

PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISOLATION IN STEPHEN KING'S UNDER THE DOME

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Abstract: Isolation, as a condition contrary to the inherent social nature of humans, presents a compelling area of exploration in both psychology and literature. The theme of isolation has been extensively employed in literary works, evolving in its portrayal over time. In earlier narratives, isolated individuals were often characterized negatively; however, more contemporary uses of the theme have shifted to serve broader purposes, such as facilitating character development. Human responses to isolation are highly varied, a dynamic vividly depicted in Stephen King's *Under the Dome*. In the novel, the inhabitants divide into two distinct groups: one guided by innate social instincts fostering cooperation, and the other driven by cold, self-serving logic aimed at maximizing personal gain.

Keywords: isolation, social instinct, Stephen King, American literature

POSTAWY LUDZI WOBEC IZOLACJI W *POD KOPUŁĄ* STEPHENA KINGA

Abstrakt: Izolacja, jako stan sprzeczny ze społeczną naturą człowieka, stanowi fascynujący obszar badań zarówno w psychologii, jak i literaturze. Temat izolacji jest szeroko wykorzystywany w dziełach literackich, a jego wyzyskanie znacząco ewoluowało na przestrzeni czasu. We wcześniejszych narracjach odizolowane jednostki były często charakteryzowane negatywnie; jednak bardziej współczesne przedstawienia tego tematu zmieniły się tak, by ukazywać rozwój postaci. Reakcje ludzi na izolację są bardzo zróżnicowane, a dynamika ta została żywo przedstawiona w dziele *Pod kopułą* Stephena Kinga. W tej powieści mieszkańcy dzielą się na dwie odrębne grupy: jedną kierują wrodzone instynkty społeczne, sprzyjające współpracy, a drugą zimna, samolubna logika mająca na celu maksymalizację osobistych korzyści.

Słowa kluczowe: izolacja, instynkt społeczny, Stephen King, literatura amerykańska

Isolation is broadly understood as a state of being separated from others, applicable to humans, animals or other entities. The American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology, defines social isolation as: "voluntary or involuntary

absence of contact with others.”¹ The phenomenon of isolation contrasts with the social nature of human beings, since according to Aristotle, “A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature” (Aristotle 1999: 6) meaning that people are innately prepared to live in organised groups.

Considering humans' social nature, “Isolation is the most intense stress that humans can endure.” (Beak 2014: 143) Cooperation and collective unity confer a significant advantage to groups over individuals living alone. According to Yousef: “Aloneness and isolation negatively inflect and ultimately subvert the idea of self-sufficiency.” (Yousef 2004: 193) In the modern world, people want independence and prioritise self-sufficiency, but in fact, they need other people around to survive and remain healthy. In the words of Aristotle, a person who can live in constant isolation “must be either a beast or a god.” (Aristotle 1999: 6)

“Isolation is an abnormal psychopathology to humans. Isolation is not a pathological symptom but isolation is a phenomenon of pathological factor or situation.” (Beak 2014: 147) During the time a person spends in isolation, possible changes in behaviour may occur. Quoting the definition from the APA once again: “Social isolation often produces abnormal behavioural and physiological changes in both humans and nonhuman animals” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Possible changes are hard to predict as each organism reacts differently to anomalous situations. Isolation from the rest is dangerous because it sometimes leads to the intensification of one’s bad characteristics and further inability to conform to societal rules.

Since people, by nature, are meant to be social creatures, isolation is considered to be the toughest punishment that a human being can suffer. Such a form of punishment is widely used in prison where a person is put in solitary confinement to be entirely separated from the rest of the prisoners. In their article, Sarah Vogel and Stephen Braren state that: “solitary confinement weaponizes the negative effects of social isolation for the specific purpose of punishing a person.”² The fact which adds seriousness to the case of isolation as a form of punishment is stressed by the fact that: “the psychological effects of solitary confinement are so severe, that the United Nations decided to consider solitary confinement for more than 15 days to be a form of torture.” (Vogel, *ibidem*).

