

**Other worlds than this: Stephen King's *Dark Tower* gothic multiverse**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)

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Ames, Iowa

2014

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DEDICATION

To my parents. They let me discover the terror of redrum all on my own.

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## NOMENCLATURE

DM	<i>Danse Macabre</i>
DT	<i>The Dark Tower</i>
GS	<i>The Gunslinger</i>
SL	<i>'Salem's Lot</i>
SK	<i>Skeleton Crew</i>
SS	<i>The Song of Susannah</i>
WC	<i>Wolves of the Calla</i>
WG	<i>Wizard and Glass</i>
WL	<i>The Waste Lands</i>
Dark Tower	Holds the multiverse together
Gan	God of King's multiverse
Keystone Earth	Stephen King's, and possibly the reader's, version of Earth
Mid-World	Roland's world, a post-apocalyptic version of America
Twiner	Doppelganger
White	The force of good

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my committee chair, Matthew Sivils, and committee members, Dometa Brothers and Elanor Taylor for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. Their patience and insight have been indispensable.

I'd also like to thank my colleagues at Ames High for their patience and encouragement during this time with regards to Erin Miller for her proofreading and setting of deadlines. There was never a deadline that I missed or a comma that I failed to splice.

Last, but not least, a special thank you to my family, friends, and my dog Chewbacca Jones who waited patiently for me to escape the labyrinth of Parks Library. I left intact and mostly unharmed, and I'll see you all soon.

## ABSTRACT

The rise of multiverse cosmological models in the twentieth century birthed many texts, fictional or scientific, that navigated the potential of multiple universes. Stephen King's *Dark Tower* novels infuse gothic conventions with new possibilities and facets of meaning while simultaneously illuminating harsh narrative difficulties inherent to a multiverse.

A study of King's innovations required the use of literary criticism of King and the gothic, scientific journals and works on the multiverse, and psychological or philosophical studies of the human mind and its relationship to the cosmos. King evokes the uncanny through both a living, wounded multiverse and infinite doubling across infinite worlds. The growing cosmic landscape, unable to be confined by stable borders or cartography signifies gothic fiction's attempt to map unstable moral boundaries. The dark tower, an ambiguously symbolic focalization point, places the gothic castle in every universe. Each iteration of the tower bears symbolic weight, from the conflict between empiricism and faith the mistreatment of women. Lastly, King uses a multiverse to weave himself into the fabric and legacy of American fiction, citing Chambers, Lovecraft, and Poe.

The gothic dependence on a setting, e.g. haunted castles or landscapes, takes on new purpose in a multiverse. King's choice of a vast, infinite milieu for his magnum opus afforded him numerous opportunities to alter gothic convention. While the depths of a multiverse's narrative potential may never be fully plumbed, King's exploration of it indicates where future authors may travel.

## INTRODUCTION

**King's Epic**

“The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed” (GS 1). Thus begins Stephen King’s magnum opus, the *Dark Tower*. King began to write the series early in his career, inspired by the epic scope of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, the cinematic setting of Sergio Leone’s *The Man with No Name* trilogy, and the romanticism of Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (GS xiv-xv). Roland, the titular gunslinger, traverses a parallel, post-apocalyptic American landscape, with a culture combining Christianity, Arthurian legend, and western ethos. Drawing heroes from parallel Americas to aide in his quest, Roland battles a pastiche of gothic, pulp, and mythical villains, including King’s trickster figure, Randall Flagg. Roland seeks to save the tower, linchpin of reality, while the Crimson King works to destroy it and revel in the chaos that follows. Roland’s quest saves not only his world but every world that King’s characters inhabit.

The connections between the *Dark Tower* and King’s other works vary. At the simplest level, similarities of various characters, settings, or conflicts build intertextuality, such as the uncanny resemblance of *The Shining*’s Danny Torrance to Roland’s adopted son, Jake Chambers. In contrast, characters can travel across novels and decades to find their way into Mid-World, as damned priest Father Callahan did, first appearing in *Salem’s Lot* in 1975 and reappearing in *Wolves of the Calla* in 2003. Taking into account all of his homages and pop cultural appropriations, ranging from Harry Potter to Marvel Comics, the scope of Mid-World expands ever larger, drawing on the vast genre universe of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The sheer length of the *Dark Tower* and its related works makes the story, even to hardcore King readers, difficult to approach. Despite King's commercial success and appeal, the *Dark Tower* has failed to receive the same readership of *It*, *The Stand*, or *The Shining*. The series exists outside of King's perceived skillset, horror, and thus sparks less interest<sup>1</sup>. The *Dark Tower* seeks to meld various genres; something discussed in the following exchange from *Wolves of the Calla*, in which Roland and Eddie discuss different types of stories:

"In our world you got your mystery and suspense stories... your science fiction stories... your Westerns... your fairy tales. Get it?"

"Yes," Roland said. "Do people in your world always want only one story-flavor at a time? Only one taste in their mouths?"

"I guess that's close enough," Susannah said.

"Does no one eat stew?" Roland asked. (WC 40)

Justifying his decision to blend genres, King's *Dark Tower* stew contains fantasy, horror, gothic, and sci-fi elements with a postmodern sensibility. The multiverse setting upon which the series rests provides mixed results. King draws characters and settings from other works, whether or not he authored them, to build the vast landscape that he desired. The setting and genre-fusion came first for King; any implications for genre conventions were an afterthought, a consequence of his world building. King found himself having to address the tension between a multiverse setting and gothic tradition. The portrayal of certain gothic anxieties, including sexual normatives or belief in God, benefit from the ambiguity and uncertainty that comes from parallel worlds. King's

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<sup>1</sup> See "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption," *The Green Mile*, or *On Writing* for well received non-horror works.

multiverse adds new facets to these discussions, sometimes reinforcing tradition and sometimes challenging it. Despite that, a multiverse proves too unwieldy for King concerning other gothic traditions, including the archetypal battle between good and evil where King succumbs to gothic's custom of medieval, e.g. Arthurian, morality. While the *Dark Tower* adds some new approaches to various gothic concepts, the friction created by the inclusion of a multiverse setting proves to be too much for the latter half of the series, as King abandons his earlier gothic experimentations for more familiar ground. The multiverse proves far from familiar, however.

### **Other Worlds**

Physicists and philosophers have contemplated the possibility and machinations of a multiverse since the 1950s. A multiverse differs from a universe in that existence contains multiple or infinite variations of Earth, the solar system, and the universe. This can be portrayed as a simple binary Earth, i.e. Earth 1 and Earth 2, or by infinite Earths existing either across the vastness of infinity or layered like a cake, separated by dimensions or frequencies. There are various terms that comprise studies of the multiverse and the two most frequently used, possible worlds and parallel universes, are not equivalent. Possible worlds exist simultaneously until observed. Once observed, all quantum possibilities, whether two or thousands, collapse into one "true world." Brian Greene, theoretical physicist, describes a startling development to this concept:

The mathematics underlying quantum mechanics — or at least, one perspective on the math — suggests that *all* possible outcomes happen, each inhabiting its own separate universe. If a quantum calculation predicts that a particle might be here, or it might be there, then in one universe it *is* here, and in another it *is* there. And in each such universe, there's a copy of you

witnessing one or the other outcome, thinking — incorrectly — that your reality is the only reality....there's no such thing as a road untraveled. Yet each such road — each reality — is hidden from all others. (5-6; emphasis in original)

Quantum worlds, therefore, don't collapse into one reality but could become realized across a multiverse of parallel Earths, where each and every motion of particles is realized as truth. A quantum multiverse is only one construction of a multiverse among many others that exist. All concepts remain firmly theoretical, tempering the hopes of those who advance the immense ramifications that a multiverse would bring.

Mankind's understanding of the cosmos continues to grow through observation and exploration, and a multiverse stands to revolutionize the perception of Earth's place among the stars. The last upheaval placed the sun, not the Earth, at the center of the solar system. Exploring various cosmological models, physicist Paul Davies writes, "Ever since Copernicus demonstrated that the Earth does not lie at the centre of the universe, the principle of mediocrity has been the default assumption; indeed, it is normally referred to as simply "*the cosmological principle*" (Davies 727; emphasis in original). The default principle that sites the Earth around the sun in a galaxy among billions of other galaxies argues that man's existence, while unique to this solar system, could be a mediocre, simple fact of the universe. Other planets have been observed orbiting suns similar to Earth's, and it stands to reason they could support life as well. A multiverse contradicts the simplicity of the current cosmological model and inherently resists traditional empiricism. As George Ellis writes, "We study specific mountains, oceans, planets, stars, galaxies; but there are other mountains, oceans, planets, stars, galaxies with which they can be compared. In

the case of cosmology, because there is only one universe there is no chance of discovering other universes” (Ellis 12). Despite not fitting within current models or resisting empirical scientific methods, multiverses do have proponents beyond the physicists who argue on their behalf. Attempting to argue against the argument from evil, Jason Megill posits that a multiverse could help prove the existence of God. He writes:

God actualizes the best set of all possible universes. So, our universe, while not the best of all possible universes, is (or at least might be) in the best set of all possible universes, and so God was (or at least perhaps was) justified in creating it. There might be better possible universes than ours, and these universes might also be in the multiverse, but the fact that there are better universes than ours does not entail that God doesn't exist. (Megill 128)

This argument exists in various forms, but draws on the potential of parallel worlds and histories that a multiverse provides. Arguing for “net good” across a multiverse, Megill draws on the potential that a multiverse provides to philosophy. Regardless of scientific skepticism or philosophical promise, multiverses allow for creative depictions of life and reality in literature.

Physics and literature may at first seem odd companions, but in attempting to portray reality, authors will follow the predominate governing laws of their own reality. During the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century, Copernican cosmology and Newtonian physics ruled the discourse and thus became the default construction for literary realism (Baulch 56). Lamenting the limitations of empiricism on fiction, Baulch celebrates how multiverses and their proponents provide authors the means for “some of the most radical experiments with literary narrative since

the advent of Enlightenment science” (57). Prominent multiverse critic Marie-Laure Ryan best illustrates specifically what those experiments include:

For literary scholars, who do not really care whether many-worlds cosmology is the best explanation of quantum mechanics, the interest of the theory is wide-ranging: it provides a powerful way to dramatize the “what if” mode of thinking that makes us marvel at the major consequences of apparently insignificant events for our destinies...it offers new points of view on such fundamental questions as identity, ethical responsibility, and free will; it encourages questions regarding the nature of space and time; it rejuvenates the old theme of the double; and it creates narrative situations which would not be possible in a system of reality limited to one world.

(Ryan 668)

Ryan values the potential inherent in a cosmology that includes multiplicity, ambiguity, and instability. In so doing, multiverses share common traits and values with romanticism and gothic literature, traditions that refute the ability of empiricism to fully explain life. King employs a multiverse, in part, to enact just these questions and possibilities in the *Dark Tower*.

Multiverse cosmological models clearly drive King’s writing both throughout the *Dark Tower* and in other texts. Short works such as “The Reploids,” or *Ur* focus solely on multiverse travel while the *Dark Tower* creates a structure that all of King’s works orbit around. At *The Gunslinger*’s climax, Roland confronts the man in black. Drawing on the sublime terror of infinite size, Roland’s nemesis proposes that by walking across the desert Roland may have “[knocked] a billion billion worlds flying off into darkness, in a chain never to be completed. Size,

gunslinger...size...” (GS 223; emphasis in original). Visualizing universes of microscopic or vast scale, the man in black identifies the tower as the “nexus,” the “Godhead itself” (GS 223).

Roland’s quest journeys towards the tower and thusly knowledge of the cosmos and the multiverse. King’s knowledge of the machinations and potential of multiverses originate in his pop culture education, and like Ryan, he does not so much care how or if multiverses work but rather the potential behind them. King can move characters and settings across his various works and argue that his works exist in a multiverse, not as fiction, but as truth. This exercise in metafiction strongly challenges the various genre elements present throughout the *Dark Tower*, specifically gothic elements of uncanny landscapes, haunted castles or homes, and doubles. Although critics have tackled multiverse works and metafiction steadily throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the critical gap exists in examining how King’s setting both augments and surrenders to the gothic.

### **Previous Criticism**

King did not write the first multiverse work nor the first work to posit fictional worlds as possible worlds. The twentieth century witnessed a surge of multiversal literature, ranging from children’s books to alternate histories. The Pevensie children continued the tradition of Alice and Dorothy by leaving Earth for a fantasy world, be it Narnia, Wonderland, or Oz. Science fiction cult author, Philip K. Dick wrote about parallel Americas in his alternate history, *The Man in the High Castle*. Jorge Luis Borges wrote many short stories which merged the classical labyrinth with the notion of branching, parallel worlds, such as “The Tower of Babel,” or “The Garden of Many Forking Paths.” Pop culture, whether DC Comics or television’s “Fringe,” have also adopted the notion of a multiverse in order to tell their stories. The 2009 reboot of the *Star Trek* film series

depended on a branching, parallel universe, in order to appease older fans and attract new ones. Space, apparently, is not the final frontier. Like most science fiction or horror stories, these multiverse works often address various issues of economic, sexual, or other institutional and social inequities. The merit of these works, however limited, has been written about by critics, such as postcolonial readings of Dick<sup>2</sup>, or the structural symbolism of Borges<sup>3</sup>. Literary criticism of the *Dark Tower* pales in comparison, despite the healthy body of King criticism available.

