

Stephen King's Vampire Kingdom. Supernatural EVIL and Human evil in TV adaptations of *Salem's Lot* (1979, 2004)

'Beneath the postcard camouflage there's little good in small towns. Mostly boredom, interspersed with a dull, mindless, moronic evil' (*Salem's Lot*, 2004)

First published in October 1975, *Salem's Lot* is one of Stephen King's most enduring novels. King critic Douglas Winter considers it 'the single most influential of his books' (1989:43), while screenwriter Peter Filardi, who would adapt it for TV in 2004, has described it as 'a modern literary classic' (Gross 2004: 10). Not only did the novel achieve longevity in its own right, but also the story of a small American community torn asunder by the arrival of a supernatural force became something of an archetypal Stephen King narrative to which he would return many times during his career. In *Salem's Lot* the catalyst is the arrival of Kurt Barlow, an ancient European vampire, but in later works King has had the destructive force be extra-terrestrial (*IT*, 1985, *The Tommyknockers*, 1987 and *Under the Dome*, 2009), demonic (*Needful Things*, 1991), cosmic forces of fate (*Insomnia*, 1994) and inter-dimensional ('The Mist' 1980)

Possibly because its structure became a King archetype, or due to its enduring appeal and the fact that it is one of King's earliest works, *Salem's Lot* is unusual in the canon of King adaptations by being adapted twice, once in 1979 and once in 2004. Both were miniseries for television, the first directed by Tobe Hooper and the second by Mikael Salomon. Although at the time of writing in May 2017 a number of King's works have been or are about to have a second outing on either film or TV, including *IT* (Lee Wallace, 1990, Muschietti, 2017) and *The Mist* (Darabont, 2007, Torpe, 2017), when Salomon's version of *Salem's Lot* was broadcast on TNT in 2004 the only others of King's works to have been re-adapted were *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976, Carson, 2002), *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980, Garris, 1997) and King's short story 'Trucks' (King, 1985, Thomson 1997). In all these other cases the adaptations are trans-medial, former cinema releases being made for TV (*The Shining*, *Carrie*, *The Mist*, *Trucks*) or vice versa (*IT*), making *Salem's Lot* the only King story to date to be adapted more than once for television.¹

The fact that there are two versions of *Salem's Lot* for TV, made 25 years apart, provides a useful opportunity to examine the changes made in adapting King's

original work for television in the very different contexts from which the two versions emerged. Hooper's film came towards the end of the 1970s, a period that John Kenneth Muir has described as a golden age of terror television in which horror TV adopted a darker look and tone, as 'the fun, brightly-colored, action-packed and optimistic TV visions of the 1960s ... were ... superseded by violent, dark, grim programming such as *Night Gallery* and *Kolchak*'. He argues this 'turn towards darkness' was responding to 'a shift in the national mood' as a result of images on TV of Vietnam and civil rights violence, which meant that 'for the first time Americans were aware of a darker world, and television reflected this shift in perspective' (2001: 2).

The producer of the re-adaptation, Mark Wolper, remembered Hooper's version as being 'the scariest thing I'd ever seen' but was influenced in his decision to redo it by a feeling that 'the original is still good, but it feels unfortunately dated' (quoted in Kipp 2004b: 41). Wolper's miniseries updates King's text to the twenty-first century, meaning the 2004 version includes things absent both from the book and from Hooper's, such as the use of cell phones and, more significantly for a post 9/11 America, references to the war in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it arrived at a transition point in modern TV horror. In the 1990s and early 2000s the genre had enjoyed a fruitful period through shows like *The X-Files* (1993-2002, 2016-), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2002) and *Angel* (1999-2004), as well as King's own relationship with ABC that led to successful miniseries events like *IT* (1990) and *The Stand* (1994). However, by 2004 *The X-Files*, *Buffy* and *Angel* had all ended (in 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively) and King's TV work hit rock bottom with the critically derided *Kingdom Hospital* (2004). The second *Salem's Lot* appeared in a transitional moment between the end of the key horror TV texts of the 1990s and a new Golden Age of TV horror (see Abbott in this volume) that began with *Supernatural* (2005-) and would include the likes of *True Blood* (2008-2014), *American Horror Story* (2011-) and *The Walking Dead* (2010-).

Reflecting their position in the ebb and flow of the TV horror genre, both versions would take a very different approach to King's story, with Hooper emphasising supernatural evil and the gothic, while Salomon would take a more realist approach, focussing more upon the natural world and the evil that men do. Both approaches are not only embedded in King's original text, but also are, like the story of *Salem's Lot* itself, a standard trope of King's writing throughout his career.

Perhaps most importantly in both versions the character of Barlow, King's lead vampire, is largely incidental to the on-going narrative. While he represents the supernatural force that forms the catalyst for what happens to the people of Salem's Lot, in terms of both screen time and narrative agency, Barlow is a supporting player, more metaphor than monster. Concentrating on King's novel and both adaptations, this article will explore the dual nature of the vampiric metaphor that King adopts and consider how his depiction of the interplay between the petty sins of small town America and the invasion of an evil supernatural force is given different emphasis within these two versions.

