



THE SPECTRUM OF POWER-KNOWLEDGE: A DISCURSIVE STUDY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF MICHEL FOUCAULT IN STEPHEN KING'S ROSE MADDER AND THE INSTITUTION

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Abstract:

In Stephen King's writing, the concepts of strength and knowledge commonly interact alongside those of horror, supernatural prowess, and the consequences of obtaining or possessing certain knowledge. According to Foucault, power and knowledge are intertwined and mutually constitutive, and King explores how knowledge culminates in power and the hazards and corruption that may come with it. He argued that knowledge is not only a detached representation of reality but is deeply embedded in institutions of authority. The ideas of power and knowledge are central to the plot of Stephen King's book *Rose Madder* (1995) and *The Institution* (2019). The story revolves around Rose McClendon, a battered wife who flees her abusive husband, Norman Daniels, and sets off on a quest for self-awareness. The Institute is a clandestine institution that kidnaps kids who have psychic powers. The staff at the Institute, under the direction of Mrs. Sigsby, uses their understanding of these kids' abilities to abuse and subjugate them. The Institute stands for a place of authority where people are controlled and subjugated via the application of knowledge.

Power is manifested via discourses, institutions, and practices that influence and regulate knowledge creation, dissemination, and control. This viewpoint views knowledge not as an immutable truth but rather as a social construct that serves the interests of the powerful; "discursive practices are not purely and simply modes of manufacture of discourse. They take shape in technical ensembles, in institutions, in behavioural schemes, in types of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms that both impose and maintain them" (Foucault 12). This paper looks at select samples from the above mentioned two novels of Stephen King and correlates them with Michel Foucault's notion power-knowledge.

Keywords: Discourse, Knowledge, Liberation, Power, Self.

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1. Introduction

The idea of power and knowledge frequently coexists in Stephen King's literature with themes of terror, paranormal prowess, and the repercussions of acquiring or holding certain information. King examines how knowledge culminates power and the risks and corruption that may come with it: according to Foucault, Power and knowledge are interwoven and mutually constitutive. He maintained that knowledge is strongly ingrained in power institutions and is not just a neutral reflection of reality. Discourses, institutions, and practices that shape and control knowledge generation, diffusion, and control are all ways that power manifests itself. According to this perspective, knowledge is not regarded as an unchanging fact but rather as a social construct that advances the objectives of the powerful; "discursive practices are not purely and simply modes of manufacture of discourse. They take shape in technical ensembles, in institutions, in behavioural schemes, in types of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms that both impose and maintain them" (Foucault 12). In *Gay Science* Nietzsche defines "knowledge is an 'invention' ... an interplay of instincts, impulses, desires, fear ..." (Foucault 14). The ideas of power and knowledge are central to the plot of Stephen King's book *Rose Madder*. The story revolves around Rosie McClendon, a battered wife who flees her abusive husband, Norman Daniels, and sets off on a quest for self-awareness. The Institute is a clandestine institution that kidnaps kids who have psychic powers. The staff at the Institute, under the direction of Mrs. Sigsby, uses their understanding of these kids' abilities to abuse and subjugate them. The Institute stands for a place of authority where people are controlled and

subjugated via the application of knowledge.

The Discourse:

As Rose becomes more conscious of and aware of the degree of Norman's brutality, she makes the decision to leave him. She understands that education is her key to escaping a toxic relationship as she develops awareness of the cycle of abuse and an understanding of her own power. Rose Daniels overcame her husband Norman's abuse for fourteen years. Norman was a policeman who specialized in questioning witnesses. Inflicted by her husband, Rose endured shattered bones, several dark eyes, and even a horrific miscarriage. Regularly, Norman threatened Rose with violence by saying he intended to "talk to her up close". After one tiny incident made her realize Norman would eventually murder her externally, just as he had spent his entire marriage killing her mentally, she left the cruel and repressive house. The incident that led her to decide to leave was a seemingly little one: one morning when she made the bed, she noticed blood on the pillow: "It was on the top sheet, her side, close to where the pillow went when the bed was made" (King, *Rose Madder* 26). She regretfully made the decision to leave since that one drop of blood encapsulated the instability of both her marriage and "Norman and the brutal reality for another dimension ..." (Strengell 46). Rose decided to leave the house and the community she knew because she had no relatives or acquaintances. She looked for safety in a big city more than 500 miles away, wherein she believed she would be protected from Norman. She arrived in her new town alone and without friends. Rose's life started again at Daughters and Sisters, a women's shelter after she decided to seek help. She learned that she had the fortitude to endure the horrific

traumas she had through at the hands of Norman when she came across other women who had gone through similar torture. Rose Daniels made a symbolic move by giving up her marital name and resuming her life as Rose McClendon, at least in her own mind. Through the discourse of failed marriage Rose acquired knowledge that equates her with the other women in the safe house. Ruth Rosen asserts, "It turned out that women had no particular proclivity for walking into doors, falling down stairs, or smashing their faces on the ground" (Rosen 185), but they were formerly forced to keep domestic violence a secret from the public. This discursive knowledge, which provided the protagonist immense power to become a rebel, maybe better described as a reminder or a fresh understanding of this pervasive and deeply ingrained crime. Jayne Mooney mentioned this power under the "Feminist movement": "that has only become publicly evident at times when there has been a strong feminist movement" (Mooney 2).

