

AND JUST AS FAR AS EVER FROM THE END: A
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE GUNSLINGER BY
STEPHEN KING

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DEDICATION

For Stephen King, who showed me the path;
For my parents, who encouraged me to take it;
And for my husband, who traveled the path with me.

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My hometown public library is the coolest place on Earth, and my dad and I spent many afternoons together in its magical children’s section when I was little. Eventually, however, I started to notice the “grown-up” novels my mother brought home from the library, and began reading them on the sly. I soon learned there was no need to hide: my parents almost never kept me from reading anything I got my hands on. They encouraged me to read and ask questions, and to look for my own answers when theirs weren’t good enough for me. William and Geneva McGown nurtured my desire to learn, and for that, I owe them an infinite amount of gratitude and love.

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ABSTRACT

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AND JUST AS FAR AS EVER FROM THE END: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE GUNSLINGER BY STEPHEN KING

Beginning as a collection of short stories published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1978 and novelized in 1982, *The Gunslinger* is the first novel in Stephen King's Dark Tower series. This thesis explores the textual journey of the novel that serves as the foundation for a series that has left its mark throughout King's broader fictional canon.

After finishing the final three novels of the series, King revised *The Gunslinger* to bring it closer to the narrative essence of the series' subsequent novels. Collation of all three versions of the text—the serialized *Fantasy & Science Fiction* stories, the 1982 novelization and the 2003 revised and expanded version—reveals a sometimes overlapping pattern of revisions to the novel. These revisions concentrate on character, the novel's cosmological framework, and languages and dialects King uses later in the series. The impact of these revisions extends beyond the plot elements of the series itself, as a number of King's most popular novels—*The Stand*, *'Salem's Lot*, and *It* among them—have plot arcs that bend toward the Dark Tower mythos.

King returned to the novel's three main characters—Roland, Jake, and the man in black—to refine their actions and clarify their motivations. This also gave him the opportunity to provide the reader with more of their interwoven histories, a

strategy that established the background for the role each character plays later in the series. In addition to introducing details about the main characters of the series, King enhances and redefines the world of *The Gunslinger*; the revisions reveal connections both within and outside of the Dark Tower multiverse. King also uses revision to introduce a variety of languages and dialects Roland encounters on his journey through an endless path of worlds.

Finally, the textual evolution of *The Gunslinger* documents King's development of a theme central to his entire canon: the multifaceted theme of salvation and sacrifice. In controlling the evolution of the Dark Tower series, particularly with his return to revise *The Gunslinger*, Stephen King shows that he is capable of maintaining a complex saga with a great degree of literary vision and craftsmanship.

Jonathan R. Eller, Ph.D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE

In 1970, King began writing a story about a man named Slade, a gunslinger in a post-apocalyptic world who was unrelentingly focused on the trail of his archenemy, the unnamed man in black¹ (Vincent 2004, 1). That literary exercise developed into five connected stories about a gunslinger named Roland, serialized in the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* from October 1978 to November of 1981. A year later, the stories were collected and *The Gunslinger* was released in novel form by Donald M. Grant Publishers; it soon became the first book in an emerging series called The Dark Tower (a controlling metaphor based on Robert Browning's poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"). Over the next 22 years, King added six novels to the Dark Tower saga, concluding the series on September 21, 2004 (King's 57th birthday) with the final novel, *The Dark Tower*.

In 2003, twenty-five years after the opening chapters of Stephen King's *The Gunslinger* first reached print in serial form, King revisited what had become the foundational work in his canon. He undertook this task to revise—and, in effect, re-create—the first novel in what is now one of the most prominent multi-volume works in contemporary fantasy: the Dark Tower series. For my thesis, I will rely on the enumerative and analytical methodologies of textual studies as I compare and evaluate the two most distinct published versions of *The Gunslinger*. In the process, I will identify the major categories of variation that emerge from my collation of King's

¹ King's usage of "the man in black", which does not include capitalization, has become convention for both King and his critics.

revisions. I will also interpret what these revisions tell us about King's maturing vision for this novel, and for the series it has introduced to two generations of readers.