The People Versus Kurt Barlow: 'EVIL' and 'evil' in King's *Salem's Lot*

There's nothing revolutionary in suggesting that the vampire often acts as a metaphor for something else. In both the novel and numerous film versions of *Dracula* for example, notably Tod Browning's 1931 version, Terence Fisher's (1958) and John Badham's (1979), the count represents a foreign and liminal Other whose atavistic presence sparks a sexual awakening in the Victorian women he encounters, who in turn then present a challenge to patriarchal authority. More recently Stacey Abbott (2016) has considered vampire films like *Ultraviolet* (Wimmer, 2006) and *Daybreakers* (Spierig and Spierig, 2009) as engaging with contemporary fears of viral pandemics, a metaphor also adopted in the increasingly popular presentation of a zombie-filled post-apocalyptic world.

In the novel *Dracula*, and many of the film versions, the count's arrival and his impact particularly on the key female characters of Lucy and Mina threatens to spark a series of societal changes, the potential for which already lurk beneath the Victorian veneer. Dracula unleashes the sexuality that already exists within Lucy and Mina. As Abbott has pointed out, Mina uses a typewriter to record her stories and observations, making her a modern woman in some ways, but one whose sexuality and true independence is still shackled by societal norms, taboos and traditions, which Dracula breaks when he seduces first Lucy and then Mina (2007: 24-30).

In the novel *Salem's Lot*, the vampire Kurt Barlow and his human familiar, Richard Straker are, like Dracula, anachronistic Others from an older world, in this case coming to Maine from Germany and the United Kingdom rather than to Whitby and London from Transylvania. Yet they do not represent a similar type of sexual

threat to the one that Dracula poses. Theirs is a different form of seduction. For example, their purchase of the looming and creepy Marsten House is arranged by corrupt local estate agent Larry Crockett of his own free will. They offer him a piece of land worth millions in exchange for buying the house and the store where their antique business will open for one dollar (King 1975: 67-69). Just as the good people of Castle Rock help the devil to destroy their community through their pursuit of consumer goods in *Needful Things*, Crockett agrees to the sale not because he is in thrall to a supernatural creature of the night, but rather to plain old-fashioned human greed.

James E. Hicks argues that *Salem's Lot* shows that 'the American pastoral is corruptible, that small town America is not a bulwark against depravity' (1987: 75-6). While Dracula is active in his 'seduction' of Renfield, Lucy and Mina that brings them under his thrall, in *Salem's Lot* Barlow does not, in Hicks' phrase, 'violate the American pastoral' by turning most of the people of Salem's Lot himself. Instead he exploits the corruption and depravity already embedded there and so, as Tony Magistrale says, Barlow and Straker arrive in 'a society already so manipulative and violent that it makes the itinerant revenant feel comfortable, if not tame by comparison' (2003: 178). King himself says the novel 'talks about small-town life as vampiric culture' (quoted in Magistrale 2003: 6), and the people of the Lot are not so much fed upon by the outsiders Barlow and Straker as feeding off each other. As Hicks points out, the true malevolency in *Salem's Lot* is familial. Barlow's external influence is surprisingly minimal and instead what King presents is one family member turning another until the family unit is destroyed, as in the case of the Glicks where Barlow turns the youngest son, Ralphie, but it is he who then turns Danny, who subsequently turns his mother. The result is that '*Salem's Lot* brings death and its terror to its readers through increasingly closer degrees of physical intimacy' (Hicks 1987: 77).

In the interplay between the invading un-dead Other and the vampiric culture of the town itself, King's novel therefore walks a line between depicting evil as an invading supernatural force and as one that already openly lives in the hearts of men and women and behind the facades of ordinary everyday life. This distinction is articulated in the book by King's failed Catholic priest, Father Callaghan. Despite a weakness for whisky, Callaghan wants to see himself as a Christian warrior who can 'lead a division ... into battle against EVIL ... to slug it out toe to toe with EVIL' but

instead bemoans his fate dealing with evil with a small 'e' rather than a big 'e', 'evil from which there was no mercy or reprieve. The fist crashing into the baby's face, the tire cut open with a jackknife, the barroom brawl' (1975: 163-4).

