

Would you like a balloon? an analysis of the clown in Stephen King's "It"

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<http://lattes.cnpq.br/8154722162254089>

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Enviado em: 19/09/2018

Aceito em: 26/11/2018

Abstract: The figure of the clown has usually been seen as a sweet and harmless creature, although this perception has started to change in the last decades and the beloved circus character started to be associated with evil characteristics. The present study aims at analyzing the character of the clown within the plot of *It*, a novel by the American horror writer Stephen King, first published in 1986. The analysis is based on the archetypal approach proposed by Carl Gustav Jung in two of his works: *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) and *Four Archetypes* (1971). The analysis consists of unraveling the figure of the clown, discussing the reasons why it is not uncommon to place the clown as an evil creature and no longer as a harmless character. Initially a historical background of the origins of the clown is presented. Later the study displays an analysis of the character in the storyline of *It*, showing the importance of Stephen King's work for the shift of perception in the nature of the figure of the clown and the possible reasons that may have caused this alteration. Finally, the study proposes Pennywise the Dancing Clown as a perfect example of trickster, archetype explained by Jung (1968).

Keywords: Clown; Stephen King; Trickster; Pennywise the Dancing Clown.

Resumo: A figura do palhaço é frequentemente vista como inofensiva e doce. Essa percepção sofreu uma mudança nas últimas décadas e o amado personagem de circo passou a ser associado com características malignas. O presente estudo tem como objetivo analisar o personagem do palhaço dentro do enredo de *It*, livro escrito pelo autor de horror Stephen King, publicado pela primeira vez em 1986. A análise é baseada na abordagem de arquétipos proposta por Carl Gustav Jung em duas de suas obras: *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) e *Four Archetypes* (1971). A análise consiste em desvendar a figura do palhaço salientando as razões pelas quais não é incomum considerar o mesmo como um ser maligno e não mais como um personagem inofensivo. Inicialmente apresenta-se o contexto histórico da origem do palhaço, em seguida, a análise do personagem na trama de *It*. Finalmente, o estudo sugere Pennywise o Palhaço Dançante como um perfeito exemplo de trickster, arquétipo explicado por Jung (1968).

Palavras-chave: Palhaço; Stephen King; Trickster; Pennywise o Palhaço Dançante.

1 Introduction

Most of the horror fiction stories have as a villain a supernatural creature: a monster, a vampire, a ghost among many others. Besides those creatures, another figure started to appear more frequently in horror stories in the last decades, the clown. Losing the imaginary of a funny and harmless character, the clown began to be presented as a potential dangerous

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villain. This shift of perception on fiction stories may actually influence the way people see clowns in real life.

Previous studies (DURWIN, 2004; ZUCKER, 1954) state that due to fiction stories and mass media productions, some people have developed *cloutrophobia*, a phobia caused by an extreme fear of clowns. Framing the clown as a villain is an understandable title once the figure is related to misbehavior, rebellion against rules and the fact of being hidden under a mask, almost as if they were protected from punishment.

While some people suffer just to be in the presence of a clown, North American Indian tales considered the clown a type of shaman, relating them to curing and fertility processes. (CARROLL, 1985). Some studies also mention the appearing of jesters – ancient clowns – in stories in which they are described as clever, funny and poetic, but as being neglected and excluded from the *real society*. (STEFANOVA, 2012). Durwin (2004) suggests that perhaps the divergence between the character of the clown and the real person behind the mask is what makes the figure so appealing.

There is one thing in common among the studies mentioned previously; all of them present the clown with features that could be analyzed from the perspective of the archetype of the trickster. The trickster is described as a selfish and clever creature that can shift its form in order to attend its own desires and interests. The archetype often causes problems, although they are vital figures to the development and unraveling of the ones surrounding them. (JUNG, 1971).

Therefore, in this article, the character of the clown is analyzed by the perspective of the archetypal approach (JUNG, 1971) on King's (1997) novel entitled *It*, comparing the clown to the archetype of the trickster. The article aims at explaining the possible reasons for the transition of the clown from good to bad as well as discussing the importance of Stephen King's *It* in this shift.

The motivation for this research raises from the fact that the conception of the figure of the clown has greatly changed in the last decades. The presence of clowns in horror stories/movies and the reasons that have led the audience to believe in the evilness of the character are not largely discussed. Consequently, this article will present the origins of the clown and the path followed by them to reach the position of evil in current days.

