

[Linguistic and stylistic aspects in Stephen King's *Holly*]

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[Abstract] *This article examines the linguistic and stylistic features of Stephen King's novel Holly (2023) using a stylistic and discourse-analytical approach. The analysis focuses on three groups of features: typographic markers (italics and repetition), colloquial and lowered lexical register, and syntactic structures, particularly negation and ellipsis. The study demonstrates that these features function systematically in creating narrative voice and psychological realism. Colloquial language and vulgarisms contribute to characterization and authenticity, while syntactic fragmentation and ellipsis reflect cognitive processes and emotional states. Typographic devices, especially italics, mark shifts between narrative levels and foreground interior discourse. The findings further show that these linguistic patterns are closely connected to the novel's engagement with contemporary socio-cultural issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic, ideological polarization, and racial tension. The article argues that King's stylistic choices in Holly combine conventions of popular fiction with consistent linguistic patterning that supports both character construction and thematic development.*

[Keywords] *Stephen King; Holly; stylistics; discourse analysis; colloquialism; lowered lexicon; syntactic fragmentation; ellipsis; narrative voice*

[1] Introduction

The well-known contemporary American writer Stephen King has long engaged readers with his distinctive blend of horror, suspense, and the supernatural. His 2023 novel *Holly* continues this literary tradition, showcasing his evolving narrative style while revisiting one of his most complex characters: Holly Gibney. First introduced in *Mr. Mercedes* (2014), Holly has grown into a compelling protagonist whose journey reflects both personal and societal challenges. This article investigates the linguistic and stylistic techniques used in *Holly*, with a focus on narrative voice, colloquialism, and syntax. The study demonstrates that King's use of colloquial language, syntactic fragmentation, and typographic emphasis systematically creates characterization, psychological realism, and thematic meaning in *Holly*. The study addresses the following research question: How do specific linguistic and stylistic devices in Stephen King's *Holly* construct psychological realism and reflect contemporary socio-cultural tensions?

The primary aim of this study is to demonstrate that King's stylistic strategies – specifically colloquial language, syntactic fragmentation, and typographic emphasis – function systematically to create psychological realism and to articulate contemporary socio-cultural concerns in *Holly*. The analysis is based on selected textual excerpts from the novel and supported by relevant secondary sources on King's stylistic and narrative practices. The article argues that these linguistic features not only shape the representation of Holly Gibney's internal voice and cognitive processes, but also reflect broader cultural anxieties associated with the COVID-19 era.

Stephen King is known for combining elements of the horror genre with psychological depth, recognizable characters, and compelling supernatural elements. King's writing style integrates complex narrative structures with language that reflects terror while exploring the human psyche and social issues. Moreover, King demonstrates a distinctive capacity to combine suspense, horror, and supernatural elements with nuanced representations of everyday struggles, often framed within the Gothic tradition. This interplay enhances the emotional and thematic depth of his narratives. King uses different verbal means to convey information that appeals to readers' consciousness and evokes emotions based on sensory experience. His literary output is distinguished by specific stylistic and thematic features. Intertextual relations with other genres distinguish King's style, and this feature contributes to the global popularity of King's work. The majority of his books have become bestsellers, with a total circulation of more than 100 million copies. Despite this popularity, however, literary critics are still debating the evaluation of Stephen King's creative work. Some consider him the leading representative of horror literature, while others criticize him for his willingness to accept mass culture and sensation (Atanasova, 2022; Indick, 1998). Numerous studies have been devoted to Stephen King and his work (Allan, 2021; Buday, 2015; Didukh, 2019; Hye-Knudsen et al., 2023; Morris, 2022), including investigations of his novels, narrative strategies, authorial development, and literary positioning within postmodernism; however, most of them remain primarily descriptive.

M. Atanasova (2022), in her work *Stephen King: New Reflections and Refractions*, points out the significance of the writer in the domain of the horror genre and the influence of other authors on King's writing (p. 12). She states that the works of Bram Stoker, H. P. Lovecraft and Shirley Jackson contributed to the formation of Stephen King's unique literary identity. His works published between 2011 and 2021 continue some established traditions while also introducing new aspects. King continues to combine the elements of different genres, and at the same time he retains the Gothic tradition. It is important to note that female characters are rarely at the centre of the narrative in his work. However, his ability to blend readability with profound emotional and psychological depth, as discussed in his memoir *On Writing*, allows readers to immerse themselves fully in his fictional worlds, engaging both their intellect and imagination (King, 2012).