This theme of good versus (human) evil versus (supernatural) EVIL is present in much of King's work and heavily influences his general approach to character and story, which is to take ordinary people and put them in extraordinary, often supernatural, situations and to let their actions and fate stem from their moral choices. Throughout his stories King frequently creates a situation that confronts his characters with an outside EVIL and allows them free will to respond based on their own inner capacity for evil or good. Many King scholars have argued that this interplay between evil and EVIL, between the real world and the supernatural, is an essential aspect of King's appeal, and is clearly visible in the aforementioned *Salem's Lot* inspired titles. In books like *The Tommyknockers*, *Needful Things* and *Under the Dome*, he begins by writing relatable, blue-collar characters with whom audiences can identify. As Thomas F. Monteleone points out, '(King) writes about people we know. They are real. They are familiar. They are not removed from the normal humdrum of our everyday world. They are part of it.' (1986: 256). Likewise Ben Indick suggests that, 'the basic groundwork of [his] stories is their intense realism, rooted in genuine small towns as a rule, and quite average individuals, with all the familiar settings of their lives' (1985: 9). Only once he has established 'this very real world, among these very believable characters' does he introduce an element of horror, 'something nominally *unreal* and *unbelievable*' (Ryan 1982: 171-2)

This element of horror forms the supernatural spark which forces his characters to act according to their natures, and what matters more to King in these stories is not so much the big, supernatural EVIL, as how his characters respond to it. In *Under the Dome*, for example, the revelation that the dome is placed over Chester's Mill by alien children who wish to observe human behaviour is largely a McGuffin. It forms only a fractional part of the narrative, which is far more concerned with watching the town split between morally polarised 'good' and 'bad' characters who then come into conflict. This structure is most evident in *The Stand* (1978) where the survivors of an apocalyptic plague are placed into clear moral camps, the 'good' ones with Mother Abigail in Boulder and the 'evil' ones with Randall Flagg in Las Vegas. Only a few characters are permitted moral ambiguity in the book, notably Harold Lauder, who seems outwardly good but ultimately betrays the Boulder community.

Flagg is only able to manipulate Harold because of inherent flaws in his morality; Harold is in love with Frannie Goldsmith and consumed by jealousy when she rejects him.

In the case of Father Callaghan, despite his desire to fight, when confronted by the *unreal* in the form of Barlow, he capitulates, his faith fails him and he drinks from the vampire before taking a bus out of town. It is the fact that Callaghan knows what his foe is that makes his weakness so much worse. The majority of the townspeople of Salem's Lot are virtually unaware of Barlow and are mainly turned by people they know, while the majority of those who know that Barlow is a vampire, including writer Ben Mears, teenager Mark Petrie and doctor Jimmy Cody, become modern-day vampire hunters, who face up to and battle EVIL and either win or lose. Only Callaghan is found truly wanting, the evil of his weak spirit and faith making him powerless against EVIL, and so Callaghan in the novel embodies the battleground between human corruption and supernatural forces that lie at the heart not just of *Salem's Lot*, but at the moral centre of much of King's forty-plus year output.

EVIL in *Salem's Lot*, 1975 and 1979

It is therefore significant that as the personification of this natural/supernatural ambiguity, Callaghan is virtually absent from Tobe Hooper's 1979 miniseries, which takes a more straightforward approach and presents evil as a monstrous Other. Being products of the 1970s and with their idea of the vampire Other unleashing the hidden sins of the Lot, it is easy to equate King's novel, and the 1979 TV miniseries adaptation, with Robin Wood's classic assessment of 1970s horror as depicting 'the American Nightmare', in which 'normality is threatened by the monster' through a process that witnesses 'the return of the repressed' (1986: 70-94). Ripping horror from the Victorian gothic worlds it inhabited in the late 1950s and 1960s in Hammer's reworkings of Universal's classic monster movies like *Dracula* (Fisher, 1958) and *Curse of Frankenstein* (Fisher, 1957), or Roger Corman's adaptation of stories by Edgar Allan Poe, the films of the American Nightmare brought terror into the contemporary US landscape. Few did this with more impact than Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), in which a group of American youths are stranded in the middle of nowhere when their van runs out of gas, a clear reference to the on-going oil crisis that gripped America in the early 1970s. They are then

terrorised by a perverse family of cannibalistic, unemployed slaughterhouse workers, whose livelihood has been taken away when a harsh economic climate closed the abattoir, leaving them to live off what the land can offer, in this case a stranded handful of teenagers.

King took the idea of updating horror into the modern United States literally, bringing Victorian gothic horror into contemporary America by settling an ancient European vampire in a town in rural Maine. John Sears argues that through this conceit King marshals tropes of the gothic, primarily in the realm of the uncanny, making the book ‘disconcerting in its simultaneous inhabiting of and displacement from familiar gothic traditions’ (2011: 22). King uses gothic imagery, but in such a way as to both make the normal world of the Lot uncanny, but also to highlight the anachronistic nature of this imagery, so out of place is it in small town New England. For example King emphasises the significance of the Marsten House, an archetypal gothic mansion on a hill that can be seen from, and can therefore watch, everywhere in the town. As Alan Ryan points out, the house is ‘the source of evil’ and King ‘predisposes the reader to see it that way by quoting, just before the actual story begins, the first paragraph of Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*’ (1982: 173) but King nevertheless places it in this ordinary town amongst the everyday mundanity of Bab’s Beauty Boutique, the town dump and Spencers’ ice-cream sodas.