As Rose Madder dealt with domestic violence and its discursive knowledge rests upon the protagonist's accumulation of power through the journey of marital experiences, wherein The Institute dealt with child exploitation by the totalitarian power structure. According to The Institute, America is a country characterized by capitalist mechanisms that promote excessive and wasteful consumption. While King's other works, including *Misery* (1987) and *Needful Things* (1991), which examine aspects of consumption and greed, contain elements of this critique, *The Institute* stands out because it frequently and explicitly alludes to Nazi Germany, suggesting totalitarian features of twenty-first-century American life. The Institute was founded in 1950 using a design that was initially developed in Nazi Germany, therefore the brutality that

characterizes that totalitarian state may also be seen in the Maine woods. The Head of the Institute, Mrs. Sigsby is as heartless as Nazis; "who thought it would be a terrific idea to put Arbeit macht frei, works set you free, over the entrance to Auschwitz" (King, *The Institute* 57). King makes a subtle allusion to National Security in the German Democratic Republic when Mrs. Sigsby refers to the visual hallucinations the children have during examinations as "Stasi lights". The Nazi dictatorship is another particularly vivid illustration of brutal twentieth-century organizations. Mrs. Sigsby's sadistic harshness sees her impose a chillingly straightforward approach to tokens and physical punishment on her subjects, which is frequently compared to the Holocaust; "an earnest-looking fellow, middle-aged, bespectacled, mostly bald. He looked like an accountant. Of course, so had Adolf Eichmann" (King, *The Institute* 159). The Institute, therefore, represents a sad chapter in human history when seemingly civilized civilizations, like America, give rise to oppressive and cruel regimes. While Luke battles to understand how totalitarian power might exist in America, totalitarian features may also thrive in democratic societies, as African Americans did under slavery and Jim Crow in the South. It is easy to find King's indictment of totalitarianism in the dictatorship of the American government, which is well-known for altering district lines, repressing voters, and using Cambridge Analytica's data-mining methods to influence voter preferences; "the Stasi, the Gestapo, or the NKVD green with envy" (Huneke). In previously speculative novels like *IT* (1986), *The Stand* (1990), and *Desperation* (1996), where evil is represented by the monstrous individuals Pennywise the Dancing Clown, Randall Flagg, and Tak, King's reference to Eichmann helps a more complex

exploration of his enduring interest in good and evil.

A picture that Rose finds in a pawn shop serves as a major plot point in the novel. Rose Madder, a picture, exudes a supernatural force. It acts as a gateway via which Rose can exit the actual world and reach the fantastic one. Rose learns more about herself, her background, and her potential as a result of her encounters with the picture. Also, the investigation reveals to her that the world depicted in the picture, she learns about her own buried talents and skills. She gains the ability to use her inner strength and face the painful events that have impacted her life. Rose is now equipped with the information she needs to overcome her anxieties and take charge of her own life. Two different discourses/universes are included in this novel. Rose is compelled to deal with two mysteries, the first of which is that she is aware of Norman's level of madness. Rose has put up with Norman's abuse for numerous years despite knowing that he lacks mental stability. She doesn't really understand the extent of his madness, though, until she walks away from him and he chases after her, leaving dead bodies in his path. This insight forces her to investigate the second Threatening Mystery in the book—the enigma surrounding Rose Madder's ancestry. Rose is compelled to discover what Rose Madder actually is when she takes Norman to his execution at Rose Madder's hands. Rose is aware that Rose Madder is not truly human. By twisting the bond between Rose and Rose Madder, King adds to the Gothic notion of the Hero and the Heroine in Rose Madder. Rose is the victim of Norman's cruelty, but when she saves Rose Madder's child, she becomes a hero. Rose Madder is unable to protect her kid from Erinyes, but when she murders Norman to save Rose, she transforms into a hero. The link between the two Roses is what contributes to this relationship's

complexity. The only physical difference between the two ladies is the growing disease that is starting to blanket Rose Madder's body in patches.

Over the span of his career, there is not a distinct shift from stereotypical female characters to realistic ones; rather, relatively a handful of realistic characters are distributed pretty evenly across the stereotypical characters. Therefore, it is impossible to claim that King's ladies have changed over time. When Rose's relationship to Rose Madder is made known, her characteristics as a Madonna and a Monster become clear. Rose and Rose Madder must be viewed as two sides of the same character, regardless of whether Rose Madder is Rose's twin or the result of Rose's fury and anger. Rose Madder's existence is either independent of or reliant on Rose's existence. If Rose Madder were to pass the domestic test, she would be, at best, a Helpmate with significant flaws and, at worst, a Monster. There is no information on Rose Madder's child's father or any sort of actual residence. Rose Madder only passes the maternal component of the domestic test; yet, despite her clear love for her daughter, she is unable to stop her daughter's kidnapping or rescue her on her own. If it weren't for her relationship with her child, Rose Madder would fit the Monster archetype because of her brutality, rage, and possibly insanity. Because Rose Madder does not originate from Rose's world and cannot be judged to identical standards as Rose, she is able to withstand the domestic test. Rose Madder transforms into a black Madonna, a woman who gives all up for her kid.