[2] Theoretical and methodological background

This study uses an approach from stylistics and discourse analysis, focusing on how language constructs meaning in *Holly*. It is based on textual features such as colloquial phrasing, fragmented syntax, lexical register, and typographic emphasis (e.g. italics and ellipses), and it examines these features' role in constructing voice, emotional depth, and social commentary. The primary focus is on identifying how lexical choices, syntactic variation, pragmatic markers, and narrative voice contribute to character development, emotional tone, and thematic resonance. The primary data consists of narrative sequences from *Holly* that reflect King's recurring stylistic features: lowered lexical register, colloquial phrasing, fragmented syntax, typographic cues, and intertextual references. Each instance is analyzed for its distinctive style and interpretive function. Secondary literature is used to study King's stylistic strategies within genre-specific and broader literary-linguistic discourse.

The analysis is primarily based on Stephen King's *Holly* (2023) as its core textual data. Specific narrative excerpts are selected to illustrate recurring linguistic phenomena, including the use of vernacular speech, lowered lexical registers, syntactic fragmentation, double negation, and typographical emphasis. These features are interpreted as stylistic means that constitute the protagonist's internal voice, convey emotional instability, and reflect broader cultural anxieties.

Stephen King's storytelling techniques reveal a mastery of narrative structure and thematic layering that transcends the traditional boundaries of genre fiction. In exploring psychological, moral and social complexities, King creates characters who embody internal and external conflicts, allowing readers to connect deeply with their narrative journeys. The writer appeals to readers' experiences, reflecting social issues through his narration. King's novels often reflect cultural tensions and existential questions, achieved via a thorough choice of language and a nuanced portrayal of his characters' emotional landscapes. This approach thus not only attracts audiences, but also encourages a critical examination of contemporary issues through a lens of suspense and the supernatural, enhancing King's literary position beyond the confines of horror fiction.

K. T. Tamilmani and V. S. Sridheepika (2024) have highlighted King's engagement with transhumanism in their analysis of his works. In novels such as *The Institute* (2019), King explores the ethical and existential dilemmas posed by advancements in science and technology. However, in *Holly* these themes are more subtly integrated, with the character of Holly herself undergoing a psychological metamorphosis as she navigates a morally complex world. As Tamilmani (2024) notes, King's characters frequently undergo metamorphic development, particularly in response to psychological strain. Based on this research, this article explores how linguistic choices, such as fragmented syntax and lowered lexicon, serve to externalize these internal transformations, especially in the character of Holly herself. Ben P. Indick (1998, p. 6) in his article "King and the Literary tradition of horror and the supernatural" points out that King's narrative style in general is ponderous and the dialogue was formal and stilted.

In the novel's afterword, King clarifies his decision not to include a protagonist with COVID-denialist views, noting that had he done so, he would have aimed for a fair and balanced portrayal. This decision reflects King's commitment to nuanced, fair representations of divisive social issues, even within a fictional framework (King, 2023).

The novel also engages directly with social themes, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. "I feel better, but this Covid is a real ass-kicker. I think if I hadn't gotten those shots, I'd be in hospital. Or..." (King, 2023, p. 125)

The speaker refers to the pandemic in a way that downplays its severity ("ass-kicker"), yet still recognizes the real danger of the disease. This mix of humour and grim reality is another peculiarity of King's style, as his characters often cope with difficult situations through levity or irreverence. The use of informal language ("ass-kicker" and "those shots") maintains a conversational and accessible tone in the narrative while also introducing deeper topics of mortality and survival. Furthermore, the use of derogatory terms is a deliberate deviation from standard or neutral registers.

King incorporates the pandemic into the narrative, offering readers a reflection of their lived realities. His portrayal of the pandemic reveals his own critical stance on the issue, a stance that he weaves into the characters' attitudes and behaviours. The thematic engagement with the pandemic places *Holly* firmly within the crime fiction genre, while also expanding its scope to address timely global concerns. As Angela S. Allan (2021, p. 271) points out, King's name has become synonymous with genre fiction, and his ability to incorporate social critique into his narratives enhances his literary standing.

