



SOCIAL PROBLEMS PRESENTED IN STEPHEN KING'S NOVELS "THE DEAD ZONE" AND "THE GREEN MILE"

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Abstract

Modern literature frequently addresses social issues, reflecting the moral, political, and psychological challenges of contemporary society. The works of Stephen King, widely known for their elements of horror and suspense, also contain profound social commentary. This article examines the social problems depicted in Stephen King's novels *The Dead Zone* and *The Green Mile*. The study analyzes themes such as abuse of political power, justice and injustice, capital punishment, discrimination, and moral responsibility. Through narrative techniques and symbolic representation, King reveals complex ethical dilemmas faced by individuals and society. The analysis demonstrates that these novels extend beyond the genre of horror and suspense, offering significant reflections on social values and human morality.

Keywords: Stephen King, social problems, American literature, justice, political power, discrimination, moral responsibility.

Introduction

Literature has always served as a powerful medium for reflecting and analyzing social problems. Through fictional narratives, writers explore the moral dilemmas, injustices, and social conflicts that shape human experience. Contemporary American literature, in particular, often addresses political, ethical, and social questions that influence modern society. Stephen King is primarily recognized as a master of horror fiction, yet his novels frequently explore deeper social themes. Beneath the suspenseful plots and supernatural elements lies a



strong interest in human nature, morality, and the functioning of society. King's works often examine the consequences of power, injustice, fear, and prejudice. Two novels that vividly illustrate these concerns are *The Dead Zone* and *The Green Mile*. Although they belong to different narrative contexts, both works present significant social issues. *The Dead Zone* explores political manipulation and the dangers of authoritarian leadership, while *The Green Mile* addresses themes of justice, discrimination, and the morality of capital punishment. The aim of this article is to analyze the major social problems presented in these novels and to examine how Stephen King uses narrative and symbolism to highlight ethical and societal conflicts.

Literature Review

The social dimensions of Stephen King's works have attracted considerable attention from literary scholars. According to Magistrale (2003), King's novels often function as social commentaries that reflect the anxieties and concerns of modern American society. His narratives reveal how fear, prejudice, and misuse of power influence human behavior. Bloom (2007) emphasizes that King frequently explores moral dilemmas through extraordinary circumstances. Supernatural elements in his stories often serve as metaphors for real social problems, allowing readers to examine ethical questions from a different perspective. In the case of *The Green Mile*, critics note that the novel raises important questions about justice and human dignity. The story's portrayal of capital punishment invites readers to reconsider the ethical foundations of the legal system. Similarly, *The Dead Zone* reflects political fears and concerns about leadership and democracy. These critical interpretations demonstrate that Stephen King's novels extend beyond entertainment, offering meaningful insights into social and moral issues.

Methodology

The research employs several analytical approaches:

1. Textual analysis – examining the narrative structure and themes of the selected novels.
2. Thematic analysis – identifying social problems represented in the stories.
3. Comparative analysis – comparing the depiction of social issues in both novels.



Primary material includes Stephen King's novels *The Dead Zone* (1979) and *The Green Mile* (1996).

Materials and Discussion

The Dead Zone tells the story of Johnny Smith, a man who gains psychic abilities after awakening from a long coma. Through his visions, he becomes aware of future events, including the rise of a dangerous politician, Greg Stillson. This narrative explores the social problem of political power and the potential consequences of irresponsible leadership.

One of the central themes of the novel is the danger of authoritarianism. Stillson is portrayed as a charismatic yet morally corrupt political figure who manipulates public opinion and seeks power for personal gain. Through this character, Stephen King highlights the risks associated with blind political support and the manipulation of democratic institutions.

Another important issue addressed in the novel is the burden of moral responsibility. Johnny Smith faces a difficult ethical dilemma: whether he should prevent Stillson from gaining power, even if doing so requires committing an extreme act. This conflict raises questions about the relationship between individual responsibility and the greater good.

Thus, *The Dead Zone* explores political manipulation, moral conflict, and the responsibility of individuals within society.

Unlike *The Dead Zone*, which focuses on political themes, *The Green Mile* examines the social problem of justice and the legal system. The novel takes place in a prison where inmates sentenced to death await execution.

One of the most significant issues presented in the novel is the morality of capital punishment. The story raises doubts about the fairness and humanity of the death penalty, particularly when innocent individuals may be punished. The character of John Coffey, a gentle and compassionate man with supernatural healing abilities, symbolizes innocence and moral purity. His unjust execution emphasizes the tragic consequences of flawed legal systems.

The novel also addresses themes of discrimination and prejudice. John Coffey, an African American man accused of murder, becomes a victim of racial bias and social injustice. Through his story, King highlights the historical problem of racial inequality in American society.



Additionally, the novel explores the psychological impact of the justice system on those who enforce it. The prison guards, particularly Paul Edgecomb, struggle with moral doubts about their role in carrying out executions. This internal conflict reflects the broader ethical questions surrounding the institution of capital punishment.

Although *The Dead Zone* and *The Green Mile* differ in setting and narrative structure, they share several thematic similarities. Both novels examine the consequences of power and the moral responsibilities of individuals within society.

In *The Dead Zone*, the central social problem is political authority and the potential dangers of unchecked leadership. In contrast, *The Green Mile* focuses on the legal system and the ethical implications of punishment and justice.

Both novels also explore the theme of moral choice. Johnny Smith and Paul Edgecomb face difficult ethical decisions that challenge their personal beliefs and social responsibilities. Through these characters, King illustrates the complexity of moral judgment in situations where the boundaries between right and wrong are unclear.

Results

The analysis demonstrates that Stephen King's novels address several significant social problems that remain relevant to contemporary society. Among the most prominent issues explored in these works are the abuse of political power, injustice within legal and institutional systems, racial discrimination, and complex ethical dilemmas concerning moral responsibility. Through the narrative events and character conflicts presented in *The Dead Zone* and *The Green Mile*, King illustrates how these social problems influence both individual lives and the broader functioning of society. The depiction of political manipulation and authoritarian tendencies in *The Dead Zone* reveals the potential dangers that arise when power is concentrated in the hands of individuals who lack moral integrity. At the same time, *The Green Mile* exposes the limitations and imperfections of the legal system, particularly in relation to capital punishment and the possibility of wrongful convictions.

These themes demonstrate that King's novels extend beyond the boundaries of popular fiction and engage with serious social, ethical, and philosophical



questions. By portraying characters who are confronted with difficult moral choices, the author encourages readers to reflect on issues such as justice, responsibility, and the consequences of human actions. Moreover, King's use of dramatic narrative structures, emotionally compelling situations, and symbolic characters allows readers to approach complex social issues in a way that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally powerful. As a result, his novels function not only as works of entertainment but also as meaningful explorations of the moral challenges and social conflicts that shape modern human experience.

Conclusion

Stephen King's novels *The Dead Zone* and *The Green Mile* illustrate the author's ability to combine compelling storytelling with meaningful social commentary. Although often categorized as horror or suspense fiction, these works address significant social problems that remain relevant in modern society.

Through the depiction of political corruption, injustice, discrimination, and moral conflict, King invites readers to reflect on the ethical foundations of society and the responsibilities of individuals within it. The characters in these novels face difficult moral choices that highlight the complexity of human decision-making in situations of social and political tension.

Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates that Stephen King's works contribute not only to popular literature but also to broader discussions about justice, morality, and social responsibility.

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