

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

**Sharipova Guljahon Saparniyoz kizi**

*1<sup>st</sup> year master's student of the Foreign languages and literature faculty, University of  
Economics and Pedagogy*

E-mail: [sharipovaguljahon0@gmail.com](mailto:sharipovaguljahon0@gmail.com)

Scientific advisor: **Turaeva Dilfuza Daminovna**

*PhD., assoc.prof. of the University of Economics and Pedagogy*

**Abstract.** Stephen King's *The Dead Zone* (1979) is often celebrated for its supernatural suspense, yet beneath its thrilling surface lies a profound commentary on American society. This article explores the novel's depiction of political corruption, mental health, and the ethical dilemmas of foresight, arguing that King uses his protagonist's psychic abilities as a lens through which to critique systemic injustices and societal fears during the Cold War era. Drawing on sociological and literary theory, the article demonstrates how King transforms genre fiction into a powerful medium for social critique.

**Key words:** Stephen King, *The Dead Zone*, social problems, politics, ethics, mental health, American society, Cold War.

**Introduction.** Stephen King's novels often transcend the horror genre by delving into deeper social and psychological issues. *The Dead Zone*, written in the late 1970s, is no exception. Set in a period marked by political disillusionment, post-Vietnam War trauma, and growing mistrust in government institutions, the novel tackles issues such as the abuse of political power, mental health stigma, and the moral responsibility of individuals with extraordinary knowledge. This article aims to analyze how King presents these problems, using his protagonist Johnny Smith's psychic abilities as both a narrative device and a metaphor for societal foresight.

**Methods.** The study employs a literary-sociological approach, combining close textual analysis with sociopolitical contextualization. Relevant scenes from *The Dead Zone* are interpreted through the lens of American political culture in the 1970s, and critical literature on King's work, including scholarly articles and interviews, are used to support

interpretations. The analysis draws from secondary sources in psychology and political theory to connect narrative developments with broader social themes.

**Results.** Political Corruption and Populist Danger: Greg Stillson, the antagonist, embodies the rise of dangerous populism. His charismatic yet authoritarian demeanor recalls real-world political figures who manipulate public fear for personal gain. King constructs Stillson as a sociopath whose charm conceals fascistic intentions. In one pivotal scene, Stillson uses a child as a human shield during an assassination attempt - a shocking symbol of moral bankruptcy in politics. His campaign rhetoric, filled with nationalism and threats, mirrors tactics employed by demagogues throughout history.

Stillson's tactics include blackmail, inciting violence among his followers, and threatening journalists - all tactics that serve to undermine democratic norms. His success highlights how the electorate can be seduced by superficial charisma and fearmongering, especially in times of socio-economic instability. King draws a disturbing parallel to the real threat of authoritarianism in democratic societies.

*Mental Health and Social Isolation:* Johnny's coma and subsequent psychic awakening symbolize society's treatment of mental and physical difference. Upon waking, he is alienated not only due to his powers but also because of the fear and skepticism of those around him. Even those who once loved him - like Sarah, his former fiancée - grow distant. The isolation Johnny experiences reflects broader stigmatization of those with neurological or psychological abnormalities.

Throughout the novel, Johnny is alternately idolized, investigated, and vilified. At one point, the media sensationalizes his story, turning him into a spectacle. He is treated more as an anomaly or threat than a human being. This dehumanization mirrors the real-world treatment of trauma survivors and those with disabilities - who often lack institutional support and are misrepresented in popular discourse.

*Ethical Responsibility and the Burden of Knowledge:* King poses a central ethical question: if one could prevent future atrocities, is it justifiable to commit a morally reprehensible act? Johnny's decision to assassinate Stillson is framed not as heroism, but as a tragic necessity. His moral dilemma resonates with debates about preemptive action in geopolitics, especially in the context of Cold War brinkmanship.

Johnny's visions - particularly the one in which Stillson initiates nuclear war - are deeply allegorical. They emphasize not only the stakes of political decisions but also the

loneliness of moral clarity. Johnny consults doctors, religious figures, and friends, seeking validation, but ultimately realizes that he alone can prevent catastrophe. His personal sacrifice is both heroic and profoundly tragic.