The paradox of isolation lies in the human need for privacy, juxtaposed with the equally essential reliance on social connections and interdependence. Humans have always lived in groups, and from the beginning, joining together was the primary way to survive. Isolation provokes many discussions in psychology, philosophy, and literature,

¹ APA Dictionary of Psychology, s.v. „social isolation”; <https://dictionary.apa.org/social-isolation>. [accessed 12.11.2024]

² S.Vogel, Stephen B., *Social Isolation as Punishment: A Call to End Solitary Confinement*, Ali Bennett, Rose Perry (ed.), May 20, 2022, <https://www.thesocialcreatures.org/thecreaturetimes/solitary-confinement>

its theme is broadly used for various reasons. In the article for The Millions, Ed Simon states that isolation is one of the fundamental themes of literature, the kiln of experience whereby a human can discover certain aspects of character, personality, and existence through journeying to the centre of their being (though results are certainly varied).³ Isolated characters have a chance to develop, look into their soul and understand their nature. Being alone prompts people to think deeply about their lives and values; it also gives them a chance to discover the truth about who they are.

The image of isolation changed throughout the years but was present in literature from the very beginning. Isolation, in both literature and real life, may affect people in many different ways. In the early literature, isolated ones were usually associated with bad characteristics, as in *Beowulf*, where the monster Grendel who was separated from society is treated as an incarnation of evil. Another novel mostly connected with the theme of isolation is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which both Frankenstein and his monster experience different kinds of isolation. While the monster is excluded from society because of its looks, Frankenstein decides to separate himself from the rest. In both cases, isolation results in tragedies. If Frankenstein was not alone, he would have been stopped by people, and the monster would never have come into existence. If the monster was not left by its creator, it would have a chance to socialize. Isolation in literature can be presented positively; for some characters spending time alone is desirable. According to Yousef, they are: "longing for safety in isolation - the imagination of privacy as a secure refuge for the self." (Yousef 2004: 195)

This article focuses on the novel titled *Under the Dome* written by Stephen King, in which isolation arises through the appearance of a dome of unknown origin. The inhabitants of the town called Chester's Mill are trapped and isolated from the rest of the world. The events occurring in the novel make people divide into two groups, guided by different values. One group of people believes that the key to surviving the crisis is unity and trust. They put the well-being of all inhabitants above the good of an individual. Their leading force is a human social instinct and empathy. Those individuals demonstrate a willingness to risk their lives, prioritising the collective well-being of the entire community over their personal safety. They operate as a cohesive group, valuing each member and considering all perspectives as equally significant. Together, they strive to overcome challenges and collaboratively seek solutions to resolve the crisis.

Another group operates solely based on cold logic and strategic calculations, driven primarily by a desire to maximise personal advantages from the situation. This approach reflects a utilitarian perspective, where decisions are evaluated predominantly through the lens of potential gains and losses. The leader of this group, James "Big Jim" Rennie is deprived of empathy and emotions; he puts his good above the

³ E. Simon, *On Isolation and Literature*, 2020. <https://themillions.com/2020/04/on-isolation-and-literature.html>

others simultaneously treating them as objects. He does not hesitate to eliminate them when they oppose him in any way. Since people on this side are focused only on their good, they see following Rennie as the most beneficial option. They are also aware that opposing him will cause unpleasant consequences and, in the worst case, their death.

In his novel, King emphasises a critical moral and social dichotomy: people deprived of empathy, driven by selfishness and focused on personal gain are meant to eventually face failure. By contrast, those demonstrating the capacity for cooperation and empathy, those who refuse to show indifference to the suffering of others, are portrayed as more capable of survival. A critical factor in fostering resilience and cohesion within a community is the trust individuals put in one another. This trust serves as the foundation for collective unity, ensuring that neither divergent actions nor differing opinions create divisions. On the contrary, individuals who lack empathy and base their actions solely on cold logic are ultimately destined to fail. This failure stems from their inability to foster meaningful connections or build the trust and cooperation necessary for survival.