Roland's quest for the Dark Tower has taken Stephen King through a thirty-year process of universe-building that has radiated out into no small number of his more general works. One of the most prolific writers of our time, King has published nearly forty novels and eight short story collections; of those, more than half connect directly or indirectly² to the Dark Tower mythos. Through characters who pop up unexpectedly from book to book (including one who manages to walk through just about every major King novel), concepts and ideas that are universal in King's literary world, and places where whole series of King's novels and stories unfold,³ King has created a universe that bleeds into nearly every story he tells. It could be said, then, that *The Gunslinger* is itself King's own Dark Tower: the novel is the nucleus around which almost all of his stories spin. And in order to appreciate the impact *The Gunslinger* has on the Dark Tower mythos and so many of King's other works, it is essential to examine the textual journey of the novel.

Analysis based on the collations reveals several traceable patterns in King's revisions. In the following chapters, I will analyze the collation record to illuminate his development of character, cosmology and language. King focused on refining the novel's three main characters, expanding the general structure of the book's universe, and bringing key aspects of the novel's language in line with the linguistic flavor he

² Novels like *Insomnia* and *The Stand* employ enough elements of Dark Tower mythology to compose a subcategory apart from the seven novel series. Others, like *Hearts in Atlantis* and *The Talisman*, contain tangential but solid connections to the DT universe.

³ A perfect little horror of a town, Castle Rock served as the setting for ten of King's novels and more than a dozen his short stories, until it was destroyed in King's satirical horror novel *Needful Things*.

had subsequently developed throughout the series. Taken as a whole, these revisions help us understand King's underlying objectives for the series and its relation to his larger literary vision.

The full record of variation has allowed me to determine the true history of textual transmission through the successive serial and book publications, and it will let me close the largest scholarly gap of all: the lack, to date, of comprehensive literary analysis and criticism of King's re-fashioning and re-visioning of *The Gunslinger*. At this time, no other comprehensive comparison of the two versions (three, including the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* serialization) exists, nor has there been any other textual analysis of the novel published.

The following chapters in this thesis will use the collation to prove several points regarding King's revision of *The Gunslinger*. First, I will focus on how King revised *The Gunslinger* to reshape and refine several main characters in the novel and, by extension, in the entire Dark Tower series. Roland is the series' protagonist and is, at first glance, the Arthurian knight on a quest to save the mysterious Dark Tower. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes clear that Roland's own future is fused—in some strange and fundamental way—to his past, to the decisions and the sacrifices he makes to propel himself along the road to the Tower. Roland's own beliefs, his imagination (or his woeful lack thereof), and his dangerous single-mindedness are laid bare in the original novel, displayed for the reader as merely the path Roland must walk to reach his the Tower. In the revised *Gunslinger*, however, the non-judgmental tone of narration subtly darkens, becoming by nearly imperceptible degrees as faintly damning as the narrator in *Death in Venice*. Murder

and betrayal, common currency in Roland’s life when we meet him in the original version, are given more weight in the revised version, and the nature of good and evil are called into question.

The Gunslinger has a growing and devoted following, but like much of King’s work, little academic attention has been paid to the novel. Several websites⁴ have noted and categorized the changes appearing in the expanded and revised versions of the novel, but no detailed analysis has been done until now. There are several list comparisons of the 1982 version and the 2003 version available online, but there is no comprehensive, line-by-line collation of the two discrete *Gunslinger* texts. Further, the comparisons available do not include the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* 1978-1981 serialization of *The Gunslinger*. My analysis includes all three versions of the work. These collations represent the primary research component of my thesis, and serve to fill these gaps in the public record of textual variation.