The story itself articulates this dichotomy, since although it looms large in both the vision and the psyche of the town, ultimately the status of the Marsten House is undefined. Ben Mears (David Soul) asks if it might be a ‘beacon of evil’ and the suggestion is that somehow the implied Satanic rituals and child abuse that went on there under the influence of the house’s first owner Hubie Marsten created a kind of repository of evil – as does Hill House - that called to Barlow and attracted him to the Lot. King however acknowledges that the influence of the House is tenuous, even irrelevant, describing it as being ‘the gothic equivalent of an appendix. It was there, but it wasn’t doing much except lending atmosphere’ (1981: 254). It is therefore, like Barlow, a beacon of old gothic EVIL placed within King’s vision of the everyday evil of contemporary small town American life, and like Barlow it has limited impact on what happens in the town.

Yet as King notes, the Marsten house became ‘a little more important in Tobe Hooper’s TV-film version’ and while he suggests that ‘its major function still seems to be to stand up there on that hill and look broody’ (ibid.) the presentation of the

Marsten House in the 1979 miniseries is in many ways a marker for Hooper's approach to King's text. If Barlow and Straker represent an eruption of old world gothic EVIL and the supernatural into the modernity and false idyll of the present day, causing that modern world to expose its secrets and then implode, then Hooper's depiction of an old gothic world coalesces around the Marsten House which sets the tone and look of the miniseries.

For the producers and director, the mood of *Salem's Lot* was absolutely crucial and the emphasis was on using style to create it. As Bill Kelley has pointed out, the subject matter of the book was automatically at the stronger end of what was acceptable on TV and so would undoubtedly fall foul of 'restrictions against frightening violence' (1980a: 50). The approach was therefore to limit the amount of potentially problematic onscreen violence and instead to design the miniseries as 'a relentless mood piece where the threat of violence – rather than a killing every few minutes – sustained terror' (ibid.). Tobe Hooper argued that 'the film is very spooky – it suggests things and always has the overtones of the grave. It affects you differently than my other horror films. It's more soft-shelled. A television movie does not have blood or violence. It has atmosphere which creates something you cannot escape' (Kelley 1980b: 75).

In emphasising atmosphere the decision by producer Richard Kobritz to hire Hooper to direct is significant because Hooper was responsible for *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, a film in which there are few scenes of actual violence and bloodletting but rather a relentless atmosphere of violence and brutality. For example in the dinner scene late in the film, Sally (Marilyn Burns), the lone survivor of the stranded teens, is tied down while Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen), the chainsaw wielding maniac who wears the faces of his victims, cuts her finger so that Grandpa (Jon Dugan) – an elderly figure so desiccated as to be almost mummified - can suck the blood, before trying feebly to hit her with a sledgehammer. Although there are a few drops of blood on display, far more disturbing in this scene is the sight of this family gathered around the table mimicking her screams, which leads to an series of extreme close ups of her eyes widened in fear and of her mouth as she shrieks incoherently. The intense horror of this sequence lies not in gore or violence but in the sight and sounds of the irreconcilable insanity of the family, their skewed sense of morality and their absolute threat.

Sally's screams are accompanied by discordant music and swirling visuals that illustrate her descent into madness, and shortly after when she finally escapes the house the music fades and her hysterical cries are joined by the relentless whine of Leatherface's chainsaw as he dances before the setting sun. Hooper uses camera movement, sound and mise en scene in combination with the narrative to imply violence rather than depict it and his success is evidenced by the fact that the British Board of Film Censors decided to ban the film outright in the UK rather than cut it. They did so because in their opinion the problem was its entire tone, meaning there were no specific scenes that could be cut to render it acceptable (Simkin, 2012: 80).

Hooper brought this same approach to *Salem's Lot*, albeit in a form more palatable for television in the late 1970s. For example he implies but rarely shows anyone being actually bitten by a vampire. When vampire Ralphie Glick (Ronnie Scribner) appears at his brother's window there is a freeze frame just as he lowers himself onto Danny's (Brad Savage) neck. What Hooper offers instead is one of the most celebrated scenes in TV horror, as the young boy floats uncannily first outside, then through the window. The effect was achieved by rigging the actor to a pipe attached to a camera crane that was hidden behind curtains. The boy was in a body cast that gave out smoke and the entire sequence was filmed in reverse. Through this approach Hooper captures that sense of the gothic uncanny that Sears suggests is the essence of King's book. The swirling mist is backlit and Ralphie appears from it like a gothic lover emerging from a moorland fog. Furthermore Hooper once again uses sound for impact, highlighting the scratching of Ralphie's vampire fingernails on the window, urging Danny to let him in, before taking his brother in a macabre and perverse embrace.