It is important to note that *Under the Dome* was not meant to serve as a critic of logical thinking. What exactly leads people to fail is the deprivation of higher emotions and empathy. King as an author is often described as “overtly concerned with questions of political and personal ethics” (Smith 2002: 340) and his novel *Under the Dome* carries a strong moral message. It condemns following cold, self-serving logic and shows unity as a way of survival. A theme used frequently by King is: “(...) that of the flawed individual who experiences several hardships, and who as a result develops into a more informed, enlightened, and ethically responsible person.” (*Ibidem*: 341) Such characters are also present in *Under the Dome*. After the crisis of the dome, the inhabitants who manage to survive understand that unity and trust are, in most cases, a way to bear the difficulties of reality.

“It’s a small town, son, and we all support the team.” Those lyrics from James McMurtry’s country song are repeated frequently throughout Stephen King’s novel *Under the Dome*. The action takes place in a small town called Chester’s Mill, where people know each other’s habits, personalities, stories and capabilities. This knowledge is to be tested by the appearance of a dome of unknown origin which traps the inhabitants of Chester’s Mill within the town’s borders. Considering the intricacies of human psychology, the prediction of possible human reactions is, in this case, not feasible, as each organism responds differently to isolation and various crises. The unusual appearance of the dome surrounding the town of Chester’s Mill made people divide into two groups. This chapter is focused on the group of people trying to unite, survive and possibly take action to shorten their time under the dome.

This group of people was characterised by Miller in the following way: “(...) characters who acknowledge their weaknesses and trust their inner hunches, the ones innate in promoting the welfare of mankind, are those who acquire the power to fight

evil.” (Miller 2007: 19) The informal leader of this group appears to be Dale “Barbie” Barbara, an ex-soldier designated by the president and the US government to take the lead during the crisis. From the beginning, Barbie knows that taking power out of the hands of the town’s Selectmen will not be an easy task. With time, collaborating with Dale Barbara becomes a crime for which serious consequences can be faced. Being a stranger in a city where people are familiar with one another is an obstacle to gaining their trust, but when some individuals start to realise that political representatives are acting only for their good, they become more sympathetic toward Barbie. When he gets arrested after being framed by the town’s Second Selectman, James “Big Jim” Rennie, for four violent murders, his supporters are still trying to follow what he advised them.

“Barbara served in Iraq, where he was awarded the Bronze Star, a Merit Service medal, and two Purple Hearts.” (King 2010: 268) Being the only person inside the town having connections in the US Army and government, he was quickly “recalled to duty and promoted.” (*Ibidem*) His experience proved helpful on more than one occasion, for instance, when he helped Piper Libby with her dislocated shoulder or found a way to calm people during the riot in the local grocery store Food City. Barbara’s experience coming from the war in Iraq provides him with a rather unclear past. A memory of “(...) a gymnasium in Fallujah and a weeping Iraqi man, naked save for his unravelling keffiyeh” (*Ibidem*: 185) suggests that Barbara’s actions were not always morally right, and in some cases, he was the one evoking suffering. According to Watkins, the fact that not all the events from his past were presented to the reader is “making him as mysterious as the dome.” (Watkins 2015: 36) According to Miller, “Barbie’s ability to take his memories of Fallujah and acknowledge his weaknesses provides him with the ability to fight on the side of good.” (Miller 2007: 19) Although the sides of “good” and “bad” are hard to define since the understanding of those concepts often depends on cultural, societal, and personal values, making them fluid and open to interpretation.