Despite *The Gunslinger*’s profound impact on King’s later work, the story that became the linchpin of his literary universe was almost abandoned. King never intended to publish *The Gunslinger* as a novel, calling it “a story with limited appeal” (Vincent 2004, 11). But his desire to construct a unique epic prevailed, and through the novel he aimed to explore “what would happen if you brought two very distinct genres together: heroic fantasy and the Western” (Vincent 2004, 8). That combination resulted in a novel far different than his usual horror stories, and King anticipated

⁴ Websites like The Dark Tower Compendium, the unofficial website thedarktower.com, and King’s own Dark Tower site all have message boards and Wikis which address differences in the editions; with the exception of King’s website, none of these websites are authoritative.

confusion, perhaps even backlash, from his Constant Readers⁵. Still, sales of the limited first printing of *The Gunslinger* were brisk, and second printings in 1986 were being sold for as much as \$100 (Vincent 2004, 10). A trade paperback was published in September 1988, and the book—after four years of being available only in limited print—was suddenly available to a much larger pool of readers.

In 1989, *The Gunslinger* existed in three typeset forms, proceeding linearly from *Fantasy & Science Fiction* through Grant, and to the Plume trade paperback⁶; nearly seven years passed between the story's debut to a small audience and its reintroduction to a larger audience. There were no further Dark Tower novels published between 1982 and 1987, but in the afterword of *The Gunslinger*, King acknowledged that he was developing the larger concept of the Dark Tower series, saying that the book was “the first stanza in a much longer work” (King 1989, 219).

Despite the stretch of years between the *F&SF* and Grant editions, the quantity of King’s revisions remained minimal, and he concentrated more on eliminating dated seventies slang and clarifying confusing phrases. Such changes went largely unnoticed—as did the book itself. King’s initial apprehensions against releasing *The Gunslinger* as a novel were partially justified. The novel’s strong fantasy element did not appear to turn anyone off, and his readers were introduced to a new aspect of King’s writing. But while King’s Constant Readers clamored for access to the book, the mainstream press ignored the book until its mass release. There are very few reviews of *The Gunslinger* from its first incarnation in the Grant

⁵ A term King uses to describe his most devoted fans.

⁶ A mass market paperback was published by Signet in 1989; the typesetting appears to be identical to the Plume trade paperback.

edition—in fact, it appears there are no major book reviews of *The Gunslinger* printed until 1989, some months after the Plume trade paperback edition was published. In the reviews of the revised novel, however, *The Gunslinger* is recognized for beginning what could be considered one of literature’s modern epics; furthermore, the reviews acknowledge the development and refinement of King’s craft. This contrast of reactions illustrates an understanding and respect for both the work and the writer.

In January of 1989, the New York Times published the most accessible review of *The Gunslinger* in its novel form, calling it a story “which mixes its genres—the western, science fiction—as well as its metaphors” (Fuller 1989, 22). In his review, Richard Fuller continued to chastise King for his “sophomoric” effort, warning readers against a story with no real focus. That *The Gunslinger* is merely the beginning of a larger work—something Fuller acknowledges, then immediately dismisses—is not taken into account. He also gives the impression that the story is raw and unfinished, something King himself notes in the afterword (King 1988, 219). It would appear that early reviewers of the novel did not understand it, dismissing it as a lofty hodge-podge with no discernable direction.

Viewing the first Dark Tower series through the lens of time, King agrees with his early critics. In a 2003 interview with USA Today, King acknowledged that *The Gunslinger* is the series’ most difficult book, lamenting that in his youth, “I tried too hard to say something important and to sound smart” (USA Today). But he returned to a young man’s novel with a veteran’s eye, broadening the scope and refining the language. Where the original *Gunslinger* stands apart from King’s other work, the revision becomes an important link to many of his other stories.

Reviews of the revised *Gunslinger* began to recognize the mark of a mature writer. A review by King scholar Bev Vincent notes that King “uses more active voice and conveys information by showing rather than telling, one of the prime directives given to young writers” (BevVincent.com, 2007). SF Site reviewer Matthew Peckham notes that King subtly shifts significance from the path to the destination: “...Roland the gunslinger’s journey is near in the first version to an inexplicable Sisyphean labor that embraces itself for its own romantic sake, than something which demands an archetypal fireworks finale” (SF Site, 2003). King’s revisions give the novel a sense of direction, making Roland’s fate both uncertain and intriguing.