Sound and lighting also play a key role when gravedigger Mike Ryerson (Geoffrey Lewis) returns to teacher Jason Burke's (Lew Ayres) house as a vampire.² Burke climbs the stairs and before entering the room he hears the creaking of a rocking chair. Vampire Mike is moving back and forth in the chair, saying nothing, only the non-diegetic music score and the rhythmic squeaking mark the moment when Burke sees him. The sequence is filmed in shot reverse shot and the brightness of Burke's side of the room, illuminated by the well-lit hallway behind him is in contrast to Mike's side, shrouded in darkness and lit by moonlight from the window. When he stands up, Mike moves in an inhuman way, bending his body unnaturally, all the while hissing 'look at me' and fixing Burke with glowing, piercing eyes.

As with *Chain Saw*, there is no blood or gore in these sequences. Eschewing the unrelenting assault of noise and images of madness found in *Chain Saw*, in *Salem's Lot* the elements of the mise en scene combine to create an atmosphere of 'otherness', of a domestic or interior space violated by something dangerous and unknowable. This again links into Sears' notion of the uncanny, since what is unknowable in these sequences is something that was until recently entirely knowable, either a family member (Ralphie) or a former student and friend (Mike).

Furthermore both the vampiric Mike and Ralphie with their glowing eyes and strange movements, are something that, crucially in terms of this emphasis on mood, *looks* frightening. This also ties in to Kobritz's controversial decision to change Barlow (Reggie Nalder), in the novel an eloquent aristocrat described by King as tall, thin, high cheek-boned and with white hair, into a Max Schreck-like Nosferatu incapable of speech. While this disappointed King fans, the decision was made in part because 1979 had already seen two suave cinematic vampires in the classic Bela Lugosi mode, George Hamilton's comic version in *Love at First Bite* (Dragoti), and Frank Langella's elegantly coiffed interpretation in Badham's *Dracula*, and Kobritz wanted something different (Earnshaw 2013: 179). However, by going back to *Nosferatu* as the inspiration Kobritz and Hooper also offer an image of a vampire that connects to their emphasis on mood rather than violence. His appearance invokes the shadow of expressionism, a genre in which mood and style predominate through the use of strange imagery, distorted mise en scene and the interplay between light and dark. The result is that Barlow is terrifying primarily because of how he looks, and so can scare viewers without having to actually do anything vampiric. When he attacks Larry Crockett (Fred Willard) for example, all we see is Barlow's strangely elongated fingers reach for Crockett's face, before the image freezes.

Rising above all these gothic visual tropes – the expressionist lighting, the uncanny performances, the emphasis on visuals and sound, the swirling mist – is the Marsten House itself, towering not just over the town but also over the credits, which show the House gradually appearing from the darkness of a full moon to Harry Sukman's driving music score. From the outset the Marsten House is the core of the miniseries. The very first sequence after the credits shows Ben Mears driving up to and staring at the House. It is the subject of Mears' first conversation with Larry Crockett when he drives into town, and also of a conversation between Crockett and Straker (James Mason) in the following scene. Before going to meet Susan Norton

(Bonnie Bedelia) for dinner the same evening, Mears again stands outside the House, which he can also see from the window of his room, where he writes of it being ‘a monument to evil, sitting there ... holding the essence of evil in its smouldering bones’. Initially then the Marsten House is the focus of the miniseries, not only as the principal topic of conversation but also as the main source of mystery, as Mears watches Straker’s comings and goings from and to the house as if he were a private eye on a stakeout.

Looming and brooding on the outside, inside the Marsten House is a decrepit wreck, a festering space with mould growing on the walls. Production designer Mort Rabinowitz presented the inside of the House as having ‘a rotting, sick appearance almost as if ... we were looking into the body, the heart of the vampire’ (quoted in Kelley 1980a: 56). With rubbish and feathers strewn everywhere, Hooper again uses visuals to create mood, one of ‘a house of horrors ... I don’t mean with ghosts and that, I mean the dirtiest, filthiest house you’ve ever seen’ (Kobritz, quoted in Kelley 1980c: 126). In 1979 the emphasis of Hooper’s version is therefore on EVIL, embodied by the monstrous Barlow and the overwhelmingly threatening gothic presence of the Marsten House. With its spooky exterior and foetid interior, the house is in Tony Earnshaw’s phrase ‘a cesspool of evil and a mirror of the vampire’s festering soul’ (2013: 21).