King's body of work, in spite of his antagonistic relationship with academia, sees regular criticism. Popular topics include King's portrayal of small town America, *'Salem's Lot*, the breakdown of the nuclear family, *The Shining*, or America's unhealthy obsession with technology, specifically automobiles, *Christine*. Tony Magistrale, Heidi Strengell, and John Sears have all written insightfully about the gothic elements of King's works. Critical works do occasionally focus on the *Dark Tower*, including McAleer's 2009 collection of essays, but these are much more rare than criticism examining King's other works. Within the limited criticism of the *Dark Tower*, the multiverse aspect of the series fails to appear, despite its clear presence in King's consciousness at the *Dark Tower*'s inception. Reflecting on the horrific possibilities of a multiverse, King cites the story of the 1944 Ringling Brothers circus fire at Hartford, Connecticut. A victim of the fire, a girl of six, was never claimed despite a recognizable photograph being distributed through the area. King writes, "the fantasist begins to play with it as a child would, speculating about children from other dimensions, about doppelgangers, about God knows what....Let us have Little Miss Nobody,

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<sup>2</sup> "Authenticity, Ethnography, and Colonialism in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*" by Timothy H. Evans.

<sup>3</sup> "A labyrinth of symbols exploring 'The Garden of Forking Paths'" by Ethan Weed.

who perhaps slipped sideways through a crack in reality, only to be trampled to death in the rush from a burning circus tent” (DM 431-35). This anecdote, published within a year of *The Gunslinger*, identifies the multiverse as a fascination of King’s and an inspiration for the *Dark Tower*. Although King rarely writes specifically *about* his multiverse, many works of his take place within it. The relationship between work to work and world to world drives multiverse scholarship, not only of King’s but the multiverse in general.

Multiversal criticism, written by pioneers Ruth Ronen, Thomas Pavel, or Marie-Laure Ryan, focuses typically on ontological and/or semiotic relationships between the real world and the millions of fictional worlds that authors and poets have created over millennia. At times the criticism focuses on authorial intent and innovation behind a multiverse setting, as seen in Dominic Moran’s study of Borges and Stapledon. Analyzing the social potential of multiverse narratives, Moran writes, “[Stapledon] wanted to write literature of unchecked imagination which might yet serve ethical and socio-political ends. The result was a deliberately detached, cosmopolitan but sweepingly ambitious form of science fiction... [exposing] the pettiness, destructiveness and ultimate futility of all religious and political dogmatism, nationalism, tribalism, racism, [etc.]” (Moran 934). Stapledon, like Borges, uses the sublime scale of a multiverse to dwarf human conflict, both of them inspired by the destruction of both World Wars (933). King’s *Dark Tower* does provide interesting ontological possibilities, but the series exists to enact the same means of Borges, Stapledon, or Dick — the investigation of social and cultural forces through a gothic lens.

The gothic qualities of the *Dark Tower* draw from the tradition of using scientific discoveries to examine social anxieties while simultaneously warning against possible dangers of science and empiricism. Shelley uses galvanism to create Frankenstein’s monster, allowing her to

examine the dangers of science run amok. Melville, among his many criticisms of empiricism, ridicules physiognomy in *Moby Dick*, questioning if science can ever fully explain man, beast, or anything. Wells taps into social darwinism in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, portraying fears of what separates man from beast. Science provides numerous opportunities for authors to create new ways of examining social anxieties, and King's use of a multiverse follows in this tradition. Across the eight novels that comprise the *Dark Tower*, King portrays numerous gothic fears writ large upon the multiverse: the fear of live entombment, a dead or absent God, and sexual abnormalities. Ultimately, the gothic multiverse King builds in the *Dark Tower* continues his career-long criticism of the military industrial complex and defends his belief in family as well as his belief in God. The gothic commentary begins with the structure of the cosmos.

## Chapters

What follows, then, is a critical analysis of gothic landscapes, structures, and monsters across a multiverse setting. The first chapter, "The Uncanny X-Worlds," identifies which variations of multiverse constructs King uses and how these three constructs affect the gothic, often uncanny elements present in the *Dark Tower*<sup>4</sup>. The first multiverse setting, a membrane, writes fears of bodily harm, e.g. illness, wounds, or death, upon the cosmos. Roland's quest works to heal the multiverse, saving humanity from existing within a rotting cosmic body. This fusion of gothic and multiverse continues King's criticism of the military industrial complex. Quilted multiverses, by contrast, realize and maintain Freud's uncanny, a verisimilitude impossible to disprove. King draws on brand recognition to guide readers and characters through an infinitely large and diverse multiverse. Lastly, shifting away from the uncanny elements of the *Dark Tower*, the inflationary

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Greene identifies nine possible constructs in *The Hidden Reality* (Greene 309).

multiverse signifies constant tension between urban and rural America. King, no stranger to writing about the cloaked darkness of small-town America, argues that there are still some social norms that all Americans, regardless of locale, can agree on in a divided age.

Chapter two, "A Gothic Castle in Every World," argues that King's multiverse invests the gothic castle with an ever-present, pervasive quality. Rather than dwell on old depictions of the trope, ruinous buildings that fall, collapsing under the weight of the protagonist's troubled mind, King opts for a different topoi. Ultimately, the tower is the body of god, present in every universe, but only truly knowable in one. This multifaceted and sexually ambiguous portrayal of god, placing its essence not only within a tower, but also a rose or a tiger, creates paradoxical polytheistic bodies with a monotheistic, platonic form, i.e. the tower. There are many ways to know and recognize god, but its true form stays hidden to everyone not of Mid-World. The tension between the world's various faiths pales in comparison with the tools that destroy faith according to King: science and business. The Crimson King, arguably Satan of the *Dark Tower*, uses both these tools in order to attack god. Traditional gothic fears about advancements in science become amplified by the Crimson King's mission, an attempt to wipe out every single god on every single world. Roland saves the tower, enters the body of god, and confronts his life's deeds, good and bad. Once there, Roland discovers that his ends do not justify his means and that certain actions he has taken will force another quest to save the tower. The tower serves as a catalyst for reflection and personal growth, allowing (or damning) Roland to quest for redemption a multitude of times. The tower multiverse contains an abundance of haunted places and items which, if faced with courage and honesty, can provide not destruction, but redemption.

The third chapter, “Twinners, Monsters, and Broken Things,” examines where King falters and surrenders to gothic tradition, e.g. allowing his greatest villain, Randall Flagg, to be swept aside by more traditional methods of portraying evil. The multiverse setting could have led to less binary depictions of evil, i.e. Roland facing a gang of doppelgangers, each representing one of his many faults. Instead it becomes only a means to an end, a way for King to artificially raise the stakes of the tower’s destruction. Doppelgangers exist to provide projection of shameful and confusing emotions upon another person in an effort to dissociate or hide from those emotions in oneself. King refuses his characters the chance to meet other versions of themselves, to confront themselves. When he allows readers a brief glimpse of a parallel Eddie and Jake, they are even more innocent than their familiar counterparts. By minimizing the doubling possibilities of a multiverse, King guides readers to focus on the grotesque villains that proliferate the series. The use of vampires and wolves, among his other monsters, demonstrate how a multiverse allows King to revisit old characters to revisit their conflicts or to draw on other works to defend the role and purpose of genre fiction.

Genre fiction thrives in possible worlds, places that never were and may never be. As a child, King immersed himself in a panoply of marvelous worlds by Poe, Lovecraft, and EC horror comics (DM 22). Later on, he sought to emulate more literary writers. His short story “The Man in the Black Suit,” an homage to Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown,” won the 1995 O. Henry Award for Best Short Fiction. Although King’s fusion of pulp and literature, of multiverse and gothic, produces mixed results, the *Dark Tower* required a multiverse from the start. In the first novel, *The Gunslinger*, Roland faces a difficult choice between saving a boy, Jake Chambers, or pursuing the man in the black, the man he believes can bring him to the tower. Siding on the quest

for the tower, something that has dominated his life for untold years, he lets Jake fall to his death. In a dark descent through a vast mountain cavern Jake cries out, “Go then. There are other worlds than these” (GS 205). Readers had no idea then just how many worlds King was thinking of, or if Jake could ever return. It took ten years and two more novels before Jake made a triumphant return to the land of Mid-World. Over the span of four decades, King’s readers are starting to realize just how many worlds exist and how they all orbit the *Dark Tower*. With over ten novels written after his supposed retirement in 2004, King continues to build worlds all in service of his magnum opus. Lovecraft may have had Arkham City, Faulkner inhabited Yoknapatawpha county, and Tolkien created Middle Earth, but only King has so thoroughly created and populated a vast, cosmic landscape.

## CHAPTER 1

## THE UNCANNY X-WORLDS

**The Infinitely Uncanny**

King continues the rich gothic tradition of taking inspiration from scientific theories in his construction of the *Dark Tower* cosmos. His use of a multiverse, a theory that rose to prominence in the twentieth century, allows King to create innovative portrayals of older gothic conventions, whether entombment or shifting boundaries, both moral or geographical. Unlike Shelley's use of galvanism, allowing Frankenstein to give life to his creation, King's initial use of a multiverse lies much more in building a haunted, gothic landscape, more akin to Hawthorne's forests or Morrison's plantations. Only in the later novels does the multiverse setting become a plot point, no longer content to provide only atmosphere.

In his genre-blending epic, the atmosphere and setting shift wildly from tradition to tradition, providing uncanny moments where a familiar genre, e.g. the western, contains elements unfamiliar to it. Riding through the streets of Tull, Roland hears not the clinking of piano keys escaping taverns but a drunken chorus of "Hey Jude" (GS 19). This juxtaposition stems from King's admiration of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns and their consistent oddities. Describing the early composition of the *Dark Tower*, King writes, "What I wanted even more than the setting was that feeling of epic, apocalyptic size. The fact that Leone knew jack shit about American geography (according to one of the characters, Chicago is somewhere in the vicinity of Phoenix, Arizona) added to the film's sense of magnificent dislocation" (GS xv). The unfamiliar setting of the *Dark Tower* sometimes lies in geographic misdirection, but mainly stems from a multiverse that bleeds songs and stories from one genre to another, providing numerous realizations of the

uncanny. To understand what King's multiverse contributes to the uncanny, a brief review of uncanny scholarship proves helpful.

An integral part of the gothic, the uncanny finds new life in a multiverse. Previously studied mainly by psychologists such as Freud, or by scores of literary critics, the fusion with a multiverse provides unique realizations of the uncanny. Royle summarizes the uncanny as a "peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (1). Travelling from one universe to another would allow one to enter a city or house *like* their own but a literally realized duplicate of their own city or house. There may be small differences or none between the two universes but such an instance would be unlike realizations of the uncanny experienced today. King did not first evoke the multiversal uncanny — a claim could arguably be made for Borges — but the multiversal uncanny pervades King's epic thoroughly. The *Dark Tower* calls upon King's oeuvre, and thus, all of King's uses of the uncanny.

Freud's seminal 1919 essay, "The Uncanny," established various paths to understanding what the sensation is and where it originates from. Freud calls upon linguistics, literature, and anecdotes from his own patients to build a multifaceted understanding of the uncanny. In the century since his work, critics have continued the investigation into the uncanny. The sometimes unpleasant or frightening feelings that arise from experiencing the uncanny provide inspiration for gothic, horror, and sci fi tales. Bennett and Royle write, "The uncanny has to do with making things uncertain: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic" (35). The two go on to list several guises of the uncanny: repetition, coincidence and fate, animism, anthropomorphism, automatism, questioning one's sexual identity, fear of being buried alive, silence, telepathy, and

death as creating the uncanny (35-38). These concepts, long archetypal to the gothic, not only all appear throughout the *Dark Tower* but become altered when placed within the tower multiverse. For example, repetition becomes impossible to avoid across infinity, but on a more personal scale, King's readers may posit that they exist in another gender on some worlds or not at all on others. Various characters, such as Jack Sawyer from *The Talisman* or Jake Chambers from the *Dark Tower* face just this unsettling realization. Beyond evoking this moment in readers and characters, King's multiverse allows him to allude to all the various fears he's created throughout his long career.

King, a storyteller and not an astrophysicist, chooses which elements of multiverse theory aid his writing. Absent from the earlier *Dark Tower* novels, the travelling of characters from one fictional universe to another proliferate the latter half of the series. This gathering of his many heroes and villains not only provides a culmination point for King's career, but a way for him to combine various genre conventions and alter them in the process. In this merger some new developments occur for the gothic elements present. The fear of being buried alive takes on new significance when faced with the realization that space itself lives and one day may die. A multiverse drawing on geographic or corporate recognition strengthen the ability of an author to create realistic worlds that sustain a reader's suspension of disbelief. Lastly, Mid-World's ever changing landscape skillfully represents the consistent shifting moral boundaries of America, a subject the gothic thrives on. King's tower multiverse, at first merely a landscape meant to rival the scope of Tolkien and the uncertainty of Leone, breathes new life into the body of gothic literature.