Stephen King's narrative strategies are designed to engage readers on multiple levels. John Morris (2022), in his study of King's horror techniques, notes that King has developed a formula for eliciting terror, horror and revulsion by tapping into readers' subconscious fears (Morris, 2022, p. 27). *Holly* continues this tradition, with its protagonist navigating a dark and morally ambiguous world that reflects readers' own anxieties and fears. The metafictional and intertextual elements of King's work, as noted by M. Buday (2015), further enhance its complexity. The novel also references King's own *Mr. Mercedes*

trilogy, creating a layered intertextual dialogue across his oeuvre. These references position *Holly* both within and against crime fiction traditions, reinforcing King's engagement with genre expectations while also subverting them through psychological depth and cultural critique. King often references other works of literature and plays with narrative conventions, allowing readers to engage with the text on a more intellectual level. This is particularly evident in *Holly*, where King not only explores the conventions of crime fiction but also subverts them, creating a narrative that is both familiar and surprising.

King also explores another key element of crime fiction: social themes. The writer showcases his crime genre prowess with the exceptional *Holly*, placing him on par with the timeless classics. King uses plain and direct language when writing fiction (Hye-Knudsen, 2023, p. 5). According to M. Hye-Knudsen (2023), King manipulates his audience masterfully to tug at their emotions. D'Elia (2010) argues that King's ability to engage readers lies in his use of another reality, in which he blends the ordinary with the extraordinary. His works transcend genre constraints by crafting realistic characters and settings that readers can relate to, even while introducing supernatural elements. Moreover, it is noted that King's use of colloquial language, brand names and familiar cultural references helps create authenticity and immediacy in his prose and anchors the narrative for readers (Hye-Knudsen, 2023; D'Elia, 2010). L. Didukh (2019) points out that the main features of King's writing style are the usage of child or teenage characters, focusing on common human fears and terrorizing readers, and descriptions of casual situations in frightening detail.

The analysis thus underscores that King's linguistic and stylistic strategies in *Holly* are integral to the novel's psychological depth and socio-cultural resonance. By combining vernacular expression, fragmented syntax and typographic cues with intertextual and thematic complexity, King creates a narrative that not only engages genre conventions but also reflects broader cultural anxieties. These features contribute to a nuanced portrayal of internal transformation and moral ambiguity, positioning *Holly* as both a work of crime fiction and a commentary on contemporary realities.

[3] Stylistic features in *Holly*

Holly Gibney first appeared in *Mr. Mercedes*, and this dynamic character undergoes significant personal growth during the events of the novel. As a key figure in King's *Bill Hodges Trilogy*, Holly transitions from a secondary role into a prominent, complex protagonist. By placing Holly at the centre of the narrative, King reveals social and personal traumas and enables her to confront both human and supernatural adversities, highlighting his commitment to creating characters with rich, layered experiences. King's use of language to shape Holly's voice involves colloquial and emotionally rich syntax, reflecting her introspective and methodical nature. The informal style employed in her dialogue and thoughts allows readers to access her inner world. Furthermore, linguistic choices, such as Holly's self-reflective monologues and distinct phrasings, reveal her personal insecurities and growth. Such linguistic portrayals thus enhance her authenticity, making her one of King's most memorable characters.

[3.1] Italics, repetition, and voice modulation

King frequently uses italics to emphasize emotional intensity. For example, he uses repetition and italics to highlight key moments of internal reflection:

2. “She needs to *represent*, as her students sometimes say. More importantly, this could be a good poem. Maybe even a *necessary* poem.” (King, 2023, p. 3, emphasis in original)

By combining casual and conversational language with the repetition of the word “poem,” King effectively immerses the reader in the protagonist’s internal reflections. By using different qualifiers such as “good” and “necessary,” the emphasis on the poem becomes a psychological marker for the character’s personal stakes, not just showing the creation of art but also emphasizing a crucial emotional or existential role. Linguistically, the italics underscore the character’s inner dialogue, creating a subtle layering of voice that is both self-reflective and touching. This technique is typical of King’s ability to balance colloquial speech with deeper thematic resonance, showing the tension between everyday events and underlying emotional complexity.

3. “She thinks, *the runner doesn’t hear silver above him / These bells don’t ring.*” (King, 2023, p. 3, emphasis in original)

Here King uses a representation of interior monologue to convey the protagonist’s psychological state. The use of italics marks a transition into Holly’s internal thought. The phrase “*the runner doesn’t hear silver above him*” evokes a sense of unawareness or impending threat, with the lexeme “silver” possibly functioning as a symbolic reference to danger, fate, or a higher unseen force. The subsequent line “*These bells don’t ring*” reinforces the motif of missed signals or emotional disconnection, typically associated with warning or awakening.