While the fact that the house is, in Kobritz words, ‘a crumbling ruin inside but an immaculate façade outside’ (quoted in Earnshaw 2013: 21) could act as a metaphor for the town of Salem’s Lot, outwardly well maintained but inside rotten to the core, in Kobritz and Hooper’s vision this is not the case. By emphasising gothic visuals in order to create an overall mood of horror, Hooper correspondingly downplays the other side of King’s equation of EVIL and evil and ultimately spends little time exploring the human sins of the Lot. Although we see that Larry Crockett is having an affair with his secretary Bonnie Sawyer, that Ned Tibbets (Barney McFadden) is jealous over Mears’ relationship with Susan, and that Weasel Craig (Elisha Cook Jnr) is an alcoholic willing to snoop on Mears for the price of a bottle of hooch, Hooper’s version focuses far less on the corrupt behaviour of the townspeople. Instead, in keeping with the focus on mood, the emphasis is on the gothic, on the insidious impact of Barlow and Straker and the looming Marsten House. Mears asks frequently throughout the miniseries if people think that ‘a thing can be inherently evil’ and in presenting it and the vampires in such gothic fashion, the Marsten House very clearly

acts as a metaphor for Barlow and Straker, an outside EVIL that destroys the town. So while in King's novel the house may be a gothic 'appendix', in the 1979 version with its emphasis on creating a gothic mood of EVIL, the house takes a central role, and human evil plays a far less significant part.

'evil' in *Salem's Lot* (2004)

In the 2004 version the purpose of the Marsten House is once again reconfigured. Here it is presented not so much as a place of inherent EVIL, but more as the location where Ben Mears (Rob Lowe) first found evil in himself as a nine year old boy, thus signalling a transition away from notions of external supernatural EVIL towards the more petty, human form of evil that Callaghan so bemoans in the novel.

When adapting the novel for the 21st century, Wolper, Salomon and Filardi seized on the paranoia that characterised the post 9/11 American landscape. Filardi's approach was to see the novel as 'an American classic, a portrait of a small town not unlike the works of Russell Banks' in which 'the potential for real horror is in the people around you and the community you live in' (quoted in Kipp 2004a: 6). Echoing the fear that terrorists could strike at the heart of America at any moment, for Wolper and Filardi the central message of their *Salem's Lot* was, as Jerimiah Kipp points out 'what's more terrifying than gothic vampires invading a small town? The feeling that you can't trust your neighbour' (Ibid.). Wolper started the project by asking 'how would real people respond to the idea of a vampire?' and this manifested itself as foregrounding 'the darkness of the town and the evil that we all know does exist'. In Wolper's version, 'the real horrors in a town are worse than any supernatural evil' (Gross 2004: 10).

The result is that while the new adaptation strives, in Rob Lowe's words, for a 'gnawing unrelenting sense of dread' (quoted in Kipp 2004b: 42), it is in a very different form to Hooper's original. Gone are the gothic visuals and in their place is a grey, nightmarish depiction of the blandness of small town life. When the group of vampire hunters led by Mears approach the Marsten House to destroy Barlow (Rutgar Hauer), they do so in the bright light of a sunny day, prompting Father Callaghan (James Cromwell) - who is reinstated as an important character in this iteration - to note wryly 'It'd be easier to accept vampires if you could arrange for a thunderstorm or a power failure'.

In Salomon's vision Salem's Lot is not a gothic town. From the outset the introduction to the Lot is a series of black and white views of deserted streets that gradually give way to a contemporary blue-tinted, frosty yet bustling colour world. Rob Lowe's voiceover announces that 'No-one pronounced Jerusalem's Lot dead on the morning of February 6th. No one knew it was. By and large the town, not knowing it was dead, would go off to their jobs with no inkling of what lay ahead'. This voiceover is deliberately unclear as to whether the date refers to the black and white images of the empty streets or the colour shots of the busy sidewalks, although the reference to people going to work suggests the latter. The voiceover does however coincide with Ben's arrival in the Lot, several days before the advent of Barlow, implying that when Ben arrives, even before the vampire turns up, Salem's Lot is already dead, its citizens having sown the seeds of their destruction. In the novel King says the same thing (although the date in the book is October 6th) but much later. King pronounces the Lot's death after most of the town has been turned; in Wolper's version it comes before Barlow arrives (King 1975: 321).

The reasons for the town's demise are quickly stated. Mears' voice over introduces Crockett (Robert Grubb), noting that he's the richest man in town but the IRS will never know, because 'he relies on the community to keep his secrets. This social pact is the foundation of every small town'. In other words right from the outset the miniseries highlights the corruption of the Lot, the insularity through which it keeps its confidences. Mears says that although the town keeps secrets, it 'sees through lies', suggesting that what the town hides from the outside it knows and keeps for itself. Therefore the existence of lies, and the ability to know and keep them, is an essential part of what constitutes evil in 2004 in *Salem's Lot*. When Mike Ryerson (Christopher Morris) is first bitten he ends up in a diner with Floyd Tibbets (Todd MacDonald), who is in love with Susan Norton (Samantha Mathis). He tries to force the issue between them, asking Floyd why he can't 'get real' with Susan and asks why no one in Salem's Lot ever tells the truth. Later he tells Matt Burke (Andre Braugher) 'I'm sick of all the bullshit.'