### **The Body Cosmic**

The focus and direction of the *Dark Tower* changed steadily from novel to novel over the

decades it was composed. The cosmogony shifted dramatically with *Wizard and Glass*, uniting all of King's works under the tower's reach. The fourth novel of the series, *Wizard and Glass* reached shelves in 1997, six years after the cliffhanger of the previous entry, *The Waste Lands*. In the intermittent time span between novels Edward Witten rocked the field of theoretical physics, arguing that existence contained eleven dimensions, basing his work off of John Schwarz and Michael Green's earlier concept of String Theory (Greene 112-13). These dimensions, or branes, can be classified by how many dimensions comprise them. For example, Greene describes a three-brane, the branes referring to length, width, and height, like "water filling a huge fish tank....Just as fish inhabit the water, we would inhabit a space-filling three-brane. Space, at least the space we directly inhabit, would be far more corporeal than generally imagined. Space would be a thing, an object, an entity — a three-brane" (114). What humanity perceives as the universe is really just a vast four-brane entity, the fourth brane being time, living within another seven branes. Just as three-dimensional beings on Earth move and interact with other three-dimension subjects and objects, so too could a three-brane universal body move and perhaps interact and collide with other branes, resulting in massive destruction (119-120). King, beginning in *Wizard and Glass*, portrays the multiverse as alive, a vast body with corporeal features. King continues this concept until the end of the series, where an ally tells Roland, "What I want you to understand for now — or simply accept — is that reality is *organic*, reality is *alive*" (DT 270; emphasis in original). The animistic portrayal of a multiverse allows King not only to draw on gothic fears of bodily harm, but to continue his career-long criticism of the military industrial complex. This criticism, based on injury or mutilation of the human body, exists in the Arrowhead Project of *The Mist* and in the "thinies" that populate the multiverse, first seen in *Wizard and Glass*.

King begins to purposefully incorporate his other works into the *Dark Tower* mythos in *Wizard and Glass*. Travel between parallel universes occurs in the first three novels but never to any worlds King had previously written about. Roland and his fellow gunslingers find themselves on the Kansas Turnpike near Topeka. They quickly realize that this Kansas is not their own, reading a newspaper headline detailing the travel of “Captain Trips,” the superflu strain that ravaged the America of *The Stand* (WG 73). King draws one of his most epic and successful works into the *Dark Tower* mythos in this novel and marries the fear of disease, death, and entombment with the concept of a living universe. The results provide an interesting commingling of physics and gothic convention, one of the most successful examples from all of the *Dark Tower*.

In order to change reader’s concept of the multiverse, King must change the language and metaphors used in describing the multiverse. The cosmos have been described as an object, typically the *fabric* of spacetime. This fabric concept stems from Einstein’s investigation into gravity and the bending of both space and time due to gravity (Greene 12-14). King too uses *fabric*, describing a thinny as “places where the fabric of existence is almost entirely worn away. There are more since the force of the Dark Tower began to fail” (WG 66). Roland’s crew travelled to *The Stand*’s universe through such a hole in the fabric of spacetime, an opening that also allows for the transmission of sickness, evil, and death. The shift in thinking of the universe from object to subject, brought about by brane theory, arrives shortly afterwards. Roland explains that “thinnyies aren’t natural — they are sores on the skin of existence, able to exist because things are going wrong” (WG 78). Intentionally shifting from *fabric* to *sores* and *skin*, flesh descriptors, King breathes life into his multiverse for the rest of the *Dark Tower*. Not only do illnesses appear on the skin of the multiverse, but psychic characters can poke holes through the muscle of existence, like

needles (DT 270). King, not content to propose that an entire universe can be ill, like that of *The Stand*, suggests that illnesses can spread from one universe to another<sup>5</sup>. In so doing, he magnifies gothic fears of disease and death to the largest body conceived, the body cosmic.

By projecting death and disease upon the cosmos, King alters the tradition of placing national fears upon the individual. The late nineteenth century resurgence of the gothic, seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dracula*, or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* arose, in part, to fears from the transmission of disease in burgeoning urban centers (Punter and Byron 39). The sickness or mutilation of an individual signified political and national ailments, whether hedonism, sexual perversion, or the loss of personal identity amongst the horde. Conservative beliefs in faith and community saved some characters in these works and those not saved existed to provide examples of what happens when one has gone too far. The multiverse theories of the twentieth century have further displaced and diminished man's place in existence and King reacts in kind. He amplifies and posits fears to the point where they may be beyond humanity's ability to fix them. The solution in *The Stand* was the complete destruction and rebirth of America, one that came from a weaponized flu and witnessed the resilience of small-town America, seen in the Free Zone of Boulder, Colorado. That America and that universe live on, but barely. King forces readers to consider that not only will their body one day rot and be consumed, but that the universe itself may share that fate. The fear of being buried alive, the fear of confinement takes on a vast scale when placed upon a living universe backdrop. Humanity may as well be Jonas in the belly of a galactic, rotting whale. Even if one lives in a perfectly healthy universe, a membrane multiverse resembles a

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<sup>5</sup> Ironically, Roland and his companions travel through one of these thinnies in a train car, like medicinal bodies in a capsule. While they do not heal the cosmic body they enter, they do seek to prevent the spread of that infection to other universes. It's *The Fantastic Voyage* on a universal scale.

city full of universal bodies, some of them capable of collision or the transmission of disease.

The thinny sores present on the universal bodies from the *Dark Tower* sicken those near them, furthering the corporeality of the tower multiverse. Roland explains that despite being rare, thinnies are “growing in size and number” and could theoretically spread Captain Trips to other worlds (WG 78). The spread of these sores constitute a weakening multiverse, one growing ill in universe after universe. Just as a plague might spread throughout a city, so too may a disease spread through a multiverse. The spread of an illness, whether real or allegorical, often puts innocents at danger. King places this fear in the cosmos. Innocent, pure universes may fall victim to the sins of their neighbors. It may be a strain of the flu, or as seen in King’s novella “The Mist,” could be large and terrifying creatures unknown to man. The thinnies not only represent social ills that spread easily in urban centers but also the inevitable consequences of war.

King mutilates and desecrates the corporeal universe with disease and war wounds. Coming of age during the Vietnam War, King’s works express distrust towards government and military agencies, e.g. *Firestarter*, and laments the loss of American innocence and youth, e.g. *11/22/63* or *Hearts in Atlantis*. The flu that decimates America in *The Stand* escapes from a military base and in “The Mist,” the military unintentionally wounds the universal body, allowing all manners of monsters to enter the Maine countryside. Bridgton’s residents know of the secretive “Arrowhead Project,” theorizing that they experiment with atom smashing or agricultural experiments (SK 41). The narrator, having witnessed prehistoric and indescribable monsters attack his community believes that the military might have placed Bridgton into another dimension altogether (SK 139). The mist rolls over the landscape, obscuring these monsters, signifying the veil that military research hides behind. Not only can the military threaten an entire world with

germ warfare but can conceivably threaten the multiverse, damning numerous universal bodies. The Arrowhead Project pierces the flesh of the universe and exposes that world to creatures from other dimensions, other universes. Once created, these thinnies can decimate numerous universes, their scars never fully healing. “The Mist,” ends with a slightly hopeful note but never fully explains what happened or the fate of those who try to escape. King cannot see an end to war or military research and his characters cannot see their way out of the mist. War constantly haunts King’s works.

The instruments of war, whether tanks, planes, or atomic weapons and waste litter the Mid-World landscape but their haunting power pales to thinnies, sores that anthropomorphize war. Describing the journey by thinnies, King writes, “To Eddie, it looked like flat water standing in a vast marshland....It was as if unreality had been given...what? A face? No. The vast and humming silver shimmer ahead of them had no face, was the very antithesis of a face, in fact, but it had a body...an aspect...a *presence* (WG 92; emphasis in original). The silver, humming shimmering of the thinny signifies both the body of the military industrial complex and the wounds inflicted by it. Eddie cannot come face-to-face with war or the military. Bearing witness to war’s destruction proves too painful, too unimaginable, so King infuses war wounds with similar qualities to weapons of war, i.e.the sounds and visuals of guns, planes, and tanks. The cosmic body suffers from war, supplanting the need to describe corpses littering the landscape. The fusion of war and landscape, evidenced by thinnies, takes clear inspiration from a favorite of King’s.

Inspired to write the *Dark Tower* by the *Lord of the Rings*, King takes cues from that work here, specifically the Dead Marshes. Tolkien writes, “For a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass, through which he was peering...he sprang back with a

cry. “There are dead things, dead faces in the water” (Tolkien 613). The site of a great battle, these marshes preserve the bodies of the fallen, bodies that entice and trap those ignorant enough to try to reach them. The Dead Marshes allow Frodo, Sam, and even Tolkien to see the face of war and recoil from it. Tolkien wrote much later that these marshes originated from his experience in World War One near Somme, where soldiers would stumble on corpses rotting in the mud between the trenches (Gilbert 240). Tolkien’s marshes depict war on Earth, with wounds and victims that can be seen. King’s thinnies, wounds of war and illness, present a vague, spectral encounter with war waged on a multiversal scale. Sores and disease from one universe to another provide more difficult to conceive and while Eddie cannot face the universal body beneath the sore, he can feel its presence.

King’s personification of the multiverse enables him to portray illness and war on a vast, yet, paradoxically personal scale. If the universe lives, a body surrounded by other universal bodies, then it could theoretically suffer from illness, war, and the rages of time. Humanity, buried within that body, cannot escape, forever buried alive within the body cosmic. King’s fusion of a membrane multiverse and the gothic intensifies nineteenth century fears of illness and entombment on an epic scale. That same epic scale, filtered through a quilted multiverse, enables King to create worlds not only incredibly close to reality but worlds that may be impossible to prove do not exist.

### **The Quilt of Verisimilitude**

The simplest multiverse construct to conceive, the quilted multiverse, rests on space being infinite combined with finite arrangements of particles (Greene 33). Light’s finite speed confines patches of space, creating a cosmic horizon that a universe would not be able to see past and beyond that border lies another universe — not so much parallel universes but rather infinite polka

dot universes on an infinitely large fabric of space (29). Even if a quilted multiverse was not infinite, but “merely” expansive beyond comprehension, statistics show that parallel universes, either identical or recognizable to our own, may still exist (30). This multiverse construct works well with many traditional uncanny conventions, specifically repetition and feeling oddly familiar with something newly experienced have long produced uncanny sensations, whether déjà vu or doppelgangers (Bennett and Royle 35). Travellers to a parallel universe in a quilt construct could witness parallel selves, cities, or histories, all of varying degrees between identical or recognizable. King builds worlds easily recognized by readers, worlds that might exist within a quilted multiverse. This world building and classification stems from the uncanny tradition.

Freud’s investigation into the uncanny centered on his practice of drawing from language and story. Freud drew upon the word *unheimlich* to examine the concept. Based from the root *heimlich*, “home,” *unheimlich* contains that which does not belong to “home.” In King’s multiverse, the uncanny often literally does not belong to one’s home world — *unheimlich* writ large across all of time and space. Fiction can be considered *unheimlich* and Freud argues that writers can skillfully tap into that through their works. He writes:

The story-teller can also choose a setting which, though less imaginary than the world of fairy-tales, does yet differ from the real world by admitting...daemonic influences or departed spirits. So long as they remain within their setting of poetic reality their usual attribute of uncanniness fails to attach to such beings.

The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions

operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story....He should keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the conditions he has selected for the world he writes about, or that he should cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point at all throughout the book. (158-60)

Freud argues for the power of setting in creating the uncanny. When authors place spirits in their work, as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Dante's *Inferno*, it can often serve to further the plot and atmosphere but fail in effectively evoking the uncanny in the reader. Such depictions fail to suspend a reader's disbelief. However, authors, such as King, who choose a setting that parallels reality can more effectively create uncanny emotions, all the better should they cloak the machinations behind the world. Gothic literature famously obscures information from readers, in order to misdirect and frustrate them. King often uses the "common reality" as his backdrop, changing only one or two key aspects. *The Shining* or *'Salem's Lot* depict Americas different only in the existence of telepathy or vampires. Every other aspect of these novels work to establish a common reality, an effort to create the uncanny. Although the various worlds from the *Dark Tower* occasionally stray quite far from common reality, King fragments the exact cosmological workings of the tower multiverse throughout the entire series, refusing to answer every question on how the multiverse works. When King includes worlds nearly indiscernible to the readers, he taps into both Freud's tradition and the quilted multiverse. King favors two approaches to establishing this verisimilitude: first, knowledge of the American cities and states, and secondly, American culture expressed through music, currency, or even soft drinks.

The travels of Father Callahan through numerous Americas best highlights the uncanny setting that King builds. Callahan, defeated by Barlow in *'Salem's Lot*, leaves and travels across parallel Americas before settling in Mid-World. After hunting vampires throughout New York City, Callahan must flee once more, this time on a plank footbridge underneath the George Washington Bridge (WC 292). No such footbridge exists but underneath the busiest bridge in the world, Callahan begins to travel the hidden highways of America, roads that take him from one America to another. King taps into the American occupation with roads and travel beginning Callahan's journey there. Callahan can identify which America he wakes in depending on his hotel room or the faces on his dollar bills (WC 300). Eventually the props of travel disappear behind the landscape itself; "*What matters is the sight of a weathervane against a violent pink sunset, the sound of his heels on an empty road in Utah, the sound of the wind in the New Mexico desert, the sight of a child skipping rope beside a junked-out Chevrolet Caprice in Fossil, Oregon*" (WC 305; emphasis in original). The description of rural, natural scenes and a dead car signify that travel serves to witness the land, to enjoy the journey. Shifting the focus from places and items that identify America from America, King conjures images that could be seen across numerous Americas, scenes known to readers. With an epic that contains parallel apocalyptic landscapes, monsters, and multiverse travel, King needs to reestablish the common reality connection occasionally. Here, King romanticizes the fleeing from urban to rural to strengthen the uncanny connection between universes. Readers not only imagine a weathervane or highway noise but empathize with the call of the road and the yearning for simpler times. The urban markers from universe to universe, such as the location of Co-op City being in either Bronx or Brooklyn, change consistently, signifying the uncertainty and mutability of a city. King draws on the consistent

beauty and bounty of America to strengthen the uncanny recognition of parallel Americas in his audience. The credibility of King's landscape works in tandem with his more critical tool of establishing recognition: corporate brands.