4. “He looks at the Porta-John, but he’s a long way from trying to drink disinfected water. *Which I have pissed in twice*, he thinks.” (King, 2023, p. 137, emphasis in original)

This passage illustrates how King integrates lexical informality, syntactic fragmentation, and narrative modulation to construct a psychologically credible and stylistically distinctive voice. King uses colloquial and bodily language to evoke a tone of visceral realism and emotional immediacy. The informal verb “pissed,” in contrast to the more neutral “disinfected water,” exemplifies a deliberate register shift that underscores the character’s cynicism and discomfort.

5. “‘*Nobody likes you here,*’ Junior Mitchell said. ‘*You’re standoffish and you do substandard work. Without me you’d be out on your ass. So how about a little payback, huh? I think once you try it, you’ll like it.*’” (King, 2023, p. 142, emphasis in original)

This passage demonstrates how King uses colloquial dialogue, register shifts, and pragmatic manipulation to construct psychological tension. The lexemes “standoffish,” “substandard” and “out on your ass” reflect an informal tone of confrontation. The phrase

“out on your ass” is both colloquial and idiomatic, functioning here as a threatening performative, where the speaker asserts power through socially embedded language. The insult is framed as a factual judgment, but it functions rhetorically to destabilize and humiliate the addressee. The use of short, declarative sentences and tag questions creates a coercive rhythm, reflecting patterns of real-life verbal aggression. King's stylistic economy, minimal narration, and maximal tension allow the dialogue itself to carry characterization and conflict.

The following example demonstrates phonetic distortions and sarcastic exaggerations, which are also integral features of King's stylistic approach:

6. “Em snorts. ‘Awesome. Cool. *Amyyyyzing*. I doubt if she could write an original sentence if someone put a gun to her head.” (King, 2023, p. 105, emphasis in original)

The exaggerated, elongated “*Amyyyyzing*” hints at the speaker's sarcasm and underlying disrespect for insincere praise. The use of italics emphasizes the emotional context. King often uses such phonetic distortions to add a sense of voice and realism to his characters. The casual tone, combined with the metaphor of putting “a gun to her head,” highlights King's tendency to juxtapose everyday speech with darker imagery. This balance between humour and grimness is a recurring stylistic feature in his novel. By using these distortions, King adds authenticity, showing how real people might mock or exaggerate when speaking. Such choices thus introduce a conversational, informal tone to the narrative, even as King's characters confront dark, serious topics.

King's linguistic strategies often include juxtaposing colloquial language with social observations, as demonstrated when Holly reflects on polarized social identities:

7. “You believe that, Holly thinks. You believe it to your very soul, because you're a holder-onner, and holder-onners are never able to understand let-goers. They are tribes that just can't understand each other. Sort of like vaxxers and anti-vaxxers, Trumppers and Never Trumppers.” (King, 2023, p. 137)

The use of simple, colloquial terms like “holder-onners” and “let-goers” to categorize human behaviour is both conversational and poignant, revealing the author's ability to reflect complex social phenomena in simple, everyday language. This conversational tone, reflecting the interiority of Holly's thoughts, shows King's ability to reveal the psychological state of his character. In addition, King's choice of descriptors and the conversational tone of Holly's internal dialogue shows how social and personal insights coexist within a framework of everyday language, revealing his characters' psychological depth.

King frequently employs contrasting imagery to create tension, as shown in his descriptions of physical sensations:

8. “He opens his eyes, ready for morning glare that will send another blast of pain through his poor abused head, but the light is soft.” (King, 2023, p. 7)

Here King skillfully juxtaposes anticipation with reality. The character's expectation of a “blast of pain” contrasts sharply with the softness of the light, creating an effective

reversal that surprises the reader. Tension appears from such a contrast between expectation and reality. Furthermore, King appeals to the reader's senses and imagination with the lexemes "morning glare" and "blast of pain," whereas "poor abused head" emphasizes pain and makes the reader feel it. The sentence ends with the phrase "but the light is soft," showing a moment of relief after the tension. King uses this type of structure (tension followed by a soft resolution) frequently to keep the reader involved.

[3.2] Colloquialism and lowered lexicon

Colloquial expressions and a lowered lexicon contribute to the creation of realistic dialogue, making the characters' speech more relatable:

9. "All the usual home handyman shit, and everything looking well-maintained." (King, 2023, p. 7)

The use of the word "shit" signals an informal tone and a lowered register. This linguistic choice helps readers to relate to the characters, making them appear more authentic. However, colloquialisms like these also serve as emotional shortcuts, conveying frustration, resignation, or humour depending on the context.