The biggest lie of all is Mears' experience as a boy in the Marsten House, which is illustrative of the way in which the House is reworked for this version of the story. Whereas in 1979 Ben Mears seeks to write about the House and to answer whether or not a thing can be truly EVIL, visualised by Hooper in his shots of the House as brooding gothic mansion, here Mears arrives with a desire to expose in print

what he calls 'small town lies.' In 2004 it is the people of the town in whom Mears is interested, and the house is largely incidental. Its significance stems mainly from the fact that when Mears entered the house on a dare as a child he saw Hubie Marsden hung and his wife spread-eagled in the bathroom, dead from a gunshot wound. Despite this he believed he heard her calling 'Help Me' and so froze, curling up on the floor with terror and lying there until morning when he was discovered by his aunt. Although there is an implication of supernatural forces – it is implied that some sort of demonic spirit hanged Hubie – the real horror of Mears' memories comes from the fact that in the bathtub behind Hubie's dead wife is a kidnapped young boy, Ronnie Barnes. When this is discovered, Mears believes it was in fact Ronnie who was calling to him for help that night, giving the potentially supernatural horror of Hubie's demonic death and his wife's post mortem pleading a purely natural explanation. By morning, when Mears is found, Barnes is dead and Mears' aunt covers up the fact that Ben could have saved him. This lie haunts Ben his entire life and he returns to the Lot to make amends and find peace.

In this respect while in the novel and the original miniseries Mears' presence in the town is a source of suspicion and is linked, if only by timing, to the arrival of Barlow and Straker, here it is the determination of the very human Mears to uncover the lies that rot the heart of Salem's Lot that is more of a catalyst for the town's destruction. He even lies to Susan and those around him by saying he is writing a fiction novel about the Marsten House, when in fact he is writing a non-fiction book about 'the roots of domestic evil'. Once he admits to this, Susan's mother (Elizabeth Alexander) tells her 'he'll be gone in a day, now that the truth is out'.

This emphasis on lies echoes something that preoccupied King when he wrote the novel. For him, what he found truly frightening was 'the town in the daytime, the town that was empty, knowing there were things in closets ... And all the time I was writing that, the Watergate hearings were pouring out of the TV ... Howard Baker kept asking "what did you know and when did you know it?" ... [this] may be the classic line of the twentieth century' (quoted in Underwood and Millar 1988: 5). While in the 2004 version Barlow is reconceived as a European gentleman more in keeping with King's original vision, it is not so much Barlow's vampiric activities but Ben Mears' obsession with lies that seems more of a threat to the corrupt town.

'Don't romanticize the town' says Mears' voice over, 'this town knows darkness' and this darkness comes both in the form of lies and of the kind of mindless

human evil bemoaned by Father Callaghan in the novel. It is seen in Sandy McDougall (Bree Desborough) and baby Roy's fear of abusive husband/father Royce (Paul Ashcroft), in Doctor Cody's (Robert Mammone) ostentatious purchase of a new BMW that he can't afford and the way in which he embarks on a tawdry affair with Sandy in lieu of reporting her husband to the police. It also appears in Larry's incestuous attraction to his daughter Ruthie (Penny McNamee) and in the way in which the town adopts a 'don't ask don't tell' approach to schoolteacher Matt Burke's homosexuality, happy to turn a blind eye to his 'alternative lifestyle in Portland, provided he keeps it out of the classroom'.

Ultimately Ruthie will eat Larry Crockett while a turned Royce will blackmail Cody out of his BMW. When Vampire Mike Ryerson confronts Burke in his home, he lifts up his morgue gown to display his autopsy scars, but then uses Burke's homosexuality to tempt him. In stark contrast to Hooper's version, this scene takes place in a brightly lit room. Mike asks Burke, as he does in 1979, to 'look at me,' but he then adds, 'I know why you asked me here. I can feel the way you look at me ... would it be a relief to touch me. Just once?' Indeed in the ordinary light of an ordinary bedroom Mike seems unaware that he's a vampire and is shocked to see he has no reflection, so the scene implies that Mike has returned more to confront Burke about his homosexuality than to bite him. Even after death Mike evidences the desire to reveal the truth that he showed to Floyd after he was first bitten. To become a vampire in Filardi's script is to both face and uncover the truth.

The complicity of the town in keeping secrets is illustrated by the constable, Parkins Gillespie. In Hooper's version he (Kenneth McMillan) plays an active role, investigating Barlow, Straker and Mears in relation to the disappearance of Ralphy Glick. In Filardi's version, Gillespie (Steven Vidler) is mostly ineffective, leading a search party for the boy but little else. He questions Mark Petrie (Dan Byrd) over this and Mark's feud with school bus driver Charlie Rhodes (Andy Anderson), and when Mark accuses Rhodes of showing the children on the bus pictures of dead soldiers, Gillespie warns him, 'don't lie about this, Mark' but does nothing. In fact, Mark is lying. Rhodes does have photos of dead soldiers in his glove box for some reason but never shows them to the kids. Ultimately, Rhodes is not arrested by Gillespie but killed by the turned children who once rode his bus. Mears' voice over says that Charlie Rhodes 'runs his bus the same way he ran Kilo company in Da Nang' and is,

according to the voice over, 'living proof that time does not heal all wounds.' Like the bad Lieutenant we assume he must have been, he is murdered by his own troops.