During his stay in Chester’s Mill, Dale Barbara is working in a bar called Sweetbriar Rose. At the moment of the dome’s appearance, he is on his way to leave the town. From the beginning, he knows that he found himself in a rather unpleasant situation caused mainly by getting into a fight with Junior Rennie and his friends. These circumstances made him an enemy to Jim Rennie, who was the one to exercise power in the city. Although he appeared amicable in his role as a cook, the events that transpired led him to recognize that his presence would no longer be welcomed. Barbara knows that it is almost certain that Jim Rennie would try to eliminate him. He reveals his suspicions in the conversation with Brenda Perkins: “Rennie has something to cover up, he needs a scapegoat, and the new Police Chief is in his pocket. The stars are in alignment.” (King 2010: 457) He presumes that his presence in Chester’s Mill is inconvenient for Big Jim and that he will start to look for a way to eliminate him and destroy his reputation. Barbie wants his friends to be prepared for any circumstances, and he does not want to lose

their trust. He is aware that if they divide, there will be no strong opposition to Rennie and his followers.

At first, the only sides in the situation that arose in Chester's Mill are those on the inside and outside of the dome. This natural understanding of the situation is visible in the conversation between James Rennie and Julia Shumway: "Julia turned her own smile on him, the eyes above it as innocent and enquiring as a child's. 'Are there sides, James? Other than over there' – she pointed at the soldiers – 'and in here.'" (King 2010: 222) People do not realise yet that they will soon divide, and choosing the right side will be a necessity. Many of them find this division surprising: "'Sides?' Rusty sounded honestly bewildered. 'What are you talking about, sides? This isn't a goddamn football game' Junior smiled as if he knew a secret." (p. 526) A human social instinct suggests people unite and together find a solution which will be beneficial for all, so hearing that there is a division makes them both surprised and confused.

Dale Barbara surrounded himself with people whose attitude towards Jim Rennie was rather unfavourable. One of them was Julia Shumway, a journalist and, at the same time, owner of the town's newspaper "Democrat". Despite the newspaper's name Julia is known to be "Republican to the core." (p. 31) She demonstrated complete dedication to her profession as a journalist, prioritizing the dissemination of timely and accurate information as her primary responsibility. In the eyes of Jim Rennie, Julia quickly becomes a person who might threaten his plans. Not only because she would be uncontrollably revealing his actions and plans to the city's inhabitants but also by collaborating with Barbie. Shumway has a really strong personality and does not let anyone or anything break her fighting spirit. She is not scared of arguing with the city officials or police officers, who are rather not benevolent towards her, even when her house, which at the same time served as a "Democrat" office, was burned down by Jim Rennie's subordinates. She was fighting the gossip that it was Barbie's friends who set the fire; she said: "I was on his side, which means the newspaper was on his side. He knew that." (p. 633) Julia did not believe that it was Barbie's associates because she was one of them. She immediately knew that it was another action taken by Big Jim to discredit Dale, make his supporters lose trust in him, and divide society even more.

On the day of the dome's appearance, the government blocked outgoing calls from Chester's Mill to prevent panic and the spreading of fake news. Colonel James Cox is the only person outside the dome who is in telephone contact with people inside. He regularly updates Dale Barbara, through the phone of Julia Shumway, about actions the government takes to destroy the free town. Cox also tries to call and convince Jim Rennie to cooperate, but not surprisingly, his efforts fail. Barbie believes that the right thing is to constantly inform people about what is happening inside and outside the dome. Despite knowing that Big Jim is not going to let Barbara take the lead, he still meets with him and tries to convince him to do what is right. He suspects that this will make their relationship more complicated, and James's reluctance toward him will only deepen,

but he wants to show respect for the official power in town. Barbara also knows that people in crisis need strong leadership and that Rennie, as a widely known person and longtime city official, can provide such. Unfortunately, from the beginning, Big Jim wants to use his position for different, selfish reasons, and the presence of Barbie would only make it harder for him to achieve his goals: And Barbara. Big Jim's fondest wish was that he could whistle up Peter Randolph and have Colonel Fry Cook slammed into a cell. Tell him he could run his gosh-darned martial law command from the basement of the cop shop. (p. 270) In Rennie's opinion, all the actions he takes are working for the good of the town and its inhabitants. He also believes that: "(...) it was God's will that he take this town and carry it through the weeks, months and years ahead." (p. 711)