King is known for employing strong language to express raw emotions:

10. "Even in his current fucked-up state he knows what the Porta-John means: someone intends for him to be here awhile." (King, 2023, p. 8)

The use of strong language in casual contexts conveys the frustration or vulnerability of the character, functioning as an emotional shortcut to the reader's understanding of the scene. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the character's "fucked-up state" with his clear understanding of the situation creates tension between mental disarray and clarity. King often uses such contrasts to develop multi-dimensional characters who, despite their flaws or physical limitations, show moments of sharp insight or awareness.

King's skill in suspense-building is introduced by his use of ellipsis and casual constructions:

11. "Emily Harris straightens up, puts the broom back, turns... and gives him a smile. As if they are at a fucking cocktail party, or something." (King, 2023, p. 10)

By using elliptic constructions, King creates a brief pause, inviting the readers to fill in the gap with their own expectations of what might come next. Suspense-building techniques are common in King's style, especially when he wants to prolong the moment and strengthen the reader's sense of anticipation. The vernacular phrase "as if they are at a fucking cocktail party" introduces a sarcastic tone and intensifies the character's disbelief or irritation. King exploits dissonances between action and thought to reveal a character's emotional state. This technique thus gives the reader insights into the character's frustration.

Informal language in the novel often reflects psychological depth, as seen in Holly's introspective thoughts:

12. “And feeling like shit, as I currently do, I didn’t think talking to a weepy-ass divorced mom would make me feel any better.” (King, 2023, p. 24)

The combination of comparison and vernacular speech helps to emphasize the character’s emotional and physical state. The colloquial phrase “weepy-ass divorced mom” creates an informal rude tone and emphasizes the character’s impatience. This unfiltered interior monologue provides an insight into the character’s psyche, allowing readers to experience their emotions directly.

King’s engagement with racial and psychological tension is evident in interior monologue and unfiltered dialogue:

13. “You are a bitch, is what you are. The girl is infuriating, and it doesn’t help that the goddamned sciatica has kept her up half the night. An uppity, smartass bitch! BLACK bitch!” (King, 2023, p. 55)

This example demonstrates how King expresses tonality by several means: italics, exclamatory sentences, and the use of capital letters. Moreover, the colloquial “bitch” and “god-damned sciatica” show disrespect and the impolite attitude of the speaker. Repetition emphasizes the derogatory nature of the statement, solidifying the speaker’s anger or frustration. The word “bitch” is used both as an insult and as a form of character expression, reflecting the speaker’s emotional intensity and lack of restraint. Stephen King is known for his ability to reflect the inner thoughts of his characters without filtering language, which makes this colloquial and profane choice natural in his work. Furthermore, the addition of “uppity smartass bitch” emphasizes not only frustration but also a feeling of superiority and condescension. The phrase “BLACK bitch!” adds another layer by racializing the insult, which introduces the speaker’s biases. This reflects not only the tone but also social and racial tensions in the character’s perspective.

The following example shows the use of vernacular speech to convey Holly’s frustration:

14. “‘I do,’ Holly says. ‘Seeing that poopy little long-nosed fucker going away will be the best thing that’s happened to her since arriving at 42 Lily Court.’” (King, 2023, p. 140)

Vulgar lexemes function as markers of emotional expression in the novel. The phrase “poopy little long-nosed fucker” shows the character’s frustration by means of contrast between the diminutive poopy and vulgar long-nosed fucker.

King often combines dark humour with provocative language to critique human relationships:

15. “Tom Terrific is the kind of dude who’ll suck on his fellow dudes until there’s nothing more to suck. I guess they wised up. Speaking of sucking on people, can I have another one of these?” (King, 2023, p. 191)

This extract shows dark humour and the use of rude, provocative language to create memorable observations. The repetition of “suck” plays on the idea of exploitation, turning it into a running gag that mocks both the character Tom and the transactional nature

of human relationships. The conversational tone and casual switch to a different topic (“Can I have another one of these?”) also reflects King’s ability to weave humour into tension-filled moments, lightening the mood while still delivering pointed social critique.

16. “Nobody likes you here, Junior Mitchell said. You’re standoffish and you do sub-standard work. Without me you’d be out on your ass. So how about a little payback, huh? I think once you try it, you’ll like it.” (King, 2023, p. 142)

In this speech, King exposes the darker, manipulative side of human nature. The language here is plain and direct, yet it carries an underlying threat. King frequently uses such confrontations in his writing to reveal power dynamics and the seedy side of small, everyday interactions. Moreover, the simple short sentences mimic real speech, enhancing the realism and menace of the moment. The colloquial “be out on your ass” shows ridicule and disrespect towards the character.