Rhodes' story makes it clear that lurking behind Filardi's version is the shadow of the post 9/11 war in Afghanistan. Once the vampiric outbreak is underway, Cody tells Ben that to defeat the vampires one at a time won't be done quickly but will take weeks or months, a reference to the War on Terror that by 2004, was into its third year. Before arriving in Salem's Lot Mears has written a book about his experiences in Afghanistan, in which he was a reporter who was captured and then rescued by a group of marines. On the return journey the marines killed civilian villagers in a war crime. Mears' book is an exposé of this crime, leading to a confrontation with a workman building a gaming room in the basement of Eva Prunier's (Julia Blake) boarding house. This worker is, like Rhodes, a Vietnam vet, and as such describes Mears as a traitor, saying 'there are three good marines rotting in Leavenworth right now because of Mister Ben Mears.'

Through this connection to Afghanistan and by extension to Vietnam, Ben's desire to expose small town lies, and to face up to the truth of his own festering secret about Ronnie Barnes, is given broader political currency. This is not just about the small town lies of Salem's Lot, but the bigger, more serious falsehoods of the post 9/11 Bush government, such as the non-existent weapons of mass destruction that led to the Iraq War. When speaking to Burke's high school English class Mears tells them that 'a good author illuminates truth' and when asked what the truth is about Salem's Lot, he explains the universality of the town. 'I used to think nothing happened here, but the truth is everything happens here ... you have all the horror of the Qala-I-Jangi prison right here in one battered child.' The Qala-I-Jangi prison uprising was one of the most violent engagements of the Afghan war, and so what the 2004 version does is equate small town evil with the larger, political evils of a post 9/11 world. The atmosphere is not so much gothic as nihilistic, suggesting that a town filled with lies and a 'moronic, mindless evil' is not worth saving.

But the situation is more complex than that. It's hard to see whether the vampiric townspeople are an allegory for a terrorist threat illustrating the fear of who could be living next door, or rather if Mears' writers' crusade for 'illuminating the truth' and waking the people of Salem's Lot up from their slumber leads to their demise. Even vampirism itself is ambiguous. When boarding house owner Eva is turned by her beau Ed (Martin Vaughan), she is clear that it is her choice, and she

enters a world that is, in Ed's words, 'wonderful and strong' in which he is able to love her even more than he did when he was alive, while Susan Norton (somewhat bizarrely) uses her vampirism to uncover the final lie, that young Ronnie Barnes was dead the whole time that Ben was in the house. She grants him absolution and, in Mears' own words, finally gives him faith.

Conclusion

As David Wolper explains, 'what King did so successfully [in the novel] was say that sometimes the real horrors in a town are worse than any supernatural evil- that the choices that we as normal humans can make can rival the notion of a vampire,' (quoted in Gross 2004: 10). As I have argued, in King's writing the influence of supernatural EVIL and petty human evil are balanced and interconnected, each feeding (literally and metaphorically) off of the other. The two adaptations of *Salem's Lot* separate these two elements and break the balance, taking very different approaches to what is ultimately responsible for the destruction of Salem's Lot. In Hooper's vision the emphasis is clearly upon the vampire, upon EVIL, and the destructive power of a supernatural gothic force, while in 2004 Wolper, Filardi and Salomon choose to focus on a far more natural and human form of evil, echoing the deceptions behind post 9/11 America. Stylistically the two TV films reflect their respective approaches, Hooper emphasising gothic visuals and Salomon focussing upon realism by 'making the characters, the town and the environment around the fantastic premise as authentic as possible' (Kipp 2004b: 41).

Equally Hooper's version dispenses with many of the peripheral characters in King's story (including Father Callaghan) and focuses attention upon the Marsten House and, in particular, on James Mason's Straker, while Salomon downplays the importance of the House – beyond it happening to be the place where the vampire lives – and instead allows space to bring the people of the Lot to life; a realist approach more in keeping with the real world horrors of the post 9/11 world. When Mears stakes Barlow in the 2004 version, Barlow tells him 'killing me will never kill the evil in a man'. In King's conception of Salem's Lot, evil and EVIL feed off each other. By separating these out into two different televisual interpretations, these versions of *Salem's Lot* allow us to see the richness of King's vampiric allegory as a vision of modern day America.

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¹ *Carrie* is to date the only King novel to be adapted twice for cinema release, in 1976 and 2013 (Peirce).

² Matt Burke is renamed Jason in Hooper's version. The name Matt is retained in the 2004 version.