The appearance of the dome caused many accidents on both of its sides. Unfortunately, the only qualified doctor in Chester's Mill died after "outliving his last patient by exactly thirty-four minutes" (p. 238) and performing an unsuccessful surgery on a boy who tried to shoot a hole in the dome. Dr Haskell leaves the medical assistant Eric "Rusty" Everett in charge of the hospital and its patients, but this new big responsibility is not the only problem. Eric soon discovers that hospital propane tanks are gone. On his way to find the missing tanks, Rusty meets Dale Barbara in the Town Hall. Barbie was instructed by Colonel Cox to find a Geiger counter and look for the possible source of radiation powering the dome. After a concise exchange of thoughts, they find common ground based on their shared antipathy and distrust for Jim Rennie. Although they do not know each other well, their instinct is telling them to unite because together they can do more good for the community.

Another significant figure aligned with Barbie is Joe McQatchey, a socially conscious teenager deeply invested in the welfare of his community. Motivated by his belief that the dome is a government experiment, McQatchey takes a decisive stand by organizing a protest to challenge its existence and raise awareness of its potential implications. Despite his young age, he aspires to become the president of the United States one day. Barbie soon understands Joe's potential and decides to give him a task, which many would consider impossible. With the help of his friends (Norrie Calvert and Benny Drake) and the Geiger counter, he is tasked with finding the dome's source. The fact that the most important task is given to very young people suggests that, on Barbie's side, everyone is equally important and responsible, and all ideas and opinions are valued. The range of people surrounding Barbie and working for the good of the city's inhabitants is vast. Journalists, some police officers, medical personnel, and even teenagers unite for the good of the rest of the people. As previously mentioned, their guiding principle is rooted in fundamental human social instincts, rather than relying on cold, self-serving logic and meticulous calculations.

The turning point of the novel is the arrest of Dale Barbara. At that point, he already had a lot of associates and people who would never believe he was guilty of what he was accused of. Unfortunately, as the arrest happened at the hospital in front

of many people, who only knew him as a cook, his reputation suffered a serious downfall. From the beginning, Barbara suspected that Big Jim would find a way to eliminate him. He was also acutely aware that any wrong move would result in his demise. When Barbie was already in prison, the most important thing for him was to assure his friends that he was not guilty. The only thing that would give him an alibi was the examination of bodies. He shouted to one of the police officers, the wife of his friend Rusty, Mrs Everett: “Tell your husband to examine the bodies! Mrs Perkins in particular! Ma’am, he must examine the bodies! They won’t be at the hospital! Rennie won’t allow them to.” (p. 534) Dale does not want to lose his friend’s trust; because he knows that the possible division would end in Jim Rennie’s victory.

The arrest of Dale Barbara generated a lot of controversies. People close to him immediately took detention as Jim Rennie’s deliberate action to discredit his opposition. Another fraction of the city’s inhabitants were shocked and, as a result, distanced themselves from the people who showed support for Barbie. The most difficult situation occurred between Linda and Rusty Everett. Linda was shocked because, as a police officer, she was able to see the crime scene and was even more surprised that her husband was still supporting Barbie. On the contrary, Rusty could not believe that his wife did not see that Jim Rennie’s actions, including the arrest, were arranged to eliminate his opposition. He ends their conversation by saying: “Just think about this, Lin. And think about who Peter Randolph works for.” (p. 527) The two soon begin to regret getting into an argument and Linda finally decides to take Barbie’s side, although her actions are still cautious and reserved.