These favorable reviews reveal a separate insight into the Dark Tower series: despite King’s superstar status in the book world, his magnum opus is still essentially being ignored. King celebrated the release of the final Dark Tower novel on the Today Show, but his interview with Matt Lauer had more to do with King’s birthday and his rumored retirement. That the most accessible, in-depth reviews of the revised *Gunslinger* cannot be found in mainstream media shows that, even with the influence the Dark Tower has had on King’s writing, the first novel still has little more than underground appeal.

Yet even before the 2003 revisions, a larger cultural impact had begun to develop. As King slowly and steadily continued the Dark Tower series, its audience grew; this was in part because readers began to recognize characters and plot elements from the series in his other stories. The more significant connections, however, lie in common themes. As relatively foreign as *The Gunslinger* appears in

comparison to King's other work, it utilizes the same elements as King's best horror: isolation, sacrifice, and the triumph (for better or worse) of human will. Classics like *The Shining* and *It* are much more well-known than the Dark Tower series, but devoted readers acknowledge the debt these novels owe to the Dark Tower: without the series, those other novels would not exist.

The pervasive nature of the Dark Tower appeared to leap from fiction to reality when King was struck and nearly killed by a drunk driver on June 19th, 1999. The accident galvanized his resolve to complete the series, and he wrote the final three novels in about a year. King's sense of urgency was echoed by his most ardent Dark Tower readers, as he recalls in the introduction to the revised *Gunslinger*: ““I was with this good friend of mine when we heard you got popped,” he said. “Man, we just started shaking our heads and saying, ‘There goes the Tower, it’s tilting, it’s falling, ahhh, shit, he’ll *never* finish it now.’”” (King 2003, xvii) The final three novels were published in rapid succession: *Wolves of the Calla* and *Song of Susannah* in June, and *The Dark Tower* September of 2004.

Before the closing stories were published, however, King decided that revising *The Gunslinger* to follow the “language and tone” (Vincent 2004, 23) of the other Dark Tower novels was important to the series as a whole. The revised version of *The Gunslinger* was first released as part of a hardcover collection of the first four Dark Tower novels; trade paperback versions of those reissues, including *The Gunslinger*, were released a day later.

Perhaps recognizing that readers might lose the story’s thread in the years-long gaps between volumes, King began each new novel with an extended

introduction called an argument. Each argument allows the reader to review the action of previous novels concisely; it also allows King to explicate certain plot elements and make speculations about the future of Roland and the Tower. In fact, the larger narrative reveals an important aspect of King's sense of authorship. King sometimes had no idea what turns Roland's path might take with each new story, something he all but admits in the argument of the second novel, *The Drawing of the Three*: "Who, exactly, is Roland? What was his world like before it "moved on"? What is the Tower, and why does he pursue it? We have only fragmentary answers" (King 1987, 9). King uses his arguments to engage in a dialogue with the reader, as a chance to share ideas.

The Ouroboros-like ending of the series hints at a larger meaning behind Roland's endless quest, but only in revision are *The Gunslinger*'s mysteries partially unshrouded. The Dark Tower mythos is obscured by mystery, but through textual analysis it is possible to discover answers in the text. And to solve the riddles of the first novel in the series, we must first look for clues in King's writing process.

Known primarily for the massive mainstream success of his horror novels, King's own literary preferences span the history of both American and European literature. He has been able to cultivate inspiration from nearly every author he admires—from Browning to Bradbury—and the spectrum of influences identifiable in *The Gunslinger* is a testament to King's own versatility as an author. Throughout his career, King has been pigeonholed as a writer whose stories connect to the reptilian part of the brain and the simplest of emotions: fear. With *The Gunslinger*, King's range was revealed—and with the rest of the Dark Tower novels, his range

has expanded. The act of demonstrating that range requires King to weave the threads of each disparate genre into a unique yet coherent tapestry; while the revisions are not necessarily repairs, they do enhance and tighten the narrative fabric of the book and the series.