A notable scene that exemplifies this is when Johnny chooses to test his moral limits by shaking Stillson's hand to confirm his vision. The physical act of touch becomes an ethical threshold. From a literary perspective, this moment underscores the interface between private morality and public consequence.

*Media and Exploitation:* Another layer of King's social critique in *The Dead Zone* involves media sensationalism. Reporters follow Johnny relentlessly, misreporting his story and distorting facts. This reflects the increasing tabloidization of media in the 1970s and the public's appetite for scandal over substance. The media becomes complicit in Johnny's alienation, prioritizing profit over ethics.

King suggests that the media, far from being a neutral observer, often exacerbates the very social problems it reports on. By turning Johnny into a commodity, the press dehumanizes him, stripping away nuance from his story. This mirrors broader concerns about the erosion of public trust in journalism.

**Discussion.** King's *The Dead Zone* offers a nuanced reflection on the fears and moral ambiguities of the late 20th century. The Cold War nuclear threat is symbolized through Johnny's visions, and Stillson becomes an archetype of reckless political ambition. The novel critiques how American society responds to the unknown - with fear, suppression, and sometimes violence. Johnny, a tragic hero, is misunderstood not only because of his abilities but also because he dares to act on truths society would rather ignore.

Moreover, the novel invites discussion about the limits of democracy when charismatic demagogues manipulate media and public opinion. King's portrayal of media sensationalism surrounding Johnny also critiques how trauma is commodified and exploited.

King also explores the tension between individual agency and systemic control. Johnny's attempt to change the future is a powerful assertion of personal ethics against deterministic fatalism. But the cost is high: isolation, misunderstanding, and death. The novel argues that heroism often goes unrecognized, especially when it disrupts comfortable illusions.

**Conclusion.** *The Dead Zone* is more than a supernatural thriller—it is a sociopolitical parable. Through Johnny Smith's tragedy, King reflects on the burden of knowledge, the

danger of political extremism, the social marginalization of those who do not conform, and the complicity of media in shaping public perception. These themes remain disturbingly relevant in contemporary political discourse, proving King's enduring significance as a cultural commentator.

*Future research* could explore how the novel compares with other Cold War-era dystopian fiction and examine how King's narrative anticipates contemporary debates about surveillance, misinformation, and populism.

**List of references:**

1. King, S. (1979). *The Dead Zone*. Viking Press.
2. Magistrale, T. (2003). *Stephen King: America's Storyteller*. Praeger.
3. Collings, M. R. (1985). *The Many Facets of Stephen King*. Starmont House.
4. Alexander, L. (1984). "Fate, Free Will, and the Burden of Knowledge in *The Dead Zone*." *Journal of Popular Literature*, 12(3), 29-42.
5. Mamatqulov, B. (2021). "Amerika adabiyotida siyosiy obrazlar: Stiven King ijodiga nazar." *O'zbek adabiyoti va madaniyati*, 5(1), 23–30.
6. Yusupova, N. (2022). "XX asr Amerikan adabiyotida ijtimoiy muammolar aks ettirishi." *Filologiya masalalari*, 3(2), 45–52.
7. Karimova, G. (2020). "Fantastik asarlar va real ijtimoiy muammolar: Stiven King asarlarining o'zbekcha talqini." *Til va Adabiyot*, 4(3), 75–84.
8. Sadullaeva, N., & Bakhtiyorova, M. (2021). Reflection of Onomastic Principles in Naming. *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, 3001- 3007.
9. Бахтиёрлова, М. (2024). Atoqli otlarning umumnazariy muammolari. *Зарубежная лингвистика и лингводидактика*, 2(6), 40-45.
10. Ismoilov, A., & Bakhtiyorova, M. (2024). THE PROBLEM OF COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS OF MEANING IN PRESENT DAY LEXICOLOGY. *Current approaches and new research in modern sciences*, 3(7), 26-29.
11. Alisher o'g'li, I. A., & Bakhtiyorovna, B. M. (2024, May). THE PROBLEM OF COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS OF MEANING IN PRESENT DAY LEXICOLOGY. In *Konferensiyalar| Conferences* (Vol. 1, No. 10, pp. 748-752).
12. BAKHTIYOROVA, M. (2024). ONOMASTIK KONSEPT TUSHUNCHASI. *UzMU xabarlari*, 1(1.4), 288-292.

