
- <sup>1</sup> Ibid., 691.
- li I would like to thank those who attended this paper’s presentation at the fourth annual Rhizomes conference for their stimulating questions, which helped immeasurably in its revision. Special thanks go to Elizabeth Stephens and Michelle Boulous Walker for their guidance in this process.