With more than twenty years between publications of the first novel and the final novel, it is no surprise that continuity issues emerged with respect to the original concept as presented in the first volume. As a result, King took the unusual step of revising hundreds of passages and introducing a number of new passages that expand the creative vision of *The Gunslinger* in several significant ways. Many of King's revisions are character-driven, both sharpening the focus of Roland (the gunslinger for whom the first book is named) as the central character and refining the distinctions between Roland's universe and our own. These revisions not only hone and detail Roland's character, but they illuminate the relationships between Roland and the characters of Jake (who, in *The Gunslinger* and throughout the series, plays Isaac to Roland's Abraham) and Roland's archenemy, the man in black. In the process of revising, King filled in several plot holes of the original published form of the novel, where discontinuities emerged as he went on to create the other six novels of the Dark Tower series.

Roland's actions cannot be examined on their own—of equal importance is how his actions affect the other main characters of the novel. Jake and the man in black, also have their characters redefined. Readers of King's other novels know just how important the man in black is to the Dark Tower mythos—he is the enemy in this story, but he is also revealed to be a more powerful and dangerous adversary than

Roland first believes. Readers of the entire Dark Tower series will also recognize the role the man in black plays in Roland's own past—and future—so that the connection between Roland and the man in black is strengthened and highlighted. As for Jake, his sacrifice near the end of the novel is preceded by several important revelations about his character: his life and death in New York and his mysterious arrival in Roland's world, his connection to and relationship with Roland. In a rather shrewd way, King enhances Jake's role in helping Roland reach the man in black and, ultimately, the Dark Tower. Jake is a tragic pawn in the original version of *The Gunslinger*; in the revised version, he wields his own power over Roland.

Part of the third and final chapter will concentrate on the novel's cosmology—that is, the general structure of *The Gunslinger*'s universe. We know that Roland's world is not our own—the geography, language, and even the stars are completely foreign to us—yet striking similarities to our world can be found in the story. Subtle concepts (and not-so-subtle, like the Mid-World version of “Hey Jude”) clue the reader in to what Roland's world might be without revealing it explicitly. The man in black, well-traveled between worlds, tosses out rather heavy-handed hints of his own from time to time—several additions of dialogue from the man in black show us how thin the fabric between worlds is.

Time also plays a significant role in the novel's cosmology, but it is the elasticity of time that King reveals more fully in the revised version. The phrase “the world has moved on” is common among the people Roland encounters throughout his journey, but we get a clearer idea of just what “moving on” means: both time and direction have begun to melt at the edges, and perception is likewise warped.

Roland's hunt for the man in black is affected by this development, as is Jake's perception of his own death and apparent rebirth in Mid-World. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Roland's reawakening after speaking to the man in black finds him aged more than ten years. These manipulations of time are the reader's cue that Roland's world is dying, and in the revised version, King adds information that both illuminates and shrouds the mystery of time.

The final section of the third chapter will discuss and analyze the use of language in *The Gunslinger*. The revision allows him to modify the novel's language to fit into the pidgins that emerge throughout the subsequent books in the series. There is the High Speech, a ceremonial language used by Roland and his near-royal countrymen in his homeland of Gilead; we do get a taste of the High Speech in the original version, but its importance to the rest of the series is highlighted in the revised version.

Next, there is the strange patois called "Mid-World argot" by *Concordance* writer and King's assistant Robin Furth, which is used throughout the series but is almost completely absent in the original version of the novel. The speech patterns of this argot are also a cousin to the "low speech" Roland and his friends use as children. This speech pattern helps Roland recognize characters from his past, like Sheb, the honky-tonk owner in Tull, who plays a large role in the revised novel and a much more significant part in a later book. Finally, there is the strange magical language used by the half-human creatures and other Crimson King henchmen (and in some cases Roland himself), which Furth calls "End-World Terms." These words, often bearing no resemblance to the English language, refer to magical objects and devices

left behind by The Great Old Ones (the faceless people who left behind the machines and devices that connect Roland's world with our own), mystical creatures and monsters in league with the Crimson King, and realms beyond those of Mid-World and the New York(s) encountered by Roland and his friends later in the series. These languages signify not just the way which people in Roland's world communicate with each other, but they also help show the peculiarities and dangers Roland encounters on his journey to find the Dark Tower.

With the next chapter, we will explore King's revisions of his characters, and how his decisions impact the actions of the characters, the plot of the novel, and the narrative arc of the series.