Across King's multiverse exist many beautiful Americas, filled with people facing the evils of fear, despair, and the Sombra Corporation. Sombra oversees numerous shell companies that work for the Crimson King, all aiming to destroy the dark tower. While not a dominant presence in the *Dark Tower*, corporate conspiracies and urban sprawl do work against Roland's quest. King's understated distrust of corporate America comes from weapons production and the faceless presence of business than any purposeful criticism of corporate America. Rather than a purposeful criticism of any one brand, King emulates comic book multiverses that have depended on iconography to guide readers through numerous parallel universes, such as various costumes for the Flash or Batman (Kukkonen 50). Branding typically comes across as banal differences between universes, such as Nozza-a-la rather than Coca-Cola, or Takura over Toyota (WG 662). King depends on the world's third and tenth most recognized brands, respectively, to identify a counterfactual world in contrast to the reader's baseline reality full of Apple computers or McDonald's hamburgers (Lopez). The proliferation of corporate branding across the tower multiverse not only signifies the inability for one to escape advertising and product placement but works to build Freud's common reality. King's works have long used commercial products and pop culture references to build recognition between his fictional worlds and the world of his readers. Tony Magistrale writes:

Horror must become all the more plausible and frightening as a result of this personal identification...King pursues the values of commercial America to

their illogical extreme: in a society where material objects are often treated with more dignity than the people who use them, it is only slightly ironic that many of these goods frequently attain a “life of their own.” (54-55)

Beyond arguing that soft drinks and car companies litter the landscape of numerous, parallel Americas, King writes that these products have become an essential part of creating a personal and national identity, at times replacing a nation’s founding faith. King claims, “I must say that our children are much more familiar with Ronald McDonald than they are with, let’s say, Jesus or Peter or Paul or any of those people. They can tell you about the Burger King or the Easter Bunny but some of this other stuff they’re not too cool on” (Underwood and Miller 11). King writes his personal, familial experience with navigating the American landscape onto Roland’s journey through parallel worlds, looking for God while navigating via corporate brands. The Kansas landscape alone cannot indicate which universe Roland finds himself in; ironically, he needs something as common and cheap as a soda can to orientate himself. These material objects take on a larger significance than the land or the sky; when a parallel America contains the same constellations, multiversal navigation becomes difficult. America’s love of products and commercial brands pervade the multiverse. The commonalities of the American landscape and commercialism help tie the multiverse together, creating a common reality spread across an infinite collection of Earths.

Regardless of what uncanny aspects King creates, the multiverse setting helps him adjust how they work and how they affect readers. The corporeal membrane evokes fears of the body and the infinite quilt addresses how the uncanny thrives with common ties between text and reader. The third multiverse construct, the inflationary multiverse, does not evoke the uncanny but rather

lies in the heart of the gothic itself: examining ever shifting social and moral boundaries. The relative measurement of time, space, and morality work in concert across a cosmos that grows quicker than the speed of light.

### **Borders and Bubbles**

Expanding upon the idea of the Big Bang, an inflationary multiverse argues that space continues to grow. Attempting to answer why distant regions of space improbably share the same temperature or to explain the origins of cosmic microwave background radiation, some theoretical astrophysicists argue that the very body of space itself may be stretching and growing, allowing galaxies to distance from one another quicker than the speed of light (Greene 37-45). Within this expanding fabric of space, pocket or bubble universes exist, each governed by the same fundamental laws of physics but in infinite variation. Some bubbles could support human life, but many others could not. The inflationary universe can best be visualized as a vast sea dotted with island universes, some inhospitable crags and others providing the right conditions for life (65-66). The growth of an inflationary universe provides an apt metaphor for both the *Dark Tower* and the growing field of multiverses within cosmology. Max Tegmark, proponent of parallel universes, states, "The borderline between physics and philosophy has shifted quite dramatically in the last century...I think it's quite clear that parallel universes are now absorbed by that moving boundary. It's included within physics rather than metaphysics" (Seife). Regardless of one's opinions on Tegmark's theories, his belief that borders between science and philosophy have weakened in light of multiverses stands true. Tension occurs when science challenges and expands knowledge of the cosmos, and this same dynamic occurs on Mid-World, the universe containing Roland and the dark tower.

The clearest connection between the *Dark Tower* and an inflationary multiverse lies in how Mid-World grows larger, driven by the breakdown of the fundamental laws of physics. King, following the gothic tradition of cloaking information, hides the workings of the multiverse until the third novel, hundreds of pages and ten years after readers first read enter Mid-World. The dark tower stands as a linchpin, emitting beams that bind the multiverse together, maintaining “the proper alignment of space, size, and dimension” (WL 101). Due to the Crimson King’s attack on the dark tower, the physics of the multiverse weaken, creating thinnies and disrupting time and space. Cardinal directions no longer prove consistent, and the flow of time becomes unstable. King toys with the instability of Mid-World, citing *Romeo and Juliet*, where Romeo attempts to swear by the inconsistent moon (WG xxvii). The epigraph works not only to draw parallels to the love story therein but to recall how the movements of heavenly bodies have long influenced mankind’s measurement of time and space. Juliet wishes for a more personal, Earthbound vow but even that may fail in the *Dark Tower*. The instability of Mid-World deeply troubles Roland who confesses that he does not know how long their journey to the tower will be because “the distance grows with every day that passes.” He argues that he travelled only a thousand miles over twenty years (WL 101-02). Mid-World’s landscape has inflated, shuffling directions and boundaries, signifying an inability to maintain norms, whether geographic or social. Citizens bemoan not only the dying landscape but the moral wasteland that they inhabit, desperately pleased to meet Roland and the traditional values he embodies. In the inflation and uncertainty of Mid-World, King examines the changing moral landscape of America, centered in the frontier.

To reestablish the western elements of the *Dark Tower*, *Wizard and Glass* leaves New York and its post-apocalyptic twin Lud behind for Kansas and Mejis, an analog of the American

Southwest. This choice reinvigorates the rural, frontier aspect missing from the third novel, one essential to American gothic. Charles Crow writes, “As a literature of borderlands, the gothic is naturally suited to a country that has seen the frontier (a shifting geographical, cultural, linguistic and racial boundary) as its defining characteristic” (2). These frontiers have been in constant flux since the foundation of America in the eighteenth century. Citizens of any democracy debate what social norms will define their culture, inspired by faith, politics, science, and various other influences. Cultural beliefs heavily shape morality and these boundaries are constantly drawn and redrawn through narratives. Gothic works suit America’s narrative and moral struggle quite well, dealing with fears of sexuality, race, and faith. The impermanence of Mid-World’s land and borders prohibits any cultural and social norms to be established, something more frightening than the constant establishment and shifting of cultural norms.

American gothic thrives in regional fiction, drawing on the horrors of slavery in the south or puritan theocracy in New England. King’s choice of Kansas serves many goals in *Wizard and Glass*. It provides a clear connection to *The Stand*, allows King to weave in the *Wizard of Oz* mythos to his *Dark Tower*, and recalls the American heartland. This frontier state, although home to both slavery conflict and religious strife, reawakens the promise of the frontier and traditional American values. Faced with a frontier demolished by biological genocide, Roland returns inward and shares a story from the past clearly designed to reestablish traditional values in a world that constantly changes, a world whose moral boundaries shift ever outward.

*Wizard and Glass*, with its flashback western-Romeo and Juliet narrative, mirrors the genre’s resurgence of the in the 90s, with *Dances with Wolves*, *Unforgiven*, and *Tombstone*. Like the gothic, westerns examine the moral boundaries of America, providing ambiguous portrayals of

good and evil. Faced with an awful mirror of his own world, Roland must return to a time and place where boundaries still existed, were enforced, and the sun set in the west every night<sup>6</sup>. The ever shifting geography of Mid-World represents the constant realigning of American values and beliefs while Roland stands as the arbiter of good. American perceptions of good and bad change constantly but core values of hard work and independence, concepts Roland embodies, remain strong. When a nation faces an unstable, shifting moral landscape, narratives and genres that espouse traditional values invariably appear. King's use of an inflationary, unstable world, evidenced by Mid-World's malleability, evokes the ever changing morality of America and the *Dark Tower* novels seek to reestablish certain beliefs as a steady, moral center.

King's expressed desire to build a vast, disorientating landscape that would rival Tolkien or Leone led him to create a multiverse full of potential (GS xv). When the *Dark Tower* introduces traditional gothic conventions to a multiverse, whether the uncanny or moral uncertainty, King draws on theoretical physics to blend the two. Universal bodies, infinite variations of existence, and shifting boundaries all create an epic, gothic landscape universe after universe. The dark tower, the heart of this multiverse, places God and personal salvation above all other other gothic concerns.

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<sup>6</sup> In Mid-World, the heavenly bodies travel inconsistently across the sky.

## CHAPTER 2

## A GOTHIC CASTLE IN EVERY WORLD

**The Multiversal Pantheon**

The dark tower stands as the literal and figurative center of King's multiverse, regardless of what multiversal framework he chooses to use. While the tower can only be entered on Mid-World, it exists in various forms all across the multiverse. The tower, in all its forms, holds reality together. When one tower weakens, every tower weakens. Readers only witness the structure as a tower or a rose but King writes that other forms include "an immortal tiger...or the ur-dog Rover" (DT 609). The multiple forms of the tower and its presence in every world of the multiverse provide King the opportunity to place various concepts at the center of his multiverse simultaneously. The multiversal tower affords King an ambiguous, mutable object to write on what he will. The masculine dark tower form indicates King's traditional gothic criticisms of empiricism while the feminized rose form enables King to revise his poor history of writing women characters. Despite his intent, both the tower and rose forms provide a unique depiction of the traditional gothic castle or haunted house, a place for confronting and defeating or succumbing to life's darker qualities.

Rather than merely representing the church, the dark tower literally embodies God, known as Gan in Mid-World, and allows Roland many chances to meet his creator and reflect upon his own life. This living tower and its presence throughout the multiverse fuse traditional European and American depictions of haunted sites. Gan's taking of many forms throughout the multiverse follows a paradox of gothic literature: simultaneously subverting and defending the dominant culture. The tower form both embraces and refutes a non-denominational search for God. The

tower provides not only a locale for King to depict how technology or business assaults a nation's spirituality but how to achieve peace and purpose. The rose form, either in the field of roses surrounding the tower or the rose in *Keystone Earth*, portray the feminine not as fatale, temptress, or fallen, but as a healing presence. King's amalgamation of American and European tradition, rural and urban, male and female all stem from the very origins of the gothic. To understand his purpose, a brief survey of tradition proves useful.

### **From *Otranto* past The Overlook**

Castles, churches, and other haunted sites signify various conflicts and ideas across the texts of the gothic. Punter and Byron argue, examining Walpole's *Otranto*, that castles "distort perception, [causing] slippage between what is natural and what is human-made" (Punter and Byron 259-60). The early inability to discern the origins of ruins across the European landscape, e.g. Stonehenge, troubled cultures who at first attributed the work to supernatural beings and often imbued these places with mystical properties. The confusion and uncertainty that accompanies pre-historic ruins translates to gothic castles and later to haunted houses. Within the castle time becomes uncertain and immeasurable, a home becomes a labyrinth, and what first appears womb-like may also later entomb. Characters entering these sites become "subjected to a force that is utterly resistant to the individual's attempt to impose his or her own order" (261-62). At the mercy of their surroundings, characters may face unwelcome ideas or uncomfortable truths. Surrendering personal agency to a greater power, however, can be sublime and accomplished in buildings other than castles or ruins.

Medieval and Renaissance churches began to attain these same qualities in the twelfth through sixteenth centuries. While gothic architecture varies, certain features like arches and

vaulted ceilings are typical, attempting to “create an impression of infinite subdivisions” through the use of “[stained glass], flying buttresses, shafts, finials, and pinnacles” (Punter and Byron 32-33). Gothic churches, buildings meant to worship and embody the immensity of God, blur the boundary between man and the cosmos, creating sublime moments for their visitors. These experiences could create “upward movement towards the heavens [or] downward motion, convoluting in upon itself in labyrinthine passages and dark recesses, descending to catacombs deep in the earth” (34). Reflecting upon the infinite glory of God or the cloaked workings of man, parishioners experienced the power of gothic architecture to guide one’s perception of reality. Before long, authors sought to replicate that experience in their fiction.

Gothic fiction arose from this powerful influence on perception, and the church and castle quickly became a gothic convention. Authors used castles to represent the “dark, tortured windings in the mind of those eminently civilized, and therefore ‘unnatural’ vices, ambition and cruelty...[becoming] a lasting representation of the torments of the subconscious pressing upon the conscious mind and making a prison of the self” (MacAndrew 48-49). In this way, both churches and literature portrayed the struggle of man against sin, visualizing evil welling from deep within the Earth and deep within the human mind. The buildings where Christianity identified and reinforced moral and political codes became symbolic of the struggle to follow those conventions. The destruction of gothic structures, whether *Otranto* or *Usher*, represent the mental collapse of the protagonist unable to reconcile his inner demons with the demands of his culture and faith. While European gothic possessed an abundance of castles and ruins to draw from, American gothic required something new.