2 The clown: from silliness to evilness

The grotesquely comic character of the clown appears in different contexts such as plays, folklore and in some forms of artistic expression from practically all civilizations. The person dressed in colorful and disproportional clothes, wearing a bright red nose and painted with a wide smile is commonly associated with good and funny feelings and is known for their ability to evoke laughter, especially on children.

However, a disturbing shift on the associations made towards clowns is noticed in the last decades; some of them are no longer presented as warm and harmless figures, but rather as potential dangerous villains, being capable of scaring people around them. This shift may have happened for various different reasons, it is possible to consider the history of the clown itself; the material being produced by contemporary mass media and a close analysis of the archetype in which the clown can be inserted may also suggest that the figure is not only a comic character anymore.

According to Otto (2001) the origin of the clown rises from the court jesters, also

known as fools. The appearance of jesters spreads across places and time. The author suggests that they are universal characters who appear in both major and minor civilizations. For centuries, places such as Egypt, China, Greece, Europe, Central Asia, Persia, Africa and India, among others, had fools in their kingdoms.

Jesters were in a privileged position in their kingdoms, considering their explicit license to provoke, mock, satirize and speak freely to the king about politics and sensitive matters. Jesters were usually allies of their kings; hence, this close relationship gave them the opportunity to help people from the kingdom which were constantly neglected by the crown. In brief, the fool could indirectly interfere and intercede on behalf of victims of injustices. The fools reminded the monarchs of the real purpose of their jobs, which was to guard the reign and its people rather than to enjoy life endlessly. (OTTO, 2001).

In spite of the importance of jesters to the monarchs and their kingdoms, their presence decreased eventually. By the nineteenth century, Chinese stage actors started to improvise lines and acts in their plays, simulating the improvisation performed by jesters. In Europe, the decline of court jesters occurred in the sixteenth century and it was partially influenced by the enlargement of scripted plays which were performed by professional actors. (OTTO, 2001).

Geddes (2015) states that the enlargement of scripted plays replaced jesters for comic and professional actors, slowly causing what seemed to be the disappearing of the character. However, the persona has not exactly disappeared, it has been relocated. The author complements explaining that in Europe, after the decline of jesters in kingdoms, the professionals transited to theaters where their popularity as former jesters could be transformed into steady income. The transition occurred during the blossom of professional theater companies in the second half of the sixteenth century, i.e., in the raise of Elizabethan theater.

There was one particular jester that is highlighted during the early modern English theater. Babula (2008) describes Richard Tarlton as the master of comedy. Tarlton was the most famous fool of Queen Elizabeth I and the representation of the *rural clown*. The description of the rural clown applied to Tarlton can be related to the first appearance of the English word *clown* in the second half of the sixteenth century. The term was usually referred to as Cloyne, Cloine, or Clowne, which derived from Colonus or Clod, meaning a farmer, rustic person, a country yokel. (DURWIN, 2004).

Furthermore, Welsford (1966 apud JESUS, 2012) states that during Renaissance festivals it was possible to spot clowns dressed in baggy clothes and wearing exaggerated make up. While jesters were servants of their kings, *properties* of the reigns, clowns who performed in fairs believed that clowning could bring them good luck, once their main objective was to tell jokes and evoke laughter among people. Fools and jesters evolved into the *rural clowns*, who were improved over the years resulting in the circus clowns. (GEDDES, 2015).

The majority of antique civilizations have registers of circus art, although the modern circus had its origins in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century. Decades later, the circus spread worldwide and clowns were usually required to entertain and engage comically with the audience while the next attraction was preparing to enter the ring. They performed similar acts to the court-jesters: telling jokes, juggling and interacting directly to the viewers and because of their success with the audiences, clowns slowly gain more visibility inside the circus ring. (COXE; HOH; PARKINSON; SAXON, 2017).

Circuses were one of the main forms of entertainment for many years in Europe and in the United States, although in the second half of the twentieth century circuses faced a dramatic crisis. Considering the historical scenario of wars and revolutions at the time and

the rise of the radio and television, the popularity of circuses diminished drastically. The technological advances changed the way populations entertain themselves. Consequently, circuses suffered with the lack of viewers and many artists had to find different jobs in order to survive.

If the audiences were smaller at the circus, they were larger in front of televisions. Once more the figure of the clown evolved, but this time into the black and white screen. The clown who was brought to television shows suffered some adjustments in their appearance. The exaggerated make up and disproportional clothes were redefined and gained a more sophisticated presentation. The TV clowns needed to maintain a good appearance, once the requirements for being on the screen were different from the ones in the circus ring. (JOHNSON, 2014).