After finding the source of the dome, a group of Barbara’s friends avoid telling anyone about their discovery. They are afraid that Jim Rennie would do anything to protect the generator and make the dome stay as long as it would benefit him. That provokes them to move to the abandoned farm, where the generator was found, to protect themselves as well as the device for as long as they find a way to turn it off. Being together makes them stronger, and staying close to each other gives them an advantage over Rennie. They hope that they will not attract too much attention and that they will have time to work peacefully on turning off the generator.

Throughout the story, Barbara and his friends face several difficulties accompanied by Big Jim’s attempts to divide them. Nevertheless, they can trust each other and share information and opinions within their group freely and without fear. Even if those people treat Dale Barbara as their leader, the relationships between them are similar to those between partners rather than the boss and his subordinates. They are treated as equally valid regardless of their age, gender, and position. All critical decisions are reached through dialogue and the exchange of ideas and perspectives. Their reliance on innate social instincts fosters collaboration and mutual support, enabling them to endure and navigate the crisis brought about by the dome.

The main antagonist and the undisputed leader of the rest of the people is James "Big Jim" Rennie. He is the Second Selectman of Chester's Mill and a local used-car dealer. He is deeply Christian, he often repeats that everything he does is God's will, but his prayers are more similar to a series of demands than an actual search for help and inspiration from a higher force. He sees the presence of the dome as a chance to strengthen the power he has over the city and its inhabitants. Unlike Dale Barbara, Jim Rennie is unable to acknowledge his weaknesses, and his actions are always focused on his benefits. In Miller's opinion: "Big Jim's denial of his own culpability in creating the disastrous situation in Chester's Mill is directly linked to his death, alone, in the fallout shelter" (Miller 2015: 19). As a businessman, Rennie is consistently calculating; his decisions are always careful and the actions he takes are to make people believe that his priority is their good. He treats the town as his private property: "Big Jim was too busy running what he called 'our business' by which he meant Chester's Mill." (p. 113) Andy Sanders, the First Selectman, thought that Rennie: "Ran it like his own, private railroad." (p. 113)

The appearance of the dome is accompanied by many accidents on both of its sides. On the first day, Duke Perkins, police chief, dies after the explosion of his pacemaker caused by physical contact with the dome. Duke was one of a few people in town who had evidence proving that Jim Rennie was guilty of many crimes and the last person inside who strongly opposed the Selectman. After his death, the role of police chief is taken by Peter Randolph, described by many as not very bright. Even one of his colleagues Jackie Wettington doubted that sharing any information with him would be beneficial: "The thought of taking this to that idiot Randolph... She didn't need to finish; the pallor of her cheeks was eloquent." (p. 664) Big Jim himself also doubted Randolph's abilities, as here: "As for Pete Randolph doing any sleuthing in the matter...the idea was a joke. Randolph was an idiot. 'But' Big Jim told the empty room in a lecturely tone, 'he's my idiot.'" (p. 400) Randolph's promotion to the position of police chief gave him a feeling of power, but he surely was not ready for such responsibility, which is why he still follows Jim Rennie's orders, even if he does not want to.

One of Rennie's first requests was the enlargement of the number of police officers in town. He required their support to suppress any potential opposition from the populace, yet he sought to portray this action as a measure undertaken to ensure the safety and well-being of the town's inhabitants. "Take a good look, pal - this is what incompetency, false hope, and too much information gets you. They're just unhappy and disappointed now, but when they get over that, they'll be mad. We're going to need more police." (p. 352) The new police officers are Junior Rennie, Carter Thibodeau, Frank DeLespe, Melvin Searles, and Georgia Roux. They all had their troubles with the police before and giving them power does not seem to be right. With time the police force expands with more and more young people without any qualifications. "Give this a couple of days and it won't be a police force anymore, it'll be an army of teenagers."