The scarcity of prehistoric ruins in America necessitated a different approach to the gothic

in the burgeoning literature of the young nation. American gothic turned from castles, as indigenous structures did not evoke the same sublime emotions necessary for gothic texts (Crow 10). The vast American landscape provided new modes of encoding the battle between one's innate desires and the social code imposed upon them. Hawthorne, Brown, and Cooper, all formative authors of the haunted landscape, drew upon the racial, religious, and ecological atrocities committed throughout America to evoke gothic tales (14). The implications of doing so continue to create an incongruity within the gothic, mainly whether it subverts or reinforces the dominant culture (33). Hawthorne, through *The Scarlet Letter*, "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Man of Adamant," clearly deplores Puritan New England and his personal relationship to that culture. Other early American gothic, such as Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, satirizes and critiques America subtly. Leslie Fiedler argues, "*The change of myth involves a profound change of meaning...the heathen, unredeemed wilderness and not the decaying monuments of a dying class, nature and not society becomes the symbol of evil*" (Fiedler 160; emphasis in original). The European gothic placed evil within the buildings of the establishment, of the church or the state, while American works situated evil in the very landscape itself. Rather than criticizing the institutions that governed a culture, American gothic muddled the relationship between man, society, and the land. Criticism identifies ambiguity in how authors such as Cooper depicted the fate of native cultures and while the relationship of castle to cave or forest is not precisely analogous, early American gothic works sought the same goal of their European counterparts — to examine the uncomfortable aspects of living and dying<sup>7</sup>. Once American cities

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<sup>7</sup> Crow wonders if Natty and Chingachgook's relationship presents "an alternative to the dominant vision of progress" or is only "a fantasy escape from it for the reader" (33).

began to grow, new opportunities became apparent for where to situate fear in America.

The gothic potential of American cities, present in colonial works, has accompanied the haunted landscape throughout America's gothic tradition. Early works such as *Arthur Mervyn* or *The Quaker City* used Philadelphia as their backdrop; modern audiences experience urban gothic through Batman's Gotham City or the New York of Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (Crow 166). Crow argues that cities present "the opposite of the Jeffersonian dream of a society of farms and villages: a place, rather, of corruption, crime and disease, the legacy of the Old World that immigrants to America were trying to escape" (166). Jefferson's forgotten dream and the lingering of European ills leave Americans no choice but to be haunted. The wilderness carries memories of native genocide, slavery, and widespread pollution while cities present the failure of America to escape from the trappings of their progenitor. Even the refuge of a home becomes haunted by history, abuse, or mental illness as in *Beloved*, *The Shining*, or, *The Haunting of Hill House* respectively. Americans face the horrors of past, present, and future regardless of their location, and King taps into this omnipresent haunting of America in two ways. First, the dark tower exists in every world of the multiverse, holding existence together, haunting every universe. The tower's godly presence indicates the pervasive presence of God, not just through America, but through all of existence. Roland's quest to save the tower, and therefore the multiverse, is also the quest to save both God and man.

### **The Body of God**

King's works are full of haunted homes and landscapes, but the dark tower eclipses them all by its prominence in his multiverse. In the later novels of the *Dark Tower*, King reveals the cosmic origins of the tower and the multiverse. Gan, King's god figure, arose from the primal soup

of chaos and bore the multiverse through his own navel (DT 33). From there he set it spinning, creating time, and let it drop (DT 303). Had the turtle<sup>8</sup>, Maturin from *It*, not been there to catch it on its back, creation would have fallen into the abyss (SS 295). The early tales of Gan portray him to be an indifferent, watchmaker type god. King draws from the deist beliefs of Enlightenment Europe and Revolutionary America and the more recent existential dread of a now absent, or dormant god that pervades works from H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos to Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. These varying conceptions of God clash with more conservative depictions of God, an omnipresent God who observes, judges, and interferes in the lives of men. King establishes that the cynical, distanced perceptions of God are both ignorant and mistaken, placing an active God at the center of his multiverse.

Waiting until the last chapter of his saga, King reveals the true nature of the tower and of Gan. Approaching the tower, Roland places a sigil upon the entrance and the door opens. King writes, "There was a sighing voice — *Welcome, Roland, thee of Eld*. It was the Tower's voice. This edifice was not stone at all, although it might look like stone; this was a living thing, Gan himself, likely, and the pulse he'd felt deep in his head even thousands of miles from here had always been Gan's beating life-force" (DT 820; emphasis in original). The tower is Gan; King's god sustains existence and works diligently to protect it by summoning Roland to save him. The sighing voice evokes age while juxtaposed against Gan's vibrant, ever present pulse that reaches across Mid-World. The revelation of tower as God and paradoxical aged vibrancy of Gan adds to Roland's sublime ascension through the tower.

Inside the tower, Roland's perception of time and space becomes tenuous, lost in the

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<sup>8</sup> King uses a turtle from his impressions of Hinduism and the "turtles all the way down," cosmic anecdote (SS 394).

grandeur of Gan, mirroring the sublime experience of gothic cathedrals or ruined castles. King writes, "Standing outside, Roland had judged the Tower to be roughly six hundred feet high. But as he peered into the hundredth room, and then the two hundredth, he felt sure he must have climbed eight times six hundred.....It once crossed his mind that he'd never reach the top; that the Dark Tower was infinite in height as it was eternal in time" (DT 825-826). Unable to fully perceive or comprehend the scope and scale of God's body, Roland experiences the Burkean sublime. Burke's seminal essay on the sublime examines various beliefs on aesthetics, philosophy, and faith. King's depiction of the tower cleverly employs both Burke's concept of structural sublimity and man's annihilation before God. Burke writes, "To the sublime in building, greatness of dimension seems requisite; for on a few parts, and those small, the imagination cannot rise to any idea of infinity" (Burke). Although Roland briefly considers the tower to be infinite, he does so only once, refusing to tremble by the shifting size of the tower. At first appearing six hundred feet tall, the tower now dwarfs Roland's mental capacity to perceive its size. King embodies Gan in a tower because a structure allows him to draw upon an object known to man while avoiding attributing any specific physical attributes, visualizing God as man. Large structures imitate on a small scale what mental constructs of God create in the mind of man. Burke writes, "in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant....But whilst we contemplate so vast an object...we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him" (Burke). King creates a "just" depiction of God, avoiding predominant physical markers. Roland is annihilated by both the seemingly infinite size of the tower and by what the tower presents him. Rather than destroying or abandoning the church, acts expressed through European gothic, Roland's climb conveys the role of the church of encouraging personal redemption and

reflection.

The contents of the tower present a very personal relationship between Roland and God, recalling the elevation of the individual in both the Protestant Reformation and American Revolution. Only Roland can save the tower, and only the tower can save Roland. King situates his creator as an essential component of existence. If this tower should fall, like so many other gothic structures, so too would the multiverse. The tower provides order, structure, and without it all life would perish. This essential quality to God draws on early American works that saw a heathen wilderness needing to be tamed, removing temptation from good, Christian people. Climbing from floor to floor of the tower, Roland confronts memories from his life, from birth to the first moments of *The Gunslinger*. The tower subjects Roland to these memories, forcing him to witness all the pain and suffering that he caused along the way to the tower. Despite witnessing pleasant memories, death overwhelms Roland's ascension through the body of Gan. He revisits the death of his lover and his fellow gunslingers. At the top of the tower Roland finds the desert:

How many times had he climbed these stairs only to find himself peeled back, curved back, turned back? Not to the beginning...but to that moment in the Mohaine Desert when he had finally understood that his thoughtless, questionless quest would ultimately succeed? How many times had he traveled a loop like the one in the clip that had once pinched off his navel, his own tet-ka can Gan? How many times *would* he travel it? (DT 827; emphasis in original)

The tower sends Roland back to the start of his journey in a quasi-Buddhist fashion. Gan decides that Roland has not yet led a life sufficiently pure and white, sending him back to try his journey

over. Although this resets the timeline, once more putting the tower at risk of falling, the tower provides Roland with the Horn of Eld, a family heirloom and a promise that “*things may be different, Roland — that there may yet be rest. Even salvation*” (DT 829; emphasis in original). Similar to gothic churches, the tower leads Roland to reflect on his life. Rather than crumbling beneath the weight of his sins, however, the tower allows him another chance, arguing for the power of reflection and redemption.

Despite the phallic nature of a tower or presence of ejaculation in numerous ancient origin stories, King reiterates that the dark tower is not only Gan’s body but specifically his *navel*. All of creation, an infinite multiverse of worlds, spins upon a cosmic “outie.” Roland finds the loop of ribbon tied ‘round his infant navel (DT 821) and later reflects how his own bastard son, Mordred, had no navel ribbon (DT 823). Days earlier an adversary tells Roland that “To peek in Gan’s navel does not make one Gan” (DT 609). Entering god’s body does not grant Roland god-like powers but it does grant him powerful knowledge of self. The tower, and therefore Gan, provide reflection and redemption. The entirety of Roland’s life presents itself to Roland, forcing him to, as it were, navel-gaze — literally. Decades earlier King had written about this idea, examining how American authors like Shirley Jackson or Peter Straub have altered the purpose behind gothic structures:

The gothic house functions as an image of authoritarianism, of imprisonment, or of [narcissism]. . . a growing obsession with one’s own problems; a turning inward instead of a growing outward. The new American gothic provides a closed loop of character, and in what might be termed a psychological pathetic fallacy, the physical surroundings often mimic the inward-turning of the characters themselves. (DM 297)

Although not a critical work, *Danse Macabre* provides many insights into King's beliefs and intentions toward his works. The tower does not imprison Roland in space but in a time loop, forcing him to constantly relive his quest. Roland turns inwards because without reflection he has no hope of escaping this journey. Although Roland views his return as merciless, the tower grants him a new artifact and the hope that next time may be different (DT 827-28). While Gan may or may not reflect King's personal views on God, the tower's actions draw upon the potential that the multiverse provides.

Multiplicity, uncertainty, and theory dominate the discourse of multiverses, not only in physics but in fiction. King grafts a multiversal constant, God, on the chaos, lessening the ambiguity of the gothic qualities present. The navel quality to the tower evokes a nurturing creator, one that seeks to build emotional ties to supplant the physical tie lost in birth. Although the tower, and thus Gan, assumes many forms throughout the multiverse, he can only be entered in his tower form on Mid-World. This portrayal of God encourages both a multifaceted presence of God and a platonic, true form, thus subverting and protecting Christian perceptions of God. Followers of the rose, tiger, or ur-dog Rover worship Gan but not his true form. The *Dark Tower* ultimately disregards whether that matters; the reflection and chance to try again ultimately reign as utmost importance for the tower. The omnipresence of the tower across the multiverse echoes the pervasiveness of American fears, seen across the land, cities, and homes of the nation. Despite America being constantly faced with the sins of the past and present, God provides the ability to reflect and grow past those sins. The *Dark Tower* portrays a man's quest to save God and himself. The perils that threaten the dark tower signify threats to modern man's spirituality and ability to live full lives.

Drawing from tradition older than the gothic, King writes that science and hubris pose the largest threat to the tower, and thus God. The search for forbidden knowledge, information which might place man towards unseating God, informs many works of Western literature, from Genesis to Prometheus, classical or modern. In the gothic, this distrust of science generally appears in stories which transform humanity into something monstrous, e.g. Mr. Hyde, or lead to the creation of uncanny beings, such as Frankenstein's monster<sup>9</sup>. The tower mythos contains "old ones," beings whose civilization lies in ruins, laid out for Roland's generation to witness. As a young man Roland sees Citgo refineries in Mejis, a landscape analogous of the American southwest. Such refineries pollute the landscape and locals proclaim them the "ways of death" (WG 302). Later, Roland faces off against old one crafted sci-fi weapons like robots, lightsabers, or sneetches (WC 151). The old ones even created artificial doors through time and space, allowing tourism to the assassination of Kennedy or Lincoln (DT 538). Mid-World, being an apocalyptic twin of America, presents dark realizations of America's obsession with technology. Once more, the multiverse setting enables King to make the metaphorical literal when parallel Americans begin to worship technology.

The old ones' greatest sin seeks to replace God. Knowing somewhat of the importance of the dark tower, but not of its exact nature, the old ones seek to replace both the tower and its beams with their own technology (WL 73). Their efforts fail, and in an act of contrition, the old ones build guardian robots to protect the beams. Even these, however, demonstrate the fallibility of technology. By the time Roland, Eddie, and Susannah meet a guardian, Shardik the Bear, it exhibits dementia and disrepair (WL 75). Later on Roland learns that the tower, rose field, and

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<sup>9</sup> See "Twinners, Monsters, and Broken Things" for more on the monsters of the *Dark Tower*.

beams all comprise a living force — all aspects of Gan and all devoted to singing the praise of creation (DT 757). The beams carry Gan’s wishes throughout Mid-World and can even assume human form (DT 333-34). Despite the stories told to children, and believed by Roland, the old ones no more created the beams than they did existence. Unable to understand their universe, the old ones took credit in the machinations which helped it run. These parallel Americans, long dead by nuclear and chemical war, provide readers an uncanny vision of a possible future.

