

The Ultimate Suffering

Misery

Stephen King

Penguin Group Publishing

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Fictional Horror

By Jake

It can be challenging to find a well written horror story that's as convincing and real as author Stephen King's *Misery*. The novel follows the story of Paul Sheldon after he is found battered and broken due to a car crash in a snowstorm. Miraculously, Paul had been saved by his biggest fan, the mysterious Annie Wilkes. What appeared to be a miracle turned out to be an adventure into the psyche of Paul Sheldon and his tolerance for all different types of suffering. The most enticing part about reading this horror novel is the fact that it's relatively short but satisfyingly deep and entertaining. By eliminating a hundred pages worth of unnecessary background information, Stephen King can delve right into the story while reverting back to the right amount of details about the characters' pasts. I usually find myself jaded and uninterested when the actual "story inside the story" is only about 100 pages from the middle to the end of a book. However, there are also not many points in *Misery* when it feels like the author is using filler information. Paul is often thinking to himself about his predicament and while his mind can wonder from time to time, what he shares is vital to understand his personality and his views on his life.

The adventure begins with Paul drugged up on painkillers, drifting back and forth between small comas and dream-like states. During this time he realizes he is in the custody of Annie Wilkes, a lonely woman from Sidewinder, Colorado. Throughout a series of events, Paul comes to the realization that Annie is not mentally right. Paul is trapped due to a variety of factors such as the shattered bones in both his legs, no access to a phone and the desolate state of Annie's house. Out of options, Paul is forced, by Annie, to write another book in his bestselling series about the beloved character Misery Chastain, who Paul killed off in his last book. The title of Paul's series is *Misery* which is ironic considering that he came to hate the series over time. What seems like a feasible task turns into a nightmare due to the fact that Annie can identify all aspects of Paul's story that are physically impossible in Misery's world.

Conjuring up a passable story for Annie is the least of Paul's problems though. He learns that at the conclusion of his writing, Annie will end both of their suffering by killing Paul and then herself. Paul is clearly suffering physically and mentally from his imprisonment while Annie reveals that she suffers from the opinions of society. The people of Sidewinder see Annie as a murderer of infants, which turns out to be true, who escaped punishment using her underrated intelligence. Paul now has to face a decision: Will he be courageous and save himself or will he give in to Annie's demands and be "put out of his misery" later on? The real decision comes down to one question. Is a life of suffering worth living?

Stephen King is a bestselling author of many famous horror stories such as *Carrie* and *The Shining*. He has also written a few uplifting stories such as *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Stand by Me*. According to his parents, his inspiration for writing horror novels from witnessing the death of a friend via train accident, even though he says he currently has no recollection of the event. Many of his books have been adapted into movies and he has also won various awards such as the Bram Stoker Award, presented by the Horror Writing Association and International Author of the Year in 2005, decided by members of the National Book Awards Academy.

While *Misery* tells a great story with a well thought out plot, it does have some weaknesses. One such weakness occurs when King includes pages of Paul's manuscript he wrote for Annie. The reader can't even begin to understand who the characters are and what the plot is. Another weakness is King's propensity to have Paul conjure up allusions only he knows such as a specific African bird or pilings in the ocean. Since King doesn't give too much background on Paul's life before the accident, it is confusing as to why Paul envisions these things. Yet, *Misery* has an overwhelming number of strengths that make up for the weaknesses though such as the depth of the characters, the intensity of the plot and enthusiasm the reader has to turn the page.

I would highly recommend *Misery* for Blind Brook students due to its ability to draw the reader in from the start. The beginning makes the reader wonder how Paul is in his quandary and how it will affect him. Also, reading *Misery* would not take too much time out of a high school student's busy schedule due to its short length. This is just one of the many strengths, which far outweigh the weaknesses, causing the reader to walk away feeling satisfied.