The most successful clown from this period was Charlie Chaplin. In 1915 the actor premiered his first motion picture called “The Tramp”, in which he appeared as a dreamy downtrodden, conquering the hearts of audiences forever. (THE TRAMP, 1915). Chaplin originated an irreverent way of performing foolishly. Without words, the actor explored facial and body expressions, acting humorously about simple facts of life. Charlie Chaplin did not wear the traditional clown make up, instead he wore regular daily clothes in his movies, presenting a new approach to the figure of the clown. (JOHNSON, 2014).

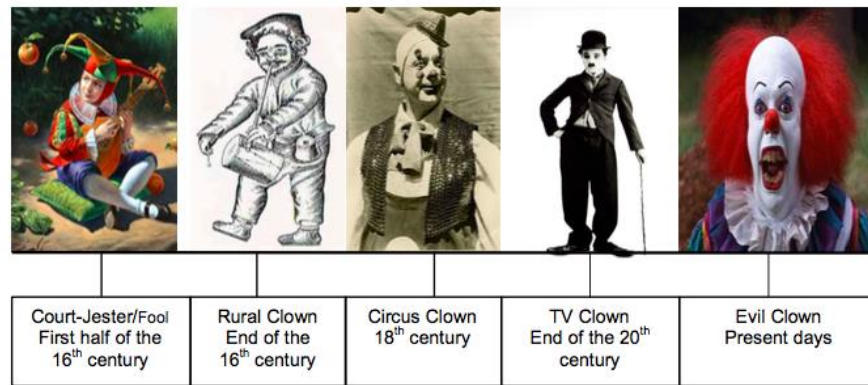
Therefore, the clown evolved into simpler clothes and make up, but kept performing comic acts to entertain the audience. Their appearance was improved but their essence was preserved. The character was incorporated from circuses to the television shows, proving their significance to the show business. So far, the clown is still seen as an innocent and funny figure, a character who transmits laughter and happiness.

However, this representation gradually changed, one of the first examples of this alteration is the premiered of the opera *Pagliacci* – meaning *clown* in English – in 1892, written by Ruggero Leoncavallo. The opera tells the story of Canio, a comedy troupe leader who travels around towns with his play “The Troubles of Pagliacci”, in which the main character is a clown. The play revolves around a jealousy clown who stabs two other characters in the story. *Pagliacci* displays one of the first registers of clowns acting evil in fiction. After that, for many years, clowns have continued to present themselves as funny and harmless figures in entertainment productions. (PAGLIACCI, 1892).

This scenario changed when in September 1986, Stephen King releases the first edition of the novel entitled *It*, presenting to the world Pennywise the Dancing Clown. Embodying the characteristics of a clown, Pennywise wears the baggy colorful clothes, the red wig and nose and an extravagant make up. He attracts children offering them treats such as balloons and candies, although behind his generosity there is an evil creature who draws children’s attention to slaughter them. (KING, 1997).

By creating Pennywise, King (1997) introduces a new perception of clowns, deconstructing the sweet, funny and friendly stereotype once attributed to them. Under these circumstances the evil clown rises. To summarize and visually represent the historical journey of clowns so far, a timeline is presented in order to better understand the character’s evolution.

Picture 1 - Clown Timeline



Source: Created by the author.

Therefore, after presenting the historical background of the clown along with their evolution from court-jester to evil clown, the next section will discuss the concepts of archetypes and how clowns can be related to one of them in particular.

3 Clowns and archetypes

As discussed in the previous section, clowns are no longer related only to warm and happy feelings, consequently, it is natural to wonder about the psychological implications related to the persona of the clown. To help explain the issues beyond consciousness, this section relies its theory upon the works of Carl Gustav Jung entitled *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) and *Four Archetypes* (1971).

Jung founded the *analytical psychology* in which he developed the concepts of the extroverted and introverted personalities as well as archetypes and the collective unconscious, the latest being one of Jung's most important and contemporary contributions to psychology. Jung analyzed the dreams of his patients through imagery and symbols, presenting a multiplicity of significances according to the associations of the dreamer. He defends that dreams speak in a symbolic and metaphorical language, portraying the person's external and internal world. Jung's work was practical, he psychoanalyzed his patients through their drawings, paintings and mandalas, which represented their feelings and dreams. (JUNG, 1968)². The methodology of analysis performed by Jung relies on the concept of the *collective unconscious* created and explained by himself:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the *personal unconscious*. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal [...]. It has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. (JUNG, 1968, p. 3-4, author's griffins).