(p. 664) Unfortunately, giving power to very young and irresponsible people causes a lot of problems as “no Chester’s Mill officers were reprimanded, thus allowing them to abuse citizens with impunity.” (Watkins 2015: 35)

A defining trait of individuals aligned with Rennie is their inability to establish mutual trust, coupled with a persistent tendency to undermine others in an effort to monopolize opportunities and advantages for themselves. They are all plagued by the thought that any wrong move may end in their elimination, which makes them carefully prepare their statements and actions. Big Jm himself treats people as objects and is ready to replace any of them without hesitation as soon as they stop following his orders. He does not care if people get hurt or die because of him; he puts people in direct danger just to achieve his goals. For example, when his close associate police chief Peter Randolph is put in a hazardous situation, he only says: “And if something should happen to Randolph...hadn’t he already decided that Carter would be a more than adequate replacement?” (King 2010: 948)

During the presence of the dome, Big Jm and his son Junior are involved in a few serious crimes. In the case of younger Rennie, two murders he committed were a result of his aggressive episodes caused by his yet undiscovered disease. His father, on the other hand, committed them for a specific purpose. One of Rennie’s victims was Lester Coggins, a priest and a shareholder in the meth-producing business. In his vision, Coggins sees that the appearance of the dome is a punishment for his and Jim Rennie’s sins. For him, the only way to save the town is to confess their faults to the people. Unfortunately, this way of resolving the situation is not beneficial to Rennie. When Lester threatened to reveal the truth, Jm resolved to eliminate him, viewing his actions as a necessary measure to neutralize a potential threat to his plans. Another victim is Brenda Perkins, the wife of the previous police chief. She discovered a file on her husband’s computer with evidence of Jim Rennie’s methamphetamine business. She wants to blackmail Rennie, so he would retreat from his position and give power to people who care for other town inhabitants. She meets Big Jm on the riot day in front of the Food City grocery store; when she tells Rennie about the file and what she wants to achieve, he kills her with no remorse.

Both murders were carried out driven by the fear that the plan could be compromised or unravelled. Later the bodies of both Rennie’s victims prove to help stop Dale Barbara from taking over Chester’s Mill. When Jim already had victims, the only thing left was to frame the person who threatened his plans the most. Jm asks his son to look for something in Barbie’s room, which may act as evidence proving him guilty and help in framing Barbie and locking him in prison. When the bodies of the victims are officially discovered by the police, Barbie’s dog tags are found on the crime scene and serve as unequivocal evidence of his guilt.

James Rennie is also implicated in orchestrating various provocations designed to strengthen his image as the city’s protector while simultaneously undermining and

discrediting those who oppose him in any way. His biggest advantage over the opposition is the fact that he can easily manipulate public opinion. He surrounded himself with people who had weak personalities and low self-esteem. From the beginning, Big Jim's actions are selfish and focused only on his benefits. In his opinion, he is the only hope for the town and the only person with the ability to guide people through the crisis. "Fearful people need strong leaders, and if there's one thing Big Jim Rennie knows he can provide, it's strong leadership." (p. 438) The First Selectman Andy Sanders acts as a puppet in Rennie's hands. After losing his wife in the plane crash on Dome Day, he sees Big Jim as his only support and is willing to do anything Rennie asks for. In the words of his opposition: "Our Mr Rennie has surrounded himself with dullards." (p. 349) As it was said before, Big Jim surrounded himself with people with weak personalities, eager to execute his commands. Most people were following him not because they thought it was the right thing to do but because they were mostly scared of what might happen to them if they were not. They see Jim's attitude to the people who try to interfere with his plans and from their point of view, being humble and executing orders appears to be the most beneficial behaviour.