CHAPTER TWO

In the previous chapter, I discussed the publishing history of *The Gunslinger* from its original serialized episodes to its present revised form. The changes made to the novel in 2003 were extensive but selective; knowing that the novel would suffer if too much were added or removed, King made strategic changes to areas that would help propel the story and set it more in sync with the other six novels in the series. By adding references to concepts that appear later in the series, introducing the various languages and patois of Roland's world, and refining and reshaping characters, King has demonstrated his ability to seamlessly weave new concepts through the existing fabric of the narrative.

King also has a particular talent for creating strong characters. Coupled with plot elements that sometimes find his characters making ruthless choices, their realistic complexity often makes them less than sympathetic; but that complexity allows readers to identify with those characters in a human rather than a strictly literary way. Because King's stories involve suspension of disbelief, he wisely makes his characters authentic in order to maintain a necessary anchor in the real world. *The Gunslinger*'s characters are no exception, but in the original version of the novel, the complexity of the characters sometimes feels out of sync with the nebulous plot—the reactions and emotions don't always have an identifiable origin. With the revised version of the novel, King reshapes his characters—not necessarily to make them more believable, but to make their actions fall in line with the events that take place later in the series. This chapter will discuss *The Gunslinger*'s main characters—

Roland, Jake, and the man in black—and how King re-sculpts their actions and emotions to enrich the story.

Roland Deschain, gunslinger and descendant of King Arthur Eld,⁷ is the central character in the Dark Tower series. Taciturn and rarely introspective, Roland initially appears to be the hero of the story: he is on a quest, a task accepted as a consequence of being a gunslinger and a “lord of light⁸,” to save the enigmatic Dark Tower. The reader’s perception of Roland as a hero shifts, however, as the action of *The Gunslinger* progresses.

In a previously unpublished essay appearing in Bev Vincent’s book *The Road to the Dark Tower*, King describes the birth of Roland as the combination of two disparate archetypes: “I had recently seen a bigger-than-life Sergio Leone Western, and it had me wondering what would happen if you brought two very distinct genres together: heroic fantasy and the Western” (Vincent 2004, 8). Added to that hybrid is Robert Browning’s epic poem about the final battle of an untested knight, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, from which King takes Roland’s name and the concept of the Dark Tower. In the afterword of the original novel, King says: “I had played with the idea of trying a long romantic novel, embodying the feel, if not the exact sense, of the Browning poem” (King 1988, 221). There are elements of

⁷ Arthur Eld is the mythic ancestor of Roland; he was a gunslinger, the earliest guardian of the Dark Tower, and a Warrior of the White (a positive force and opposite of the Red, the Crimson King). The similarity to the myth of King Arthur is no coincidence. (Furth 2006, 126)

⁸ A gunslinger is a knight in Roland’s world, a male descendant of Arthur Eld, Mid-World’s mythical king. Similarly to our world’s King Arthur myth, Arthur’s gunslingers upheld the White (the pure force of good) and swore to protect the Dark Tower. Roland, son of Mid-World dinh Steven Deschain, is not only the world’s last surviving gunslinger, but the only survivor of Gilead, Mid-World’s oasis of civilization. The term “lord of light” refers to a gunslinger who upholds the White. (Furth 2006, 126)

Browning's poem visible in both versions of *The Gunslinger*, and its influence distorts the character's heroic qualities.

With this unique mix of traditional lyric hero and modern Western enforcer, King creates a character whose identity lies less with heroism and more with isolation. Harold Bloom opens his essay, "Browning's 'Childe Roland': All Things Deformed and Broken," with a reflection that applies to both Rolands: "The quester, 'after a life spent training for the sight,' sees nothing but everything he has estranged from himself" (Loucks 2007, 634). Roland Deschain, like Browning's Roland, is without the hope and determination of a traditional hero; instead, he trudges toward his destination, his constant journey becoming a reminder of everything he must leave behind. The fourth stanza of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" could be spoken by Deschain himself:

"For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,/What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope/Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope/With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—/I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring/My heart made, finding failure in its scope." (Browning 2007, 182)

Browning's subject laments the death of his faith, killed by the punishing, endless years of his quest. So, in King's revision, does Roland reflect on his own quest by way of reflecting on his physical thirst: "He was just an ordinary pilgrim, in other words, and all he could say with real certainty is that he was thirsty" (King 2003, 4). The gunslinger cannot predict success or failure—perhaps, like Browning's Roland, he cannot accept the possibility of failure. He allows himself only to deal with the immediate present, taking action only "when his logic told him it must be

done” (4). Roland meets the challenges of his quest in the same tedious, resigned way in which he travels along the path of the Tower.