17. “Haggerty stopped her there and told her she could have the job on spec. He knew an index-nerd when she saw one, Holly thinks as she sits on the bed.” (King, 2023, p. 144)

King’s language here is casual and somewhat self-deprecating, especially with terms like “index-nerd.” This informal tone adds to the relatability of Holly’s character, humanizing her through her internal monologue. The way King presents her thoughts is thus sharp and concise, reflecting his ability to convey character traits through quick, perceptive internal reflections.

18. “‘Oh sure,’ Barbara says, and laughs. ‘It’s racist as hell. Fat black bucks in a white barrel room? Are you kidding me?’” (King, 2023, p. 200)

This passage shows King’s engagement with the topics of race and social injustice. The quoted phrase, “Fat black bucks in a white barrel room,” highlights a disturbing racial stereotype, and the character’s blunt condemnation (“It’s racist as hell”) points to King’s willingness to confront uncomfortable truths about racism.

Stephen King describes his characters’ states in detail, with emotions conveyed through detailed description:

19. “Barbara Robinson special-ordered them for her as a birthday present, and they are covered with various emojis: smiley faces, frowny faces, kissy faces and pissy faces. Quite amusing.” (King, 2023, p. 62)

This description adds humour and irony. The variety of faces depicted (from “smiley” to “pissy”) mirrors the emotional complexity of the situation or the character’s reactions to life’s various challenges. King also introduces a focus on identity and perception. The use of a nickname tied to an embarrassing quirk (jibbering) reflects Holly’s internal anxiety about how others perceive her. The comparison “follow her like a bad smell” expresses a strong image of inevitability and social shame. Moreover, King also highlights the topic of social anxiety, particularly during the character’s formative teenage years in this novel. The nickname thus symbolizes Holly’s fear of being marked or stigmatized by her peers.

20. “Her mother allowed her to switch high schools – Oh, Holly, I suppose – but for the rest of her nightmare years of secondary education, she lived in fear that the nickname would follow her like a bad smell: Jibba-Jibba Gibney. What if she started jibba-jibba-gibbering when talking to those boys?” (King, 2023, p. 64)

Colloquial language here serves a dual function. On the one hand, it grounds Holly's fear in a routine, everyday reality, making it accessible to readers who may have experienced similar anxieties. On the other hand, it reflects King's stylistic tendency to humanize his characters through language that feels unfiltered and authentic. The casual tone also contributes to the psychological realism of the narrative, as it mirrors how people often think in informal terms about personal insecurities. The phonetic repetition of “Jibba-Jibba” and the transformation into the verb “gibbering” evokes a sense of mockery and infantilization, which enhances Holly's fear of being ridiculed. This repetition functions as a linguistic manifestation of her anxiety, showing how language itself becomes a source of trauma for her. Furthermore, the association of smells with social embarrassment is a technique King uses to internalize Holly's fear of being misunderstood or mocked. The metaphor of a “bad smell” embodies the psychological weight of social stigma and personal insecurity. Thus, King's choice of such metaphor further emphasizes Holly's feelings of powerlessness, as a smell is not something one can control or easily distance oneself from.

[3.3] Negation and ellipsis in Holly's narrative structure

King also uses double negation in his novel:

21. “‘We stopped arguing’. She pauses. ‘Well, no, not entirely. You can't not argue with your kid.’” (King, 2023, p. 111)

Double negative constructions emphasize the inevitability of conflict in parent-child relationships. However, this not only reflects the emotional complexity of the interaction, but also introduces a subtle sense of frustration and inevitability.

22. “Would never dream of insurrectionists hanging elected representatives of the United States government from lampposts. Especially the blacks (a word which in her mind she will never capitalize) and the fanny-fuckers. Of which there are more every day.” (King, 2023, p. 116)

King emphasizes ellipsis here to show internal thoughts or unspoken dialogue, giving the impression that we are directly inside the character's mind. It is an effective tool for characterizing the speaker's stream of consciousness. The absence of a clear subject creates a psychological distance between the speaker and the actions being described. In addition, the writer avoids first-person or third-person pronoun in order to depersonalize the event.