King argues that Americans and their love of cell phones, *Cell*, cars, *From a Buick 8*, and machines in general, *Tommyknockers*, often supplant a focus on self, community, or God. King’s parallel Americans, the old ones, embody scientism, the belief that “science, and only science, describes the world as it is in itself, independent of perspective” (Putnam ix-x). Unwilling to look beyond science for knowledge, the old ones signify criticisms of empiricism advanced by Romantic poets such as Keats. The inability to practice negative capability, Keat’s acceptance of “uncertainties, mysteries, [or] doubts,” about their cosmos drove the old ones to supplant God (Keats 277). The continual displacement of man at the center of his own universe, driven by heliocentrism, evolution, and even a possible multiverse, leads the old ones to forego God and attempt to become gods themselves. King combats this scientism with Gan’s multifaceted and intrinsic presence in each universe of the multiverse. Gan’s existence and variety of forms throughout the multiverse not only allow other faiths access to God, but guide how man can wrestle with sin and not collapse under the weight of evil. To further investigate the concept of redemption and sin, King uses a form of the tower to return to the origin of sin in western culture: woman.

### **A Rose by Any Other Name or Form**

The tower's ubiquitous presence through the tower multiverse in a myriad of forms presents a God that has no definite sex or species. Although technically Gan's navel, the tower invariably draws comparisons to a phallus. Likewise, the tower embodied by roses evoke vaginal symbolism. Existing in a tiger, dog, or any other animal alludes to various faiths that place divine presence in non-human forms. These various forms all point to valuing multiplicity and ambiguity when worshipping God. This divine spectrum of Gan-forms values both male and female, man and beast, one and many. The trade-off for a god that exists everywhere, anchoring the multiverse on his navel, is a god that evades binaries of good and evil. The rose form becomes just as important as the tower form throughout the *Dark Tower*, and King uses it to examine not sins against God but sins against women. The rose field surrounding the tower and the Keystone rose evoke fears of colonialism, spousal abuse, and male-dominant depictions of God.

Several critics have rightly claimed that King has a complicated and troubled past when portraying women in his works (Sears 12). The *Dark Tower* includes some of these shallow or banal women characters, from the idealized Susan Delgado to Rhea of the Cöos, a bitter oversexed hag who despises the youth and beauty of others. Perhaps to address this blind spot in his writing, King released three novels in the early nineties that depicted strong female characters fighting abusive men. *Gerald's Game* and *Dolores Claiborne* share women characters fighting not to be dominated by the men in their lives. Both Dolores and Jessie suffer from sexual assault or bondage but escape from their abusers. These two works parallel each other not only through a shared eclipse but through the strength and resolve of the female protagonists<sup>10</sup>. Three years after these

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<sup>10</sup> Tellingly, a masculine, solar eclipse, rather than a feminized lunar eclipse.

works, King published *Rose Madder*, a similar novel but one written to intertwine with the *Dark Tower*. Rose Daniels, abused to the point of miscarriage, flees from her husband and assumes her old name, Rose McClendon<sup>11</sup>. Rose's name subtly indicates a tie to the *Dark Tower*, one that becomes realized after she purchases a painting of her doppelganger, Rose Madder. Entering the painting, a world similar to Mid-World, Rose meets a twinner and the spirit of a woman her husband has killed. Norman tracks Rose, assumes a bull form, and dies at the hand of Madder inside the painting. A weaving of Greek myth, the labyrinth of spousal abuse, and *Dark Tower* mythos, *Rose Madder* equates the rose form of Gan with strong feminine characters. Rose makes another appearance in the *Dark Tower* via Rosalita Munoz, lover to Roland and a Lady of Oriza, a female warrior clan that use razor sharp dinner plates to fight patriarchy (WC 326-27). This third version of Rose Daniels, in addition to her deadliness, also performs domestic, healing, and sexual acts with equal aplomb. This holistic and positive portrayal of Rose, regardless of what form she takes, supplies the first female response to the masculine tower. The rose tower form found in New York City illustrates masculine threats through colonization.

While the Rose characters portray strong, independent women in the face of abuse and misogyny, the rose "tower" form examines gendered aspects of colonization. Postcolonial criticism shares concerns with the gothic, specifically viewing "the power relationships that the fictions of politics strive to conceal" (Hughes and William). Othering, repression, and morality grafted onto geographical boundaries guides not only the gothic, but as Hughes and William argue, the postcolonial. King situates this struggle in New York City, a junction of cultures, histories, and colonial history. Readers first encounter the rose tower of New York in *The Waste Lands*. Jake

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<sup>11</sup> 'Norman' Daniels, presenting the abuse as normative inside the twisted minds of sexual abusers.

Chambers skips school to find a doorway back into Mid-World and finds Keystone Earth's Gan, a rose in a vacant lot on the corner of second avenue and forty-sixth street. Jake begins to hear a chorus of ethereal voices, then the voice of the white, and sees a tiny sun glowing, nestled in the heart of the rose's petals. Despite the beauty and affirming power of the rose, Jake can also feel something wrong, an "invading worm" in the rose (WL 173). The weakness of the tower's masculine form affects the feminized rose form as the Crimson King's attack bleeds through all of reality. While Roland seeks to save the tower, his Keystone allies strive to save the rose, as both aspects of Gan are essential. The Sombra Corporation, representing masculine control through land development of the feminized landscape, seeks to build on the vacant lot, destroying the rose and further weakening the Mid-World tower. Urban sprawl becomes an affront to God. Arguing that men and women have a role in protecting female sanctity, King creates the Tet Corporation, a rival business designed to protect the rose. The corporation, run by various male and female allies on Keystone Earth, builds a tower around the rose, encompassing it in their lobby. King goes even farther than arguing for internalizing feminine qualities within the male form, signified by the rose in the tower, by including a telepathic sign that reads in all languages of the multiverse (DT 492-94). Valuing multiplicity over the dominant, colonial force of a master tongue, King further utilizes the multiversal setting to bolster the feminine subtext of the rose. Through numerous women named Rose and the rose tower of Keystone Earth, King argues for the power of women. In the vast rose fields that surround the dark tower, King recalls the power of man and woman joined through birth.

With the exception of the dark tower, the landscape of Mid-World greatly resembles America, with vast prairies, deserts, and woodlands. Only the tower stands reminiscent of the

European ruins that bore the gothic. King avoids setting the tower among the haunted woods of New England, plantation fields of the South, or even the West that saw Native Americans pushed to the brink of extinction. In the end, the rose fields that surround the dark tower attests to birth and rebirth. Roland sees many colors in the roses along the journey, from labial, coral pink to heart's desire red, to yellow galaxies spinning at the center of their petals (DT 756-57). The dark tower, Gan's navel, sits in the midst of a giant embryonic field of roses. The intersection of desire and love and obsession all coalesce in this place that has called to Roland his entire life. Gan's body, male and female, desires to heal itself and Roland, allowing him journey after journey until he can rest. This platonic form and purpose of Gan in Mid-World exists across the infinite worlds of King's multiverse, arguing that God exists and serves to heal his/her children. The gothic tower of the *Dark Tower* does not criticize institutions or haunt America, but provides a place for personal reflection and growth.

Although the gothic castle's origins lie in the ruins of institutions dedicated to clear, definitions of good and evil, or on the vast, unknowable landscape of America, authors such as King have adapted it to their own needs and purposes. The body of Gan itself, the dark tower does not fall under the weight of human sin but asks Roland to try again, to lead a better life. The sexual duality of the tower across the multiverse, focusing more on the navel rather than a phallus and vagina, evokes the nourishing connection between mother and child. The infinite presence of the tower across existence seeks to blur boundaries between man and woman or good and evil. Not every haunted house must fall and not every evil must be extinguished. Rather, there can be places that force one to confront their failures and encourage them to do better next time. For Roland, the

dark tower serves this purpose. The tower mythos contains not only infinite variations of the tower, but infinite variations of those who seek it.

## CHAPTER 3

## TWINNERS, MONSTERS, AND BROKEN THINGS

**Wicked Things**

Universal Studios began the tradition of assembling numerous monsters together in one universe through their horror films of the early twentieth century, calling on Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, and Wolf Man amongst others. King continues this practice throughout the *Dark Tower*, gathering not only his own creations but classic monsters too. Both Mid-World and Keystone Earth suffer from vampires, incubi and succubi, witches, mutants, zombies, human-animal hybrids, were-spiders, robot warriors, and shadowy unhuman figures, cloaked in yellow. Outside of the *Dark Tower*, King typically includes only one monster or villain per work, whether it be supernatural, *It*, psychological, *Misery*, or domestic and physical abuse, *Rose Madder*. For his magnum opus, however, King throws the kitchen sink of monsters at his heroes, empowered by the multiverse setting.

Each monstrous form King presents pays homage to their origin. The taheen, human-animal hybrids that serve the Crimson King, recall fears of racial bigotry and social Darwinism present in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>12</sup>. These grotesque creations, used to defamiliarize and confuse readers, become marginalized by the destabilization created by King's multiverse. Finli oTego, a weasel-faced taheen, absurdly enacts racial stereotypes via his Gaelic surname, garish clothes, and athletic prowess (DT 224). This description fits the taheen's grotesque purpose, highlighting "the immediate and identifiable vices and follies of human beings," specifically the foolishness of eugenics (Krzychylkiewicz). That said, the taheen, and thus the

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<sup>12</sup> H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* or H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow over Innsmouth*

racial fears they signify, play minor roles contrasted to the *Dark Tower's* vampires and wolves, grotesque creations who both gain new aspects through how King resolves or surrenders to tension between the multiverse and gothic. King's vampires retain their sexual aspects but become symbolic of shifting attitudes on homosexuality. The wolves that attack Calla Bryn Sturgis playfully argue that comic books and genre fiction can rot children's brains. Lastly, Randall Flagg, the quintessential villain of King's oeuvre, falls an unfortunate victim to King's reliance on gothic and Arthurian convention. Before looking at the gains and losses of these villains, a brief review of the quilted multiverse provides insight into the Pandora's Box that King opened through using a multiverse setting, namely that of infinite doppelgangers.

A quilted multiverse, one that argues for the existence of infinite universes beyond the cosmic horizon, contains statistical certainty that infinite copies of every man, woman, and child exist across space. Greene writes, "There are many perfect copies of you out there in the cosmos, feeling exactly the same way. And there's no way to say which is *really* you. All versions are physically and hence mentally identical....in every region of space that's roughly  $10^{10^{122}}$  meters across, there should be a cosmic patch that replicates ours — one that contains you, the earth, the galaxy, and everything else" (Greene 34). Although theoretical, this concept transforms the metaphorical doppelganger into literal doubles. Infinite copies of a human would realize a vast spectrum of possibilities, presenting a range of morality, actions, and beliefs. The implications of this possibility, scientific or artistic, can become staggering and could quickly bog down a narrative. King avoids letting his characters search for cosmic doppelgangers, although the voyage between universes becomes increasingly more available throughout the *Dark Tower*.

## Roland Prime

Clichéd expressions of fighting against your doppelgangers or beside them have been presented before to varying degrees of success. King chose the multiverse setting for infinite scale, not to examine numerous copies of one character. Rather than diminish his characters, not always round and developed to begin with, King presents singular visions of Roland, Eddie, Jake, and Susannah. When Roland rescues Jake in *The Waste Lands*, it's not a doppelganger Jake from another world, it's the Jake that he allowed to die in *The Gunslinger*<sup>13</sup>. Infinite doubles and access to them diminishes the threat of death and weakens personal relationships forged along the journey. Although Roland could have obtained another Jake, one identical to the previous one, Roland (and readers) feel a strong attachment and investment in the version they experience *first*. Charles Crow writes, "Stories about twins and doubles threaten the cherished belief that we are unique and individually significant. This is an especially powerful myth in the United States" (172). The infinite duplication of an individual across a quilted multiverse threatens the unique myth even farther, stripping away an essential aspect of American identity. King surrenders the potential of quantum doubles for more traditional portrayals. Beyond emotional bonds to platonic or prime versions of characters, conflicts arise between the convention of good and evil that pervades gothic works. An evil doppelganger of Roland or an innocent Randall Flagg would present nuanced portrayals of morality and investigate nature versus nurture on a multiversal scale, but King does not desire a character study to weigh down his already massive plot. King, therefore, chooses mainly to ignore the multiverse's impact on his heroes and villains, insofar as doppelgangers. The

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<sup>13</sup> Events of *The Drawing of the Three* created a branching timeline where Roland prevented Jake's death, allowing his re-entry into the series.

setting becomes a vehicle to gather a panoply of monsters from various traditions to threaten Roland's quest. Examining the origins of these monsters provides a helpful context to understand King's revision of them.

Doppelgangers, known as "twinners" in the tower multiverse, date back to the earliest gothic works. While castles allowed authors to examine social ailments, a more personal element was needed: an individual whom readers could fear, sympathize, and identify with, all at the same time. Elizabeth MacAndrew writes, "The figure of the double was thus born from the split and warring factions of the personality of the Gothic villain. The doubles figure showed that it was the nature of every man that the good in him must struggle in unending battle against the distortions of evil" (50-51). The double, whether literally a twin or merely someone who resembled the protagonist, signifies the duality of man and the capacity for evil within everyone. The struggle exists between an individual and the social codes surrounding them. While avoiding quantum doubles, the *Dark Tower* does provide traditional doubles for several characters, conflicts that must be resolved along the way. Susannah Dean first enters Mid-World as Odetta Holmes and Detta Walker, two personalities inhabiting the same body. Susannah merges these two parts of herself, crafting a third identity stronger than either Odetta or Detta. Eddie's brother embodies the darker possibilities within Eddie and Randall Flagg, Roland's foil, shares Roland's drive for reaching the tower no matter the cost. King includes traditional doubling of the characters to protect the myth of exceptionalism and individuality, ironic in a setting that argues just the opposite. The monsters of the *Dark Tower*, however, come closer to utilizing the potential that a multiverse bears.