By this perspective, Jung claims that the unconscious is not only of an individual nature, but layers of it can actually be universally shared. Further, the author states that the contents produced by the *collective unconscious* are called *archetypes*, which are pre-existent forms. (JUNG, 1968). Jung explains that:

² Original work published 1959.

In addition to our immediate consciousness we believe to be the only empirical psyche, there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of a pre-existent form, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. (JUNG, p. 43, 1968).

Therefore, Jung describes archetypes as contents produced by a layer of the unconscious which is universal and shared by all human beings, almost as something biological, once that archetypes are not taught or developed during one's life, they are unintentionally transmitted from one generation to another. They consist of specific figures with precise characteristics that may represent people's deepest instincts and feelings. (JUNG, 1968).

Throughout his studies, Jung (1968) describes different archetypal figures, however, the most important archetype to the article is the trickster figure. Jung (1968) describes the archetype as ancient and surfacing various cultures and religions, each of them being unique, however bound by certain characteristics that are the same in all their manifestations. He can be described as "[...] a forerunner of the savior, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness." (JUNG, 1968, p. 263). The trickster is a deceitful, mischievous and incestuous creature, he crosses both physical and societal patterns once he can change his form to human, animal or even a mixture of both, he is a shape-shifter.

In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in magic rites of healing in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise. He is obviously a 'psychologem', an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level. (JUNG, 1971, p.140, author's griffin).

The psyche of the figure is considered to be highly animal as a result of its urge to attend its own necessities and desires, which is very similar to an animal's behavior. The archetype provokes and performs mean acts and jokes, he breaks the rules in order to achieve new horizons and obtain personal satisfaction. Another interesting feature of the trickster is his ability to discomfort, misplace and even transform the ones surrounding the figure, once he is the responsible for misleading and changing the course of natural paths, he is the *troublemaker*. The trickster presents himself as a comedy of opposites, considering that for almost all his good persona aspects there is an equal opposite one. (JUNG, 1971).

The archetype of the trickster presents important characteristics to the development of societies since early stages of the humankind existence. "The modern figures that resemble the trickster are nothing but outlets for human primitive impulses that do not match the massifying, tedious, and castrating rules of our time." (CASAGRANDE, 2012, p.58). Casagrande (2012) claims that the *modern tricksters* may not be so explicitly exposed as they were in past cultures, but they are still very present among societies in the most varied forms and sites. The trickster plays an important role of challenging and rearranging what seems to be accommodated, for good or evil purposes. To summarize, this characterization sounds familiar with the figure being analyzed in this article, in the next subsection it will be discussed the reasons why the clown might occupy the position of trickster.

3.1 The clown as a trickster

The previous subsection explained the archetype of the trickster, stating its importance for the development of several historical and cultural contexts. Considering the information already discussed, it seems to be plausible to concede to the character of the clown the status of trickster. The beloved circus attraction has many features that can be related to the archetype of the trickster, such as the prankster attitude, the deceitful tricks, negligence to societal laws and the unknown boundaries. (JUNG, 1971).

Stefanova (2012) states that most of the times clowns evoke laughter by embarrassing others surrounding them, their tricks are frequently mean and mischievous. Besides that, the clown has the ability to discomfort and misplace the audience, which is a substantial trickster feature as already mentioned. One is not the same after leaving the presence of a clown, causing what can be both positive and negative feelings.

Perhaps the most important feature of the clown when considering them a trickster, is the possibility of physical transformation. As stated before, for Native American tribes the clown is seen as a type of shaman during their rituals, but only after the member of the tribe had worn the mask of the clown. The clothes seem to change not only the exterior of the person playing the role of the clown, but also the interior. Once one is in the baggy clothes, wearing the extravagant make up and red nose, walking around in shoes much bigger than their feet, the person is no longer themselves, but the clown. (STEFANOVA, 2012).

Apparently the outfit is what mutates the regular person into the clown. Therefore, it matches perfectly with one of the most important characteristics of a trickster, the shape transformation. (JUNG, 1971). Nobody is born a clown, the person needs necessarily to characterize themselves, shape-shifting from their original self and only after that they can be considered a clown.

