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Too Much Passion for Children

“The Passion of Alicia” is an article written by Stephen King in response to the release of *The Passion of the Christ* movie. Originally published on March 19, 2004, in *Entertainment Weekly*, the article articulates his feelings about the movie and rehashes the experience he had in the theater with Alicia. King begins his article with the events leading up to him watching the movie, and he also incorporates a review of the movie for the audience that is looking for one. He then describes his experience with Alicia, the little girl who at first covered her eyes during the movie, but after so long simply stopped and watched the violence. It then becomes clear that King’s purpose is to persuade his target audience of pop culture fans and parents who take their children to watch disturbing films that children should not watch violence that can have a lasting effect. Stephen King effectively reaches his audience and explains to them that children should not be exposed to violence that may skew the vision of such an influential person as Christ. He does this by organizing his article purposely and precisely, by using pathos through Alicia to make the article personal for readers, and by including tone and language that is blunt, informal, and serious to convey his opinion to readers.

King’s organizational strategy is highly efficient for his article. He starts out with a blurb about pop culture and his writing idea. However, he does not forget to include a line about the subject of the article, Alicia. He then continues to an account of his experience at the movies which develops into a review of *The Passion*. It is not until over half way through the article that

King finally introduces us to Alicia. He says the following in the midst of his review, “And his enthusiasm—or religious fervor—for the task takes him again and again into a world of hyper-violence: Sam Peckinpah does Good Friday. Which brings us, finally, to the sweet little girl of this column. To Alicia” (King 1). He writes it this way so that it comes out of nowhere. Readers only wanting a review find this and feel compelled to finish because of the reference to Alicia in the beginning of the article. King chose this strategy because he has two different target audiences. One is the audience that is reading *Entertainment Weekly* to solely get information about the newest hits in pop culture. The second is on a more complex level and are the parents who would take their children to see a violent film (even one meant to be religious). In order to appease his first audience, King opens with his experience at the theater and a review of the movie. However, he does not forget to add a line about Alicia in the beginning of the article.

King also includes foreshadowing when he states, “The folks I talked to didn’t seem concerned about the movie’s purported level of violence” (1). The reader can guess that the article will relate to the violence in the film because of this line. By mentioning that people were not concerned with the violence, it implies that it will become an issue towards the end of the article. The information for his second audience follows all other information. The reason for this is because most of the parents who take their children to such movies are religious and they are almost guaranteed to read the article from start to finish. However, King’s first audience might not be so inclined to finish the article, which is why he includes, “That was before I met—sort of—Alicia. But before I explain” (1). By placing the explanation at the end of the article King guarantees that not only will readers get what they expected with a review of the movie, but they will also read what he wanted them to. When he mentions Alicia in the beginning, it sparks readers’ interests and they want to know who she is so they will not stop reading until they find

out. The simple act of writing one sentence about Alicia in the beginning guarantees that King's article will be fully read by all.

At the end of the article King makes a prediction about the effect *The Passion* will have on Alicia. He says that Alicia will have dreams about the movie for a long time and, "in those dreams there will likely be no redemption, no victory over sin, no scripture, no eternal life. I think in Alicia's dreams there will only be a skinless nightmare Christ with one eye swollen shut" (1). This is where he makes the main point of his article. King is in no way an advocate for children not watching any violence. He has made his fortune on the horror industry and movies made from his books are watched by many. In this article he however argues that violence is not for children. He changed his mind when he saw Alicia finally give in and watch the movie. King observed that "Alicia hid her face for 15 minutes...but that left another 50 minutes of punishment, torture, cruelty, and death still to go...50 minutes is a long time to hide your eyes when you're only 8. So after a while, you see, our sweet little girl stopped doing it" (1). Poor Alicia never really had the choice not to watch the movie like her mother thought. She had to watch the gruesome violence Christ endured for her. What King is arguing is that children should not watch violence that may change any vision they have of something meant to be perfect. He believes that for poor Alicia, who's "little body inside the blue dress was all angles, an exclamation mark of horror" (1), watching this movie has forever distorted the vision she had of Christ. When children think of Jesus they are supposed to think of the man that helped millions with a smile on his face. However, now she will only be able to picture Christ as sunken, beaten, and broken. King's purpose in writing this article is to warn parents not to let their children be let down as Alicia has been by witnessing the horrible acts of the crucifixion of Jesus.

King also uses blunt, informal, and serious tone and language to convey his opinions to the audience. He is blunt with readers because he wants to make sure they completely understand his intentions. For example, he wonders if Christians like popcorn with their crucifixion, "and absolutely nobody was giving anyone else hell for cutting the refreshment line. These are people who take hell seriously" (1). He says these statements that way not only because he can, but because he wants to be straight forward with his audience. By doing so he establishes an honest relationship with the reader so they know that whatever he writes he does not dilute but gives them the full effect of what he is thinking or feeling. King gets away with these blunt statements through humor. By jokingly expressing his opinions not only does he lighten the mood of an otherwise serious article, but he can write statements by which readers might usually be offended. King is informal throughout the article, like when he refers to "Janet Jackson's Super Bowl boob prize" (1), to be on a more personal level with the audience. He does not want it to seem like he is talking down to the audience. The article is supposed to be entertaining and if it was prim and proper many people would skip right over it. Although King uses humor in this article, his overall tone and language remain serious. This is because he is really trying to persuade people not to let their children watch *The Passion*. He is especially serious when he states the following about his feelings towards his experience, "And was I ashamed to be in that theater, even though the film Gibson has made is, if taken on its own artistic and religious terms, good—perhaps even great? I was. I feel that shame heating my skin even now, days later" (1). His observations of Alicia overshadow any other opinions about the movie he may have had before. After being in the theater with Alicia and feeling ashamed that she went through what she did, he wants to do all that he can to prevent it from happening to other children. If he were not serious, his argument would not be nearly as convincing.

Stephen King's article "The Passion of Alicia" is an argument for children not to watch violent movies that may alter the vision they have of someone as important as Christ. King addresses this issue by organizing his article in an exact manner, adding a personal touch by recounting his experience with Alicia, and using tone and language that is blunt, informal, and serious. This article is important for King because it caused someone who has made his fortune on the horror and violence industry and who has been an advocate for it change his opinion because of the effect it had on one little girl. If King was ashamed to be in the theater watching Alicia stare up at the screen it is obvious that this had an immense effect on him. His article provides first hand evidence that though *The Passion* may be a religious and educational film, it is not meant for the young. "The Passion of Alicia" is Stephen King's way of attempting to make a difference in children's lives by warning their parents not to let them watch violence that may change their vision of significant people and it is his sincere hope that they will listen.