King uses techniques of fragmentation and incomplete sentences to emphasize the feeling of resentment, as seen in the following example:

23. “What she minds is the idea of him traveling on a plane where the air is recirculated and anyone might have Covid, but she can’t help being delighted by his over-the-moon happiness. Spur-of-the-moment trip to New York City in the summer of Covid, she thinks. It’s good to be young and today it’s good to be Jerome.” (King, 2023, p. 206)

Here, King uses a narrative style that closely aligns with the internal thoughts of the character, creating a free indirect discourse that seamlessly merges the narrator’s voice with the character’s perspective. The idiom “she can’t help being delighted by his over-the-moon happiness” emphasizes the character’s emotions and at the same time shows contrast between her joy and her potential fear of COVID-19. This colloquialism also creates a sense of warmth, positioning the reader to empathize with the character’s mixed emotions. In addition, the ironic phrase “the summer of Covid” juxtaposes the idea of careless youth with the reality of a global health crisis. The language reflects quick and spontaneous thoughts. This stylistic choice thus displays an interior monologue style, allowing the readers to experience the character’s feelings.

24. “‘Not bothering you now,’ Em says, ‘but you’ll be moaning about it tonight, I bet, and you’ll be stuck with Bengay because the good stuff is down to dribs and drabs. We should save what’s left for the emergency.’ If my back or your neck locks up again is what she means.” (King, 2023, p. 129)

This example reflects King’s attention to the small, ordinary details of everyday life, making them significant in the context of character relationships. The reference to “Bengay” and the dwindling supply of “the good stuff” gives the scene a sense of authenticity, while the parenthetical clarification (“If my back or your neck locks up again...”) appeals to the characters’ familiarity and care for each other. Consequently, King’s style often dwells on details of life in order to develop deeper character connections.

25. “The smell of potpourri hits her as soon as the door is open. For a moment she hesitates – nothing brings back memories, both good and bad, so strongly as certain aromas – but then she squares her shoulders and steps inside.” (King, 2023, p. 137)

This example shows King’s skill in using sensory details to evoke emotional resonance. The description of “the smell of potpourri” immediately grounds the reader in the scene, while the protagonist’s hesitation hints at the weight of past experiences tied to the smell. King’s use of sensory imagery to trigger memory is a common literary technique, but he intensifies it with emotional complexity, as the aroma evokes both “good and bad” memories.

26. “Keysha does, and in her distress, or anger, or both, she loses some of her careful I’m-talking-to-a-white-lady diction. Not much, just a little.” (King, 2023, p. 166)

Here, King subtly addresses the issues of race and code-switching. The phrase “I’m-talking-to-a-white-lady diction” refers to how Keysha adjusts her speech to fit perceived social expectations. The fact that she “loses some” of it during a moment of emotional intensity illustrates the tension between maintaining composure and expressing authentic

feelings. Moreover, King's attention to these nuances of speech reflects his broader interest in the complexities of identity and communication.

27. "Can't remember. I was pretty drunk. But if you're thinking he might have done something to her, forget it. Tom isn't the confrontational type. He's more the can-you-loan-me-fifty-until-next-Friday type." (King, 2023, p. 191)

This example shows King's ability to characterize through dialogue. The contrast between "confrontational" and "can-you-loan-me-fifty-until-next-Friday" reveals the essence of Tom's personality in just a few words. King often uses such quick, descriptive character sketches to complete his characters, giving the reader a clear sense of who they are without lengthy exposition. The casual, conversational style keeps the tone light, even as the subject matter suggests deeper potential conflicts.

The following example further illustrates how syntactic fragmentation and ellipsis contribute to the immediacy of internal narration:

28. "Not if Ellen got snatched in the vicinity of Deerfield Park, Holly thinks. That's miles from here. But she'll talk to Imani McGuire. Holly is a fan of Michael Connelly's detective hero, Harry Bosch, and especially of Bosch's number one maximum: get off your ass and go knock on doors." (King, 2023, p. 210)

The elliptical construction "Not if Ellen got snatched in the vicinity of Deerfield Park, Holly thinks" shows the immediacy and spontaneity of Holly's internal dialogue, immersing the reader in her perspective. King combines the third-person narration with Holly's own thoughts, as seen in "That's miles from here." Phrasal verbs like "get off" and "knock on doors" make the style conversational. The reference to "Michael Connelly's detective hero, Harry Bosch" enriches Holly's characterization. This allusion situates Holly within a cultural context and reveals her admiration for Bosch's philosophy of action, subtly aligning her values with those of a fictional detective.