Perchance this is what makes people so afraid of clowns as tricksters, the empowerment provided by a simple outfit. Apparently the average person transforms into a clown and the outfit and make up protect them from all the possible harm they might cause, once they are undercover, playing a role, safe from being *discovered*. Moreover, the following section will present the analysis of Pennywise the Dancing Clown.

4 Pennywise the Dancing Clown

Before reaching Pennywise, it is important to understand the context in which the clown is inserted. *It* is a novel written by the American writer Stephen Edwig King first published in September, 1986.

The plot of the book revolves around a group of friends who live in the fictitious town of Derry, located in the American state of Maine. The seven friends entitled themselves as the Losers' Club, belonging to the club are the 11 and 12-year-old children: Bill Denbrough, Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Richie Tozier, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon and Stan Uris. An interesting shared feature of the Losers' Club is that all of its members suffer with some type of personal drama in their lives along with the fact of being terrorized by the school bullies, leaded by a problematic boy called Henry Bowers together with his gang. (KING, 1997).

Besides the family and school issues lived by the Losers' Club, the infants soon discover that their biggest drama is yet to be encountered, in the summer of 1958, in the last day of

school, a sequence of horrible events is triggered to present the children to their worst nightmares. The club later discovers that the small town where they live has been haunted by a spooky creature, which performs its inhuman acts in a cycle of every 27 years since ancient times. Throughout that summer the children are haunted by an unspeakable evil that changes its form to terrorize each child according to their deepest fear, the uncertainty of the creature's form is what awards it with the name of *It*. (KING, 1997).

Throughout the novel various representations of the children's deepest horrors are assumed by the devilish *It*, such as lepers, werewolves, mummies, among others. However, the creature presents itself in the shape of a clown called Pennywise the Dancing Clown in order to mingle within the community. The creature dwells the sewer and drain system of Derry, luring and slaughtering children only. (KING, 1997).

In an act of courage and partnership the Losers' Club decide to go down the sewer system of their town and defeat *It*. Unspeakable things happen to them in their journey, but they return to surface alive and believing that Pennywise had been defeated for good. When in surface, the club makes a promise of coming back and finishing what they had started if the evil creature would come back to attack once more. (KING, 1997).

The Losers' Club did not expect to return to Derry exactly 27 years later, in the spring of 1985, when a series of murderers resembling the ones in 1958 happened. The children have become successful adults who barely remembered their infancy, thus, the only member of the group still living in the small town, Mike Hanlon, calls his friends asking for their presence to face Pennywise for the last time and keep the promise made many years ago. The Losers' Club returns to Derry to defeat the evil creature once and for all, except for Stan Uris who kills himself when he discovers that *It* is back. (KING, 1997).

King (1997) describes the Losers' Club as a very special group of friends, they do not only share their fear from *It*, but also their personal dramas, their worries, their problems, their dreams and achievements. They build an incredible relationship of friendship, trust and love. They are different from one another but they complement each other, and this powerful strength of togetherness gives them the necessary strength to defeat *It*, or, Pennywise. Therefore, after briefly discussing the story it might be time to examine an extremely important character: Pennywise the Dancing Clown, the greatest villain of the plot:

[...] 'I'm not supposed to take stuff from strangers. My dad said so.' 'Very wise of your dad,' the clown in the storm drain said, smiling. [...] 'Very wise indeed. Therefore, I will introduce myself, I, Georgie, am Mr. Bob Gray, also known as Pennywise the Dancing Clown. Pennywise meet George Denbrough. George, meet Pennywise. And now we know each other. I'm not a stranger to you and you're not a stranger to me. Kee-rect?' (KING, 1997, p. 13).

By the quotation above the clown is introduced to the readers of *It*. His victim is George, the younger brother of Bill, a five-year-old boy who has his arm ripped off from his body showing to the readers right from the start the evil intentions of the clown. *It* is described as an ancient, mysterious, evil entity of unknown origin which has been attacking citizens from the small town of Derry since the formation of Derry's community. *It* attacks every 27 years when it awakes to feed from human flesh. During its hibernation the creature hides under the sewer system of the town and its periods of awakenings mark the cruelest and most violent happenings in the history of Derry, such as the disappearance of more than three hundred settlers and the horrible assassinations of many children. The creature has chosen the ideal place to stay, once that Derry is such a small town that its history of

great violence is not reported on the media and the population seems not to worry about that. Apparently who lives in Derry knows the darkness hidden somewhere in that town, waiting to awake and attack once more. (KING, 1997).