Like Rose Madder, The Institute possesses the factor of domination or power in human beings; Hannah Arendt claimed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) that Eichmann was not a psychotic anti-Semite as might be envisioned, but rather that his

wickedness was the result of a typical personality within a totalitarian structure. Eichmann was a key figure in attempts to understand the nature of those complicit in the Final Solution. In other words, Eichmann was not a cruel psychopath but a law-abiding citizen who, in his desire to follow commands, committed atrocious acts that he later explained away as just doing his job. Although Arendt's assertions have been hotly debated, they do provide King the opportunity to analyze how the very foundation of his Institute may actually cause evil as opposed to merely relying on it. Luke Ellis, a student at the Institute, decides he wants to leave and reveal the actions of the group. Rebellion and the Search for Knowledge. He becomes a challenge to the Institute's authority as he learns more about its activities and the real nature of its motives. Whether dictatorial or capitalist, corrupt and repressive institutions and structures are the foundation of evil in *The Institute*. The Institute is plagued by structural issues brought on by subpar leadership, indifference, and apathy; "an inertial glide, like a rocket that switches off its engines once escape velocity has been attained" (King, *The Institute* 180). The Institute's failure is also a result of the overbearing bureaucracy. Here, it is claimed that the bureaucracy intended to ensure the efficient running of institutions instead of undermining them. Defense head Trevor Stackhouse admits the Institute's internal disintegration as a result: "The basic infrastructure of this place is shit" (King, *The Institute* 207). King's portrayal of *The Institute* shows concerns about the waning of the once-powerful nation that emerged after World War II. Although America's population has nearly doubled after the 1960s, the postwar decades were a time of prosperity and development; as a result, the infrastructure systems created during that time have aged and are now at their maximum capacity; "mostly below

standard, significant deterioration, and a strong risk of failure" (Moss).

Luke's passion for knowledge and his desire to recover his independence and freedom are what motivate him to rebel. Luke describes the conditions and oppressions; the youngster at the Institute is endowed with a variety of psychic skills, including telepathy and telekinesis; as simple products, Mrs. Sigsby believes that little Avery Dixon is too valuable to risk having injections that may result in seizures or near-drowning incidents since his BDNF score—a test of psychic ability—is extremely high: "Certain commodities were getting rarer. Elephant tusks. Tiger pelts. Rhino horns. Rare metals. Even oil. Now you could add these special children, whose extraordinary qualities had nothing to do with their IQs" (King, *The Institute* 58). The installation of tracking devices in every child's ear at the Institute serves as a vivid instance of this commercialization. When Luke experiences this, he realizes, "Lucas David Ellis, who had been planning to matriculate at MIT and Emerson, had been reduced to a blinking dot on a computer screen" (King, *The Institute* 95).

The Institute is interested in developing and enhancing these skills because they perceive them as a source of strength and information that can be exploited for personal advantage; the children's specialized knowledge serves as a weapon for control as well as a way to challenge the Institute's authority; "... you made it do what you wanted, and if it didn't, you administered what the psychologists called negative reinforcement. And when the tests were over? You went down to the break room for coffee and Danish and talked about ... or bitched about politics, sports, whatever" (King, *The Institute* 143). The Gothic concern with mistreated children who are "powerless in the face of persecution" (David Punter 289) includes the shocking

mistreatment that the youngsters in The Institute endure. King gives his kids access to the strength that comes from belonging to a group and a community, which sets The Institute apart from this heritage of victimized innocents. Luke, Avery, and Kalisha are all susceptible to militarized versions of order and commodification as exemplified by the Institute when acting alone, but when acting in concert, they can use their meagre psychic abilities to build a force strong enough to overpower the adults who stand for failed and corrupt aftermath of World War II organizations.

2. Conclusion

The whole discussion throughout this research article is that through various elements in the discourse how the protagonists are gaining knowledge and that leads to power; in both the works of Stephen King, the power suggests truth, justice, and liberation: “the distribution of justice was the focus of significant ... struggles. They ultimately gave rise to a form of justice linked to a knowledge in which truth was posited as visible ...” (Foucault 15). “Norms of knowledge” and “production of truth” are the boundaries for the “manifestation of truth” or the “penal Justice”(Foucault 39). Rose’s life dwindles between marriage with Norman Daniel and self-realization (Rose Madder) through the painting. On the other hand, Luke’s life swings between being a child and the escape from the Institute. Knowledge is questioning “society’s economic and political structures” (Foucault 39), and both Rose and Luke gained power by doing that; “Everything would spread out ... in the limpidness of knowledge cleansed of all power ...” (Foucault 45). King is always clear about his protagonists and antagonists; it is the magic/power of King’s writing that delineates readers primarily; he is one of the greatest among the recent writers who

perfectly draws the psyche of the characters from the real world: “Some turn out to be monsters beneath their human exterior: immature, selfish, irresponsible, and without conscience” (Strengell 210).

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