29. "Freddy left shortly after, I think to look for Jorge. The love of his life. Came back broken-hearted and with a monkey on his back. Stayed six months and then left again. The Wicked Witch of the West said it best. What a word, what a word!" (King, 2023, p. 222)

This example shows a combination of colloquial language with indirect cultural allusion. The idiom "monkey on his back" refers to addiction or an inescapable burden, revealing the character's struggles without explicit exposition. This idiomatic choice adds cultural specificity, resonating with readers familiar with the expression and providing insight into Freddy's unresolved challenges. The repetition in "What a word, what a word!" uses an exclamatory tone to emphasize both admiration and irony. The fragmented sentence structure, consisting of short, paratactic units, reflects the speaker's emotional instability and mimics the associative flow of memory.

30. "Hell of a thing to be knitting on a day when the temperature's s'posed to be in the nineties, but cold weather comes... or did, they got the climate so screwed up it's hard to tell what's gonna happen from one year to the next." (King, 2023, p. 212)

The informal tone in this example is shown through contractions and colloquial expressions, such as “s’posed,” “gonna,” and “screwed up.” The ironic tone of the phrase “they got the climate so screwed up” expresses skepticism about humans’ impact on the environment. The colloquial “hell of a thing” emphasizes the emotional tension in the speech. King uses ellipses and fragmented syntax to represent the natural, interrupted flow of thoughts. The ellipsis in “cold weather comes... or did” marks a disruption in the flow of thought, reflecting hesitation and cognitive uncertainty. This fragmentation creates a sense of immediacy and reproduces the character’s spontaneous mental processing.

[4] Conclusion

The linguistic and stylistic peculiarities in *Holly* emphasize King’s ability to create a narrative that engages readers beyond horror. He creates a multi-dimensional protagonist whose interior monologues resonate with personal vulnerability and strength through the use of italics and fragmented syntax. Consequently, these linguistic aspects render Holly’s voice by showing her psychological state. Moreover, King’s attention to colloquialisms and vernacular language makes the dialogue realistic, and enhances the perceived authenticity of Holly’s fictional world. Additionally, his integration of contemporary issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and racial tensions, places Holly within a relevant social framework, encouraging readers to reflect on current social issues through a literary lens. Thus, Stephen King effectively deepens the emotional and intellectual impact of his narrative. His novel *Holly* represents a continuation of his exploration of human nature, societal issues, and the complexities of identity. Through his distinctive linguistic style and narrative strategies, King engages readers while challenging them to confront their own fears and moral dilemmas. The use of various linguistic devices reflects the social and psychological themes embedded within his work. His treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, mirrors real-world anxieties, offering readers both a means of reflection and engagement with contemporary issues. He also raises racial and political themes in his novel.

As scholars continue to explore the nuances of King’s literary techniques, *Holly* stands as a testament to his enduring ability to craft compelling and thought-provoking fiction. King’s use of colloquialism, profanity, and informal syntax is deliberate, creating characters who feel authentic and relatable. These techniques reveal characters’ emotional states, allowing readers to feel deeply connected to their experiences. Colloquial conversational styles, together with a lowered lexicon, create realistic dialogue. The unfiltered dialogue and interior monologues help to overcome the gap between the character and the reader. King frequently uses contrasts between expectation and reality, as well as between casual action and internal commentary, to create tension, irony, or humour in his narrative. King’s narrative style includes the use of ellipses, italics, and fragmented syntax, contributing to character development by making each speaker different. This technique creates pauses and encourages anticipation of what might come next. Additionally, the combination of dark humour, irony, and provocative language reflects

the emotional intensity of his characters. These stylistic choices extend the emotional impact of *Holly*, placing it within a unique narrative space that addresses contemporary concerns while adhering to King's signature style.

Stephen King emphasizes the tonality of his characters' speech and interior monologues through the use of double negation, vernacular speech, and comparisons. These stylistic tools involve the reader in the character's internal struggles and perceptions. In *Holly*, King exemplifies his ability to blend horror, psychological depth, and social relevance, using linguistic choices that resonate with readers on both an emotional and intellectual level.

Holly further demonstrates King's skill as a storyteller, highlighting his ability to craft narratives that merge horror, psychological depth, and social critique. His use of language transcends mere dialogue, shaping a nuanced portrayal of human resilience in the face of social and personal challenges. Through linguistic experimentation, King not only reinforces his status in the literary world but also fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities that define human experience. The novel becomes a reflection of both individual and social struggles, underscoring King's commitment to creating literature that speaks to a broad spectrum of emotions, fears, and moral questions.

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