King (1997) nominates the creature *It* once that its shape is not always the same along with the fact that no one knows the real form of the monster. In spite of its shape shifting powers, which will be discussed later, *It* constantly introduces itself as a middle-aged man dressed in a clown costume who identifies himself as Pennywise the Dancing Clown:

The clown, Hagarty said, looked like a cross between Ronald McDonald and that old TV clown, Bozo – or so he thought at first. It was the wild tufts of orange hair that brought such comparisons to mind. But later consideration had caused him to think the clown really looked like neither. The smile painted over the white pancake was red, not orange, and the eyes were a weird shiny silver. Contact lenses, perhaps... but a part of him thought then and continued to think that maybe that silver had been the real color of those eyes. He wore a baggy suit with big orange pompom buttons; on his hands were cartoon gloves. ‘If you need help, Don,’ the clown said, ‘help yourself a balloon.’ And it offered the bunch it held in one hand. ‘They float,’ the clown said, ‘Down here we all float [...]’. (KING, 1997, p. 31-32).

Pennywise is the typical clown figure, except perhaps for his eyes that could not deny the evilness of his nature. His outfit makes his recognition obvious, in the story he normally appears in a strategic site, guaranteeing his access to children who are his favorite victims. The clown lures children by offering them balloons and eternal fun, soon the easy targets are trapped into the sewer system where they float for eternity. (KING, 1997).

The question that may raise is why has the author chosen a clown figure to personify the evil character in the story? Perhaps King chose the persona because there may not be a character that is more enigmatic than a clown; they are protected under their masks and outfits, their make up exhibits a smile, but for real no one knows how they actually feel, they are unpredictable, they perform mean and humiliating acts and what might be the most disturbing feature is that they have easy access to children. In fact, they are constantly associated with infants and sometimes requested by them. Therefore, the clown seems to be the perfect character to perform evil acts, children are easily lured by him, with the promises of balloons and eternal fun, meanwhile adults do not suspect of a clown who is usually a harmless and sweet creature.

McAndrew and Koehnke (2016) claim that what makes clowns so terrifying is the ambiguity of the character, the authors continue stating that no one knows what might be the next act of a clown, they leave their audience in a constant feeling of doubt, anxiety and even mystery. This feeling of ambiguity and not being able to know one’s next action is what makes people feel *the creeps*. Those arguments clarify the possible reasons why Stephen King has chosen Pennywise the Dancing Clown to represent the greatest evil in the plot of *It*. Despite that, Pennywise or *It* has an interesting power, it is able to transform itself into the victim’s deepest fear, the creature believes it adds a special seasoning to its victim’s meat. (KING, 1997).

Pennywise is extremely proficient when it comes to changing its appearance, behavior and even smell in order to meet the spots of the children he is harassing. “It isn’t bad enough *It* can be any damn monster *It* wants to be, and it’s bad enough that *It* can feed off our fears.” (KING, 1997, p. 701). Just regarding to the Losers’ Club, *It* changes its form several times, showing himself in a different shape for each of the members of the group.

For the leader, Bill, the creature assumes the form of George, Bill’s younger brother who was murdered by Pennywise itself. *It* wants to make Bill feel guilty about the death of

his brother, which is a successful choice, once that Bill already feels that way. For Stan, *It* appears in the shape of two kids who drowned in the standpipe of Derry, Stan has always been a sensitive boy afflicted by the terrible stories about his town and the prejudice suffered because of his Jewish origins. (KING, 1997).

As for Beverly, the creature is represented by blood, which is all over her bathroom and she is the only one who can see it. The blood symbolizes the violence inflicted on the girl by her abusive father, together with the fact that she encounters herself in a complicated position, trapped between childhood and adulthood, showing her transition from a girl to a woman. In adulthood Beverly also sees *It* as her father, showing the unforgettable traumas caused by her dad. Meanwhile Mike sees Pennywise as a black bird, stating an irony, on the one hand representing his bird enthusiastic father and on the other hand showing that black people were unwelcomed in Derry. Therefore, the clown uses something that brings Mike good memories to state the fact that he and his family are underrated in town. (KING, 1997).