### **Vampiric Subversion**

Monsters, in contrast to doubles, personify specific evils or sins in a culture, rather than the

general struggle to remain good. Beyond literature, othering also presented different races as monstrous during the reign of Imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. William Veeder writes:

Projection of terrifying desires onto the dark Other was originally a tactic of imperialist conquest...what was inadvertent with colonialism is constitutive of gothic. In reading, we avoid that denial of the terrible which repressive culture enacts. Reading gothic fiction parodies this repressive process, displacing onto characters and scenes those terrifying desires which are thereby positioned so that we can call them back to us in creative play. [We] regain contact not simply with forbidden desires but with desires forbidden because of their terrifying — and thus potentially therapeutic — power. (34)

The result of monsters and othering is the realization that in contacting forbidden desires an audience questions why that desire should be forbidden in the first place. In projecting sexual deviancy or heathenism on native peoples, a conquering nation reveals their own innermost fears and desires. The oppression of an impulse, not the desire itself, becomes evil. Monsters allow readers to identify with traits deemed unacceptable and judge whether the desire or the culture is “wrong.” By reading gothic works, an audience can subvert the dominant culture and come to peace with certain desires that the culture classifies as deviant or unwelcome. The monsters of the last two centuries provide clues as to which desires the dominant culture struggles with the most.

While doubles present a fairly binary split between good and evil, monsters investigate the gray areas that continue to defy consensus. Early on, monsters assumed human form through larger and exaggerated bodies such as Mr. Hyde or Frankenstein’s creation. Eventually, more demonic or

grotesque bodies, whether zombies, werewolves, or aliens began to appear. The multifaceted forms that these monsters assumed fit the more ambiguous nature of the fears or desires they represented. In examining *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Punter and Byron write, “it is suggested that the real problem is not the existence of some more primitive and passionate internal self, but the force with which that self must be repressed in accordance with social conventions...the texts also imply it is not simply a *split* that is at issue but a more complex fragmentation of the subject” (41; emphasis in original). This fragmenting of a double into numerous monster forms argues that while good and evil exist, a culture’s perception of what constitutes evil may not always be correct, necessitating subversive elements within the culture. That ambivalence towards certain moral grey areas, such as human sexuality, works well within King’s multiverse setting.

King’s second novel, *Salem’s Lot*, tapped into one of mankind’s oldest monsters: the vampire. The monster appears in nearly every culture and early on “functioned primarily to explain the spread of disease and sudden deaths in the community” (Punter and Byron 268). The vampire became gradually sexualized, associated with the transmission and consumption of bodily fluids, whether blood or semen. The vampire became symbolic of various sexual transgressions, including sexual assault or the burgeoning sexuality within oneself (MacAndrew 168). Although King minimizes the erotic titillation that often accompanies vampire novels, i.e. Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* or Meyer’s *Twilight* series, the eroticism of vampires remains present and dominates the novel. Rather than seeking to arouse readers, the sexual acts of Kurt Barlow and his vampire children delve into abject sexuality, with clear subtexts of incest, pedophilia, and necrophilia in the novel (*Dissecting* 40). King avoids equating homosexuality with perversion, focusing on predation

instead. The ambiguous relationship between homosexuality, vampires, and sexual perversion, originating in *'Salem's Lot* (1975) becomes clarified decades later in the *Dark Tower* (2004).

Depictions of homosexuality throughout *'Salem's Lot* stem from public fear, mistrust, and ignorance, mirroring America's belief of homosexuals at that time. The novel was published in the early years of the gay right's movement; the American Psychiatric Association had declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder just two years prior (Eads 79). Homophobia leads to the town's downfall as Barlow and his assistant Straker are perceived as "fag interior decorators" (SL 90). Effeminized, Barlow can safely prey on the unsuspecting community. Ben Mears and Mark Petrie, the novel's heroes, have also been othered through failing to perform masculinity to the community's satisfaction (Eads 85). Homophobia in *'Salem's Lot* both welcomes destruction and discounts the only two men strong enough to defeat the vampiric invasion.

Despite this criticism of homophobia, King's portrayal of George Middler can be troubling. Middler, a thinly-closeted homosexual, commits the final act of vampirism of the novel, satisfying his "darkest fantasies" on local high school boys (Eads 78). This act partially justifies the *'Lot's* perception of homosexuals as child predators and perverts, but prior to his vampiric conversion, Middler satisfies his needs through cross-dressing and masturbation. Examining predation and vampirism, Sean Eads writes, "Vampirism is clearly a metaphor for power and control within the novel, so much so that we can say within the confines of *'Salem's Lot* there is neither a potentially monstrous homosexuality or heterosexuality specifically, only a potentially monstrous sexuality in general" (83). Acts of sexual perversion come not from one's sexual identity, but the loss of self-denial that vampirism brings. King, joining the APA, removes homosexuality from the list of sexual perversions, within the context of gothic vampires. The most enduring portrayal and

investigation into homosexuality from the novel, Father Callahan's failure to defeat Barlow, represents the failure of Christianity to accept homosexuals. King uses the multiverse concept to draw Father Callahan, vampires, and homosexuality back into his discourse.

The sexual history of Father Callahan, a brief aspect of the *Dark Tower*, plays a large role in how both monsters and a multiverse encourage accepting multiple viewpoints and moral relatives as compared to the absolutes of doubles or a universe. King briefly mentions that Callahan was forced to burn *Playboys* he had as a boy and pray for forgiveness, a memory that haunts him still (WC 599). This shaming of Callahan's sexual curiosity, led by his father, demonstrates how the contempt and veiling of sexuality causes trauma, inhibits communication between parent and child and leads to ignorance of one's sexual identity. The stifling of a predominant, biological urge leads people to experience shame, fear, and confusion towards sexuality: thus, the vampire. From there, Callahan receives a strongly homoerotic baptism at the throat of Kurt Barlow, forced to drink pulsing, vampire blood. The fear in the moment originates not from the homosexual aspect of the consumption, but how Barlow forces Callahan against his will to do so. King writes:

*Barlow's hands are strong, implacable. As Callahan is drawn forward, he suddenly understands what is going to happen. Not death. Death would be a mercy compared to this. No, please no, he tries to say, but nothing comes out of his mouth but one small, whipped moan....Callahan's mouth is pressed against the reeking flesh of the vampire's cold throat....In the end he does what all alcoholics must do once the booze has taken them by the ears: he drinks. (WC 260-61; emphasis in original)*

While Barlow's strength forces Callahan towards his neck, the majority of this memory focuses on

weakness and victimization. Callahan loses his voice, succumbs to the blood like he yields to alcohol, and is forced to live with this memory. The horror of the moment comes not from Barlow's sex but from Callahan's loss of power and control of his body, irrevocably altered by this experience. This rape at Barlow's hands further drives Callahan's sexual identity inward.

Callahan's pain drives him to flee not just 'Salem's Lot, but his own universe. Travelling in exile, Callahan settles in New York. Continuing his humanitarian past, he volunteers at a homeless shelter, meeting Lupe Delgado. Lupe's surname matches Roland's young lover, Susan Delgado, in a deliberate conjuring of that star-crossed love. Just as Roland fell under the spell of Susan, Lupe Delgado seduces Callahan. King writes, "By March I'd fallen in love with him. Does that make me queer? A faggot? I don't know. They say we all are, don't they? Some do, anyway...I had no reason to think of myself as queer...Nor was there ever anything physical between Lupe and me. But I loved him...There was a physical attraction" (WC 272). Attempting to justify his attraction by normalizing homosexual tendencies, Callahan confesses to being at least bi-curious. Even with the distance of years and universes, Callahan struggles to identify and accept his own sexual nature. The attraction to Lupe becomes jealousy when Callahan witnesses a vampire feeding on Lupe's neck. Although Callahan enacts revenge for his own abuse, the erotic overtones of the scene also indicate sexual frustration Callahan feels being unable to bring himself to express his sexuality with Lupe. King, drawing on the disease spreading tradition of vampires, infects Lupe with AIDS from this predator, leading to Lupe's death. Distraught, Callahan once more hits the road, eventually landing in Mid-World.

The continued adventures of Father Callahan present shifting beliefs on homosexuality in America since his first depiction in 1975. *'Salem's Lot* included various examples of sexual

perversion designed to reinforce certain social codes, i.e. incest or pedophilia are wrong, but King did not illustrate homosexuality as immoral. He avoids outright defending homosexuals, but they stood on King's periphery, waiting for a sea change. The relationship of Callahan and Lupe indicate such a change as their sexual identities exhibit sympathy, not perversion. King places America's struggle to accept homosexuality within Callahan<sup>14</sup>. The spread of AIDS throughout the community and threat of violent homophobes illicit sympathy and anger from readers. Callahan's suffering at the hands of both Barlow and the Crimson King firmly place hate crimes against the LGBT community as immoral, something King only hinted at before.

Comprising three chapters of *Wolves of the Calla*, Callahan's journey into Mid-World via the multiverse setting focuses exclusively on vampirism and the homosexual community. Callahan arrives in the *Dark Tower* novels first, but King quickly introduces Ted Brautigan, Dinky Earnshaw, and Patrick Danville<sup>15</sup>. These and other characters appear in the *Dark Tower* but only Callahan's journey dominates the narrative so thoroughly and becomes intertwined with Roland's quest. The multiverse allows King an opportunity not just to revisit characters from past works but to revisit the conflicts inherent to those works. Although '*Salem's Lot* evaded AIDS, *Wolves of the Calla* addresses it directly and with the benefit of three decades of medical research. The vampiric transmission of disease becomes paramount in the homosexual community of the 1980s, under the siege of AIDS. King portrays Callahan and Lupe as victims, not because of their homosexuality but because of those who would prey on them due to their homosexuality. Callahan expresses disgust at the ignorance and slow response to the needs of the community, reminding readers of

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<sup>14</sup> Callahan's classification of Vampires by their ability or inability to reproduce or not mirrors an aspect of American preoccupation and discomfort with gay marriage and adoption (WC 269).

<sup>15</sup>"Low men in yellow coats," "Everything's Eventual," and *Insomnia* respectively.

“GRID—Gay-Related Immune Deficiency...[or] newspaper articles about a new disease called ‘Gay Cancer’” (WC 270). Americans othered homosexuals by defining AIDS as a homosexual disease, demonstrating similar methodology when othering native cultures during colonialism. Callahan’s anger towards this sequestering of AIDS only to the homosexual community joins another example of homophobia and violence through the “Hitler Brothers.”

Nazis and World War Two iconography have pervaded multiverse works due to the massive cultural impact of Nazi Germany on western culture. Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* posits an America that lost WWII and became a German colony. Various *Star Trek* series have visited Nazi Germany or a parallel Nazi America. King follows this tradition several times in the *Dark Tower*, including a crashed Focke-Wulf German fighter plane outside of Lud (WL 275). The most direct recollection of Nazi morality and persecution come from the Hitler Brothers, two thugs who attack Jews and African-Americans throughout New York. The Hitler Brothers attack Father Callahan at the behest of the Low Men, furious that Callahan hunts vampires across America. The brothers carve a cross on his forehead, an act that ironically allows Callahan to be a Priest once more (WC 437). Callahan prevents the spread of AIDS through killing these vampires, thus protecting the homosexual community. The Crimson King does not purposefully seek to eliminate homosexuals, but his vampire servants speed the process along. King’s nomenclature conjures the systematic genocide of Jews, homosexuals, and other targets of Nazi Germany. While America never established a widespread program to kill homosexuals, King argues that the initially passive response to AIDS indicates a sinister apathy. Callahan’s death and entry into Mid-World presents one last vampiric concept, tapping into American distrust of corporations.

American culture changed dramatically over the thirty years that King wrote the *Dark Tower*, evidenced by his defense of homosexuals. One constant throughout his series, inspired by 80's greed, was the evil of corporate America. The Sombra Corporation, a front of the Crimson King, works to destroy all of reality. Offered a million dollars for his homeless shelter by the Sombra Corporation, Callahan comes face-to-face with a boardroom full of AIDS carrying vampires. Afraid of their kiss, he jumps out a window to his death. Callahan accepts his sexuality in this moment, not afraid of AIDS but of their predator nature. This revelation bestows peace on Callahan and allows him to preach once more (WC 456). Callahan joins Roland's company for a brief time before sacrificing himself to save Jake Chambers. His successful conjuring of his faith and the power of the white at the moment of his death signifies acceptance of his sexuality and his welcoming into God's graces<sup>16</sup>. Through Callahan's life and death, King examines how acceptance of sexual expression may change over time, but sexual assault and apathy towards human suffering remain evil. The vampire provides the perfect body for such a conversation, and the multiverse allows King to revisit the issue after many decades. The next issue that King tackles through monsters denotes a more personal fear of his, mainly that of his legacy.