The blended nature of *The Gunslinger* is manifested most explicitly in Roland’s character. Roland’s heroic qualities are distorted, leaving him in a sort of moral and mythological limbo. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, professor and mythologist Joseph Campbell defines a hero as “a personage with exceptional gifts...he and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolic deficiency” (Campbell 1968, 37). Indeed, Roland does possess an extraordinary talent for gunplay, and both he and the world he inhabits suffer from some sort of deficiency. When Roland is attacked by the whole population of a small town called Tull, his shooting is described as “automatic, instantaneous, inbred” (King 1988, 59), and he is reduced to his purpose, a man “transmogrified into an Eye and a Hand” (61). In this case, his actions remove him from the goal of the Dark Tower and weld him to the brutal moment—his superhuman ability eclipses his humanity.

Campbell continues, saying that a hero’s ultimate goal is to “[bring] back from his adventure the means for regeneration of his society as a whole” (Campbell 1968, 38). In *The Gunslinger*, however, Roland’s talent neither creates or regenerates, but instead it destroys. In his slaughter of the citizens of Tull, we see another perversion of the hero motif: he must save himself in order to continue his quest, but in doing so he wipes out the men, women and children of an entire town. And near the end of the novel, Roland sacrifices Jake in order to reach the man in black. Like his actions in Tull, his role in Jake’s death is a twist on sacrifice; Roland’s actions are

necessary to clear his path to the Dark Tower. But in sacrificing Jake, he sacrifices a child he loves—a child who will, later in the series, prove to be his salvation.

As for returning to his home after victory and sharing his reward, his quest will not redeem him in the eyes of his family; they are long dead and he has no partners with whom to share the journey.⁹ Neither his conscience nor his sense of loyalty guide him on his quest—while he holds to the vow he made to protect the Tower and follows the way of the gun, Roland’s allegiance does not extend beyond the quest. To call Roland a hero—or an antihero—ignores each side’s evidence to the contrary.

Roland’s character possessed these contradictions in the original novel, but he still read like a one-dimensional character; his goal consumes him, leaving little room for emotion or reason. It is no surprise, then, to find that King uses the 2003 revision to both develop Roland’s complexity and to highlight the motivations for some of his actions. In revision, we watch Roland ignore gut feelings and dismiss episodes of *déjà vu*. Neither heavily dropped hints from the man in black, nor his own mysteriously protracted lifespan, can force him to acknowledge the cyclical nature of his quest. Roland, originally just obsessively single-minded, becomes willfully ignorant.

Further, the differences between how the gunslinger views himself and how other characters see him are more starkly contrasted. While his self-image is of a man who is simply plodding along on a quest, through King’s revisions we see Roland more directly through the eyes of the people he meets as someone conflicted and adrift. His goal of reaching the Dark Tower is a simple one, but the purpose of this

⁹ Roland’s companions, those who compose Roland’s *ka-tet*, do not appear until book two, *The Drawing of the Three*. Jake returns in book three, completing the *ka-tet*.

quest remains a mystery to Roland until—and even after—he wins through to the Tower. And finally, King's revisions illuminate Roland's amorality more fully in terms of how he views death and killing—most importantly in his relationship with and sacrifice of Jake.

In both versions of the novel, we first meet Roland as he makes his way across the desert in pursuit of the man in black. In revision, King inserts an early hint of *déjà vu*; the new passage, for a reader who has completed the seven-book series, could be considered proof of Roland's return to the beginning of a loop.