Ben sees Pennywise in the shape of a mummy because of all the books he had read about the topic and also because mummies move slow, just like him, considering his physical shape of an obese boy. For Richie the clown appears as a werewolf with the jacket of the school where he studies, the werewolf is due to many horror movies watched with the character on it and the jacket worn by the werewolf represents the bullying and recrimination suffered by Richie at school because of his thick glasses and annoying voice imitations. (KING, 1997).

Finally, the clown assumes the shape of a leper when in the presence of Eddie, reminding the boy of his health fragility and his fear of germs and diseases. (KING, 1997).

Ben thought it was the smell of the mummy. To Eddie it smelled like the leper. Ritchie though it smelled like the world's oldest flannel jacket, now moldering and rotting-...to Beverly it smelled like her father's sock drawer. In Stan Uris it woke a dreadful memory from his earliest childhood-an oddly Jewish boy who had only the haziest understanding of his own Jewishness. [...]. Mike thought of the dry smell of feathers in a dead nest. (KING, 1997, p. 979-980).

Besides the shape transformation, Pennywise has a mockery and ironic attitude, its comments are usually involved by a dense dark humor, reaching his victims in the deepest of their souls, while *It* seems to be enjoying the sensation.

'Did I give you a scare m'man?' It rumbled. And Richie heard his mouth say, quite independently from his frozen brain: 'Cheap thrills in the back of my car, Bozo. That's all.' The clown grinned and nodded as if it had expected no more. Red paint-bleeding lips parted to show teeth like fangs, each one coming to a razor point. 'I could have you now if I wanted you now,' it said. 'But this is going to be too much fun.' [...] 'Want to play some more, Richie?' How about if I point at your pecker and give you prostate cancer? Or I could point at your head and give you a good old brain tumor – although I'm sure some people would say that would only be adding to what was already there. [...] 'I can do it, Richie. Want to see?' (KING, 1997, p.563-563).

Considering the characteristics of Pennywise so far presented, it is possible to associate the character with the archetype of the trickster proposed by Jung (1971). The main characteristics of the trickster include mockery attitude, the practice of cruel and mean jokes along with the fact that the nature of the archetype is closer to an animal's nature, once that it does whatever is necessary to achieve personal satisfaction. Furthermore, the trickster is

described as a mysterious and dual archetype, considering its deceitful and ambiguous nature. (JUNG, 1971).

Those features can be easily applied to the figure of Pennywise the Dancing Clown. The clown himself is already an ambiguous and dual creature, considering that the person transforms himself into a clown only after wearing the outfit and make up, what seems to provide them with an unpredictability and prankster attitude. The physical characterization apparently is what evokes the prankster attitude, once that one is no longer just an ordinary person, but a clown, being *allowed* to be mean and to perform unpredictable acts with others surrounding them.

Consequently, clowns in general could easily fit the description of a trickster but Pennywise seems to perfectly qualify for the position of trickster, considering its cruel acts, performed with a sense of irony and entertainment; its urge to do anything in order to achieve personal satisfaction, which *It* encounters when murdering and feeding from infant victims; its unpredictability when it comes to the following acts to be performed, and the most important feature that qualifies *It* as a distinctive trickster, the impressive shape shifting ability.

Jung (1971) claims that one of the most important features of the trickster is the power of transforming its form into any animal, human or even a combination of both:

Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. [...]. He is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other. [...]. Even his sex is optional despite its phallic qualities: he can turn himself into a woman and bear children. From his penis he makes all kinds of useful plants. (JUNG, 1971, p.143).

The mockery attitude, the evil acts and the proficient shape shifting ability consolidate *It* as a trickster.

After considering the information above, the article dares to propose Pennywise the Dancing Clown as one of the most perfect trickster archetypes in modern days, once that *It* can change its form into absolutely anything; such as animals, in the example of Mike when *It* shape shifts into a bird; movie creatures as the terrible werewolf seen by Richie and the mummy seen by Ben; members of the children's families like Bill's little brother and Beverly's father and even inhumane things such as blood, seen by Beverly all over her bathroom. (KING, 1997). The creature's transformations were made due to the fact that *It* needs to lure in children to feed from their flesh just to satisfy its urges and desires, showing its evilness and selfishness, other features associated with the trickster archetype, as stated by Jung (1971).

Another observation can be made regarding the resemblance of Pennywise with the trickster archetype, the ability to discomfort and misplace the ones around them. (JUNG, 1971). In spite of the horrible acts performed by Pennywise, *It* was the responsible for bringing the Losers' Club together and for misplacing them out of their comfort zones.