13. Камолова, Р. Ш., & Бахтиярова, М. (2024). ЭМОЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ КОННОТАЦИИ ПРИЛАГАТЕЛЬНЫХ, ОПИСЫВАЮЩИХ ПОГОДУ. ТА'ЛИМ VA RIVOJLANISH TAHLILI ONLAYN ILMIY JURNALI, 4(1), 30-33.
14. Baxtiyorova, M. (2023). ONOMASTIKONLARNING LINGVOMADANIY XUSUSIYATLARI. Namangan davlat universiteti Ilmiy axborotnomasi, (9), 464-469.
15. Baxtiyorovna, B. M. (2023). INGLIZ VA O 'ZBEK BADIY ADABIYOTIDA ONOMASTIKONLARNING CHOG'ISHTIRMA SEMANTIK TAHLILI. "GERMANY" MODERN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH: ACHIEVEMENTS, INNOVATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS, 9(1).
16. Baxtiyorova, M. (2023). INGLIZ VA O'ZBEK BADIY ADABIYOTIDA ASAR QAHRAMONLARI NOMLARINING MATN "JOURNAL OF SCIENCE-INNOVATIVE RESEARCH IN UZBEKISTAN" JURNALI VOLUME 3, ISSUE 01, 2025. YANUARY ResearchBib Impact Factor: 9.654/2024 ISSN 2992-8869 221 YARATISHDAGI ISHTIROKI. Namangan davlat universiteti Ilmiy axborotnomasi, (10), 268-273.
17. Bakhtiyorovna, B. M. (2022). Discursive-pragmatic nature of anthroponyms. Asian Journal Of Multidimensional Research, 11(9), 110-114.
18. Bakhtiyarova, M. B. (2021). VERBALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT" ONIM" IN LINGUOCOGNITOLOGY. Ростовский научный вестник, (3), 11- 12.
19. Baxtiyorova, M. B. (2020). ANTROPONIMLARNING SHAKLLANISHIDA MORFEMALARNING SEMANTIK VA USLUBIY XUSUSIYATLARI. Студенческий вестник, (36-3), 96-98.
20. Bakhtiyorova, M. (2019). THE EFFECT OF USING MNEMONICS. Студенческий вестник, (22-8), 63-65.
21. Pulatova, S., & Bakhtiyorova, M. (2019). THE STRUCTURALSEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE WORDS RELATED TO" SPORTS" IN PRESENT DAY ENGLISH. Студенческий вестник, (22-8), 69-71.
22. Bakhtiyorova, M., & Djumabayeva, J. (2017). WRITERS MAKE NATIONAL LITERATURE, WHILE TRANSLATORS MAKE UNIVERSAL LITERATURE. Студенческий вестник, (10), 55-56.
23. Bakhtiyorova, M., & Elmurodova, F. (2017). THE PRINCIPLES OF SEMANTICS. Студенческий вестник, (10), 52-54.

24. Bakhtiyorova, M., & Elmurodova, F. (2017). PAPERS IN ENGLISH. СТУДЕНЧЕСКИЙ ВЕСТНИК, 10, 52
25. Mamadiyorova Mariyam Kosim kizi, & Bakhtiyorova Maftuna Bakhtiyorovna. (2025). PRAGMATIC AND STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF NEOLOGISMS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCABULARY TEACHING. Journal of Universal Science Research, 3(1), 89–95. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14674390>  
<https://universalpublishings.com/index.php/jusr/article/view/9454>
26. Mamadiyorova , M. ., & Bakhtiyorova , M. . (2025). PRAGMATIC AND STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF NEOLOGISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH (BASED ON MEDIA MATERIALS) AND THEIR ROLE IN TEACHING VOCABULARY. Центральноеазиатский журнал междисциплинарных исследований и исследований в области управления, 2(1), 187–191. извлечено от <https://in-academy.uz/index.php/cajmrms/article/view/43009>
27. Mamadiyorova , M. ., & Bakhtiyorova , M. . (2025). PRAGMATIC AND STYLISTIC ASPECTS OF NEOLOGISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH (BASED ON MEDIA MATERIALS) AND THEIR ROLE IN TEACHING VOCABULARY. (2025). Journal of Science-Innovative Research in Uzbekistan, 3(1), 217-221. <https://universalpublishings.com/index.php/jsiru/article/view/9503>