The gunslinger had been struck by a momentary dizziness, a kind of yawning sensation that made the entire world seem ephemeral, almost a thing that could be looked through. It passed and, like the world upon whose hide he walked, moved on. (3.14-4.1)

That final sentence of the new opening paragraph ends with more than just a familiar turn of phrase. A common saying in Roland's universe, “the world has moved on” is an adage that serves to explain the unexplainable in the slow disintegration of Mid-World. From the slow decay of society to the mutation of nature, everything appears to be moving toward an entropic state, and there is no tangible cause for the breakdown. Roland moves on as well, but this passage shows how Roland neglects to pay attention to what his intuition is telling him: there is a thinness in the fabric of the world, and Roland seems to be standing at the center of it. We know from the final novel of the series, *The Dark Tower*, that Roland forgets his recurring victories of reaching the Tower. But his willful ignorance of anything outside of his immediate, literal vision could be a factor in the length of his mission—his tunnel vision doesn't allow him to make a leap into the realm of the unknown.

The revisions offer the barest suggestion of the supernatural forces that might be at work, and how powerful they might be.

King's revisions slowly reveal Roland's cyclical journey, but other critical plot elements must be added as well. To make these additions as seamless as possible, King chooses to give Roland several episodes of *déjà vu*. Through these strange visions, King can introduce concepts and characters that become important parts of the narrative arc later in the series.

A scene in which Roland listens to a sermon given by Tull's fanatical preacher Sylvia Pittston manages to give readers a taste of book four, *Wizard and Glass*, by mentioning Mejis¹⁰, a small town from Roland's adolescence. By adding just a few lines, King packs an entire plot element into a small paragraph.

¹⁰ Roland meets—and loses—the love of his life, Susan Delgado in Mejis, a story that is one of the main focuses of *Wizard and Glass*; he also meets Sheemie Ruiz there, who returns in the final novel to help Roland and his *ka-tet* progress toward the Dark Tower.

It was a haunting line. For a moment the gunslinger felt mixed feelings of nostalgia and fear, stitched in with an eerie feeling of *déjà vu*—he thought: I dreamed this. When? He shook it off. The audience—perhaps all twenty-five all told—had become dead silent.

(48.21-26)

It was a haunting line. For a moment the gunslinger felt mixed feelings of nostalgia and fear, stitched in with an eerie feeling of *déjà vu*, and he thought: *I dreamed this. Or I was here before. If so, when? Not Mejis.* No, not there. He shook the feeling off. The audience—perhaps twenty-five all told—had become dead silent. (64.12-18)

A memory as powerful as his ordeal in Mejis should shake Roland to his core—but instead, he pushes Mejis aside without taking the time to connect his current situation with the one he faced as a young man. Nevertheless, Roland is able to sense some strangeness early on, and King intensifies this sensation in revision. There is a point where Roland appears to latch onto a strange recollection that might reveal the repeating cycle to his conscious mind, but, as is becoming his habit, he pushes it away:

*LaMerk*¹¹, the gunslinger thought. *Or maybe she said LeMark.* The word had some vague resonance for him, but nothing he could put his finger on. Nonetheless, he filed it away in his memory, which was capacious. (67.20-23)

This is the first time we see Roland actually contemplate, however briefly, an odd recollection. Still, instead of working it out then and there, he shunts the thought to the back of his mind to consider later. But given his poor track record of reexamining his strange hunches, it's safe to assume this is an episode he will not revisit. It's also interesting to note that one of the few times Roland considers

¹¹LaMerk Industries is a front company of sorts for agents of the Crimson King; they are also responsible for building many of the old and broken machines found in Mid-World. Later in the series, LaMerk appears in “our:” world as well, as an enemy of Roland and his ka-tet. (Furth 177)

revisiting a memory in the novel is in this instance; Roland does not allow himself to dwell on oddities, but this name is odd enough that he wants to contemplate it later.

One of the final and most obvious hints comes from the man in black, during his final conversation with Roland. In the original version, the man in black tells Roland that he is closer than he thinks to his goal—in revision, however, Roland is all but told he has made his trip before:

Yet you have no idea how