The seven kids who suffered bullying at school and dealt with major personal dramas at home, find themselves haunted by the same creature who brings them together. United by a promise and an inexplicable friendship, the seven friends reunited after 27 years to defeat *It* once and for all, but more than that, they defeated their inner fears. Pennywise is their villain and at the same time their savior, because thanks to *It* the Losers' Club had the chance to forsake their pasts and move on with their present, considering a much brighter future. The clown helps them to face feelings and situations they have been hiding for 27 years, fastening them in the same spot, making impossible

for any of them to truly move forward. (KING, 1997).

In other words, it is one more feature of the trickster, it changes you, it makes you think of different solutions to your problems and it requires from you a strength that sometimes you were unaware you had it. The trickster is a troublemaker that demands from the ones around it some type of action, Pennywise the Dancing Clown is the awful creature who brings the kids together giving them the chance to develop their characters, demanding of them the attitude of saving the town and themselves, while Pennywise propitiates the finding of an incredible friendship that changed their lives forever.

Once more Stephen King offers his readers a terrible monster, but this time in shape of a clown, one more mysterious creature which awakens the most human and sensitive feelings in his readers. Pennywise, the trickster, is the evil character responsible for the development of the Losers' Club, forcing them to deal with their deepest fears, changing their lives forever, consequently making them become self conscious of their fears and confident adults.

5 Final remarks

As it has been discussed throughout this article, one of the reasons why clowns scare people is the feeling of ambiguity they cause in their audiences. (KOEHNKE; MCANDREW, 2016). Besides that, different media productions have lately presented the clown with an evil attitude, easily explaining the cases of *coulrophobia*, the extreme fear of clowns. No one can foresee what is the following act to be performed by a clown, neither the real emotions hidden behind the colorful make up or mask. Clowns have the power to discomfort people, using the element of surprise to entertain along with prejudice jokes, humiliating and sarcastic acts.

Those characteristics are similar to the archetype of the trickster described by Jung (1971). The ancient archetype found in the most varied cultures and contexts since the dawn of days, expresses itself with a prankster attitude and a nature that can be practically considered animal, once that it does everything to achieve its personal desires, the trickster is moved by its cravings. The trickster also has the ability to shape shift, turning itself into any animal or human form, or even a mixture of both.

Considering the features of the trickster, it is easy to associate it with the figure of the clown. Clowns perform their humiliating jokes and acts in order to obtain their own satisfaction. The clown also has the power to change their form, since one can only become a clown after wearing the exaggerated outfit and make up, which seems to grant them with the mischievous attitude. (STEFANOVA, 2012). In spite of all the similarities, King (1997), in one of his most recognized novels, *"It"*, presents Pennywise the Dancing Clown, which seems to fit perfectly the position of trickster. The big star of this article performs not only humiliating and sarcastic acts, but also evil ones.

Pennywise is more than a dual creature, since it has an impressive shape-shifting ability, being capable of changing into the children's deepest fears. Therefore, the distinguishing ability to shape shift into human, animal or inanimate forms reaffirms the position of Pennywise as a perfect example of modern trickster. Another interesting feature is the fact that Pennywise does everything to satisfy its own desires and consequently discomforts people surrounding it, forcing them to face their fears. The Losers' Club members are not the same after leaving the presence of Pennywise, the clown was the responsible for propitiating situations in which the children were obliged to face their inner fears. Pennywise helps them evolve, become more confident and self assured adults, even though it is through a painful and terrorizing experience. (KING, 1997). Therefore, it is noticed that

the ancient creature of the trickster has received a modernized version through the creation of Stephen King's *It*.

The novel provides the readers an incredible story of overcoming their insecurities and personal dramas, which is only possible because of the figure of the trickster which makes the characters more mature, making the readers identify themselves with the plot, encouraging them to face their own evil clowns. Thus, I dare to claim that Stephen King is one of the responsible for changing the perception of the clown from harmless to evil when he graces his readers with Pennywise the Dancing Clown, or simply *It*. The shape shifting clown has served as an inspiration for the fiction subsequent evil clowns all over the world.

"*It*" is not just a story about a creepy clown; it is about the purity of infant friendships, the importance of family and more than anything, it is a story about overcoming your deepest fears and using them to make you stronger. All our lives seem like a freak show once in a while, but we can not let it define who we truly are and who we are able to become. After all, life is a circus and we have to be ready to face the evil clowns along the spectacle.

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