### **It's Pop Culture — Do You Know Where Your Child Is?**

The titular villains of *Wolves of the Calla* demonstrate King's multiverse gathering characters from other texts, not to revisit old characters but to examine genre fiction's place in the culture consciousness. The true nature of the villains, wolves in name only, demonstrates King's intent. The werewolf, a gothic double created to show the unleashed id in bestial form, denoted fears of racial and genetic evolution and classification in the wake of Darwin's *Origin of Species*

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<sup>16</sup> Callahan's faith failed him while confronting Barlow.

(*Dissecting* 68-73). Although racism still remains prevalent in America, the scientific backing of it via degeneration or eugenics have steadily disappeared. King, no stranger to the werewolf, has previously examined the social isolation of the monster in *Cycle of the Werewolf* and *The Talisman*. Both texts examine the duality of good and evil, the “perpetuation [revealing] our inability to evolve past our base instincts, to purge them completely from the human psyche” (“The Monster”). King writes the purging of instincts in *Wolves of the Calla* on a community rather than an individual and these wolves represent a different collapse than race or genes, mainly that of social and cultural values. *Wolves of the Calla* reveals fears that genre fiction such as sci-fi, horror, or comic books, rot the minds of American youths.

Drawing other pop culture works into his tower multiverse, King defines himself a member of that community. The wolves resemble Marvel Comic’s Doombots, Andy the Robot reminds Eddie of C-3PO, and the entire plotline of the novel clearly duplicates *The Magnificent Seven*. The wolves, armed with lightsabers and sneetches, threaten the community every generation, stealing children, and returning them later emotionally and mentally handicapped, a condition known as roont — ruined. The Calla’s children, once returned, grow only physically. The wolves have emptied psychic abilities from the children, cementing their mental capacity at childhood. King satirizes the fears of mothers and kind-hearted people everywhere — genre fiction rots your brain, in this case, literally.

Comic books, horror films, and video games can present to parents an outside, omnipresent threat to their child’s mental and emotional health. King’s favored E.C. Comics were among the targets of the Comics Code, a federal censorship committee inspired by Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* and U.S. Senate hearings. In response, Harvey Comics targeted children and

presented inoffensive ghosts, witches, and even the rich with child-friendly Casper, Wendy, and Richie Rich (Jackson and Arnold). Decades later the American public sought to censor another witch, Harry Potter, for “occult, Satanism, and violence” (“Frequently Challenged”). Landing on the top of the frequently challenged books list in 2001 and 2002, the *Harry Potter* series revealed how uncomfortable some parents and readers still are with depictions of “others,” monstrous or human. Challenging *Harry Potter*, under the pretense of threatening young minds, ironically robs children of developmentally beneficial works. Judith Robertson, examining the advantages of fantasy, writes, “From early childhood, then, mental life is crucially affected by its capacity to recognize and tolerate the disagreement between omnipotent phantasy and expectation, and the reality that is actually encountered. Healthy development demands multiformulaic projects through which the psyche may be led to investigate and adjust to the demands of shared living” (Robertson 199). Genre works, including *Harry Potter* or E.C. Comics, lead children to discern between fantasy and reality. Of course, there are various alternatives to *Harry Potter* that could be read in order to build this perception, but one strength of *Harry Potter* lies in self-discipline. Faced with the Mirror of Erised and tools to avenge his childhood, Harry and his friends often favor mercy, compassion, and dialogue with evil. Denying himself ultimate power or satisfaction, Harry portrays a “child’s struggle to establish a sense of self as autonomous, alone, not omnipotent, but secure” (Robertson 206). Harry, unlike Roland, can deny himself his own heart’s desires for the greater good. Although Roland’s quest of saving existence clearly falls within the “greater good,” his methods towards achieving said goal, sacrificing friends and family if needed, leave much to be desired. King includes these fantasy works not only to pay tribute to them, but to include himself as part of the beneficial genre community.

Not a critic, but well versed in genre works, King knows very well the appeal that science fiction or comic books provide for readers. King, acknowledging the psychological impact of genre, writes, “What are tales of magic but stories of power? [There] is no impotence in the stories of the sword and sorcery genre, nor in those stories of Batman and Superman and Captain Marvel which we read as children and then — hopefully — gave up as we moved on to more challenging literature and wider views of what the life experience really is” (DM 369-70). King argues that children, who lack power and the means of attaining it, learn to wield power responsibly for the community from these works. Adult literature, providing wider, more ambiguous representations of life, also nourishes the soul. Reading *only* fantasy and horror fiction as an adult represents a continued impotence. The nature of the wolves demonstrates the dangers of reading only genre works, but their defeat defends the role of genre fiction in childhood.

The key to defeating the wolves comes from an old man’s tale, one who had defeated a wolf in his youth. The robotic wolves have a “thinking cap,” that transmits orders. Without it, they die (WC 665). Once Roland and his company pay heed to the stories of their elders and respect what at first seems a childish fantasy, they succeed in defending Calla Bryn Sturgis from the wolves. The institution and shared knowledge of stories, whether designed for children or adults, exists to help people navigate the complexities of life. The wolves gently satirize the dangers of genre fiction while paradoxically defending its role in culture. By broadening his multiverse to include the worlds of Oz, Tatooine, Hogwarts, and Latveria, King draws on modern fiction to add ambiguity to his depiction of werewolves. Gothic works often build upon works and genres, including the romanticism of the nineteenth century. The *Dark Tower* contains an underlying romantic thread, that of King Arthur’s mythology. By doing so, King robbed his trickster figure,

Randall Flagg, of the glorious death he so richly deserves.

### **A Trickster's Death**

First appearing in *The Stand*, Flagg terrorizes numerous worlds of the tower multiverse. His origins vaguely resemble Roland's, providing him a double in typical gothic fashion. Both Roland and Randall left home at a young age to face trials. Roland suffered from the loss of his lover and Randall, then known as Walter Padick, ran away from home at thirteen and was raped (DT 184). Walter refuses to return home and becomes the villain that haunts King's multiverse, known as Marten Broadcloak, Walter O'Dim, The Dark Man, The Man in Black, and most infamously, Randall Flagg. Walter haunts Roland's lifetime, from childhood through the tower quest. As Marten, Walter seduces Roland's mother and tricks Roland into shooting her. In *The Gunslinger*, Walter encourages Roland to drop Jake Chambers to his death. Text after text, Walter works against the white because that's what King needs him for. All the suffering and pain Walter inflicts originates directly from the suffering that King places on him. Even Walter's defeat signifies the gothic institution reigning over him.

King revels in the medieval and romantic conventions of the gothic and repurposes Arthurian legend for his saga. Roland descends from King Arthur and his guns come from the same steel as Arthur's Excalibur. Unwilling to abandon the Arthur myth, King works Mordred into the plot as a MacGuffin for Randall to obtain and use to enter the dark tower. Mordred, a human baby/were-spider, grows quickly and devours Randall Flagg. King's adherence to Arthurian legend consumes his greatest villain with little fanfare. Flagg's death shows King's unwillingness to fully embrace the multiverse concept. A multiverse breeds ambiguity and uncertainty, qualities essential in a trickster figure such as Flagg. King could have chosen any number of lies or tricks to

present readers or characters with, emboldened by the potential of a multiverse. Flagg could have been Roland from another universe, a twinner who shares the same quest for the tower but with different reasons for doing so. Instead, King surrenders to romantic and gothic tradition, forcing Mordred into the narrative. Despite this misstep, King's balance of good, evil, and shades of gray in between balance demands of the gothic and the promise of a multiverse.

Massing an immense collection of characters to populate his *Dark Tower* novels, King faces the most pronounced discord between his gothic intentions and the epic setting. Protecting the individuality of his heroes, King avoids multiplicitous depictions of them, placing them safely in the traditional good versus evil construct of the gothic. His monsters, however, provide more ambiguous uses of the multiverse. Callahan and his battle against the vampires reveal how a multiverse allows authors to draw on past characters and conflicts to portray how morals change over time. The wolves gathered from various genre works both subvert and enforce the power that genre fiction permits children and adults. Lastly, King avoids the ambiguity that a multiverse encourages through the demise of Randall Flagg, denying his double qualities of Roland, thus protecting Roland's champion of good status. Demons, vampires, wolves, and evil hybrids travel across the multiverse attempting to destroy reality while forces of the white gather from multiple worlds to save reality. Walter Padick will be the villain no matter what universe he exists in, just as Roland will always be the hero. Although King avoids all the potential that his multiverse setting allows him the overall blend of gothic, western, sci-fi, and horror somehow coalesce into a successful epic that embodies King's oeuvre.

## AFTERWORD

## THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

“The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed” (DT 830). Thus ends Stephen King’s magnum opus, the *Dark Tower*. Ending the series as he began it, King threads recursive structuralism with reflection on the *Dark Tower*, including the timespan of its composition — “June 19, 1970-April 7, 2004” (DT 830). The final pages of the *Dark Tower* include the full text of Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” and an author’s note justifying both the use of metafiction and the end of the series. In doing so, King indicates a much more personal benefit of choosing a multiverse setting: reflecting on his place as an author of fiction.

Before the multiverse allowed King a unique way to reflect on his career, it enabled him to examine and portray a myriad of gothic conventions. The various cosmological models present in the *Dark Tower* evoke the uncanny fears of body integrity and uniqueness while simultaneously observing the deteriorating borders between physics and philosophy. God’s omnipresence throughout the multiverse, signified both structurally and organically, haunts all of existence with the potential for redemption and growth and of holistic sexuality. Monsters and heroes travel from world to world giving new context to homosexuality, pop culture, and Arthurian legend. The vast labyrinth of the *Dark Tower* multiverse fades in importance when contrasted in the last pages to King’s life and journey. The final conflict of the *Dark Tower* is King’s attempt to situate himself among his peers.

The intertextuality of a multiverse guides King to weave himself into a large fabric of authors and texts that he appreciates, situating himself among them. King strews clear allusions to

characters, locales, and objects from Oz, Narnia, Hogwarts and others in appreciation of them, recognizing that he wants his works to join them in the parthenon of American fiction. Veiled references and stylistic imitations of Lovecraft, Chambers, Hawthorne, Poe, and Bierce signify King's desire to be counted among the more cerebral authors of gothic fiction. This encyclopedic integration of himself into the canon clashes with his antagonistic and consistent devaluing of the literary establishment. Justifying his entrance into the *Dark Tower*, King exhibits this conflicted relationship: "There's a smarmy academic term for this—"metafiction." I hate it. I hate the pretentiousness of it" (DT 843). While he proclaims his despisal of the term, King is not above using metafiction to become a hero in his own novels. This tension between himself and the literary community resembles the conflict between an individual and the annihilating power of a multiverse.

A multiverse setting annihilates an individual when faced with the infinite size of the cosmos. A city, on a smaller scale, can evoke a similar reaction. Writing on the cosmopolitan nature of sublime, Binney writes, "The subject can be empowered to act morally toward foreign and unfamiliar peoples, and politically through a profound sense of his or her limitations made aware through the experience of the sublime's external magnitude...the recognition of larger, complex, or even limitless communities that have elaborate and sophisticated customs and beliefs" (Binney). Communities can lead one to confront their place in the world and act accordingly for the benefit of all rather than oneself. This sublime response could be writ large across King's multiverse, a cosmos presenting an ever larger confrontation with one's diminished size in the face of something infinite. Rather, King does something different; he reasserts the power and potential of the individual.

Critics have long written on the failure of King's heroes to succeed. Trusted with power and ability to confront evil, King's protagonists often stumble toward the end. Patrick McAleer argues that:

King provides a layered discussion focused on a constant lamentation for himself and his generation—the Baby Boomers: a selection of people who were positioned to radically alter their social landscape and who reportedly had the necessary means to do so, yet failed to use the available resources, which were required to accomplish their ends and must now live with and face the constant reminders of their resonating and collective collapse.

(McAleer 1210)

The failure of his characters who possess the means to fully defeat or resist evil, such as Danny Torrance's alcoholism in *Doctor Sleep* or Louis Creed's resurrection of his son in *Pet Sematary*, symbolize the inability of Boomers to defeat poverty, sickness, and war. Through the failure of a community only the individual triumphs. A character's success in King's works lies in their refusal and removal from the community: "In King's fictional America, society is the ultimate corrupting force which individual characters must either rise above or be dragged down by, so that what readers are presented with is an internal version of the frontier myth...one must leave the corruptive trappings of American society behind and strike out on one's own, relying only on personal ethics and integrity" (Smith). A multiverse supplies King infinite frontiers to situate the fight of an individual against the community. Eddie, Jake, and Susannah all succeed because they redefine themselves in a new context, removed from the limitations of their previous communities. King's composition of these works celebrates the healing potential of the frontier.

Though King decidedly hopes to be included among the storied authors of America, his writing also indicates that he ultimately serves the story, the purpose of which was reflection and redemption. Justifying the circular nature of Roland's quest, King writes:

It was all about reaching the Tower, you see—mine as well as Roland's—and that has finally been accomplished. You may not like what Roland found at the top, but that's a different matter entirely....I wasn't exactly crazy about the ending, either, if you want to know the truth, but it's the right ending. The only ending, in fact. You have to remember that I don't make these things up, not exactly; I only write down what I see. (DT 844)

The *Dark Tower* novels gave King a decades long journey of reflecting on and correcting his early faults as a writer, specifically in the portrayal of homosexuals and women. King gathered his better works within an über-tale of epic scale and importance. The multiverse setting allowed King decades to find, define, and redefine himself as a writer; one whose worlds will join Poe's, Lovecraft's, and Chamber's in the haunting of America for centuries to come.

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