One of James Rennie's provocations was organising a riot outside the Food City grocery store. He knows that such a threatening situation is going to make people look for a protector who would grant them safety. Rennie orders Pete Randolph to deliver a message to the store manager Jack Cale that the store should be closed until further notice. Cale argues that there is no need to do that because the shelves are still full and that an unexpected closing would cause mass hysteria. He eventually surrenders under pressure posed by police chief Randolph. Big Jim also decides to send newly recruited police officers there, then asks his son to find Sam Verdreaux, Randall and Richie Killian and offer them payment in exchange for attacking the officers and starting a riot. Rennie's opposition does not doubt that it was a carefully planned action: "He set up that damned food riot the way a terrorist would plant a bomb." (p. 752)

Junior Rennie, the only son of Jim Rennie, was suffering from a yet undiscovered brain tumour. Throughout the time under the dome, his condition gets more and more serious. During his aggressive episode, he killed two young girls. One day he is found in front of McCain's house, a place where the bodies of his and his father's victims were found; he is then hospitalised in Cathy Russles's hospital. During a visit, his father thought that he should kill his son, as it would be beneficial for the case. Although Junior helped his father on multiple occasions, his sickness made him dangerous as he might reveal a secret of who was responsible for the murders under the dome: "In some ways, Big Jim knew, it would be better if Junior died." (p. 799) The cold, logical thinking and the fact that James is devoid of higher feelings make the thought of killing his son appear in his mind as the most beneficial option.

When Junior is unable to serve as his father's right hand, this place is taken by his friend Carter Thibodeau. Jim liked that boy because he saw him as a person who

would blindly follow his orders without asking too many questions. Carter was impressed with the figure of James Rennie and how he handles the management of Chester's Mill: "I love to watch you operate, Mr Rennie." Big Jim grinned – a great big sunny one that lit his whole face." (p. 910) The fact of having the power to influence young people and inspire them to serve him is the thing that gives him confidence and a belief that people actually need him.

The dome's presence is an unexplainable phenomenon, and the government keeps people from approaching it. Since people from the outside are not allowed to come near the dome, the government decided to organise Visitors Day, during which people will be allowed to see their trapped friends and families. Big Jim decides that it would be a great occasion to organise a town meeting on the same day. He carefully prepares his speech in which one of the points is the case of Dale Barbara and his possible execution. James's goal was to make himself look like a protector and a person who could guide people towards survival. He also wants to use the time people will spend near the dome with their families to take over the methamphetamine laboratory and destroy it.

Unlike Dale Barbara, Rennie does not show any signs of respect for the official law and higher political power. Here he talks about the president, who gave Dale Barbara an order to take over the power inside the dome: "Big Jim hadn't voted for him, and at this moment, had he teleported into existence in front of him, Rennie felt he could cheerfully have strangled him." (p. 270) In his understanding, for as long as the dome stays, he is the only political power and people should listen only to him. Colonel James Cox is in telephone contact with Selectman Rennie, and he blackmails him because the government already has all the evidence allowing them to imprison him. This situation makes James decide to destroy any proof of his guilt inside the dome, not taking into consideration that it may put Chester's Mill inhabitants in great danger.

In conclusion, this article presented two people's attitudes towards isolation in Stephen King's novel *Under the Dome*. In his novel, King shows that following intuition and unity has an advantage over selfishness and logical, emotionless understanding of a situation, especially when the case itself is irrational. People of Chester's Mill who are placed in an abnormal and unexpected situation react differently and divide into two groups. One group of people believes that unity is going to lead them through the crisis of the dome. The rest of the town's inhabitants focus on gaining profits for themselves; putting their own good above the survival of the rest.

Logical thinking is not entirely criticised in *Under the Dome*. The novel shows that humans should trust their social instincts and not let cold, emotionless thinking be their guiding force. People on both sides have to think about their actions, but they should not be blinded by greed for power and other benefits. Despite the significant loss of life during the crisis, a substantial portion of those who chose to unite and work collaboratively succeeded in surviving, whereas individuals who prioritized only their self-

interest ultimately failed. Instead of following human social instincts, they start to calculate possible benefits the dome can bring them. They abandon their intuition to follow greed for power and the possibility of other benefits. Those actions, in consequence, lead them to inevitable failure and result, in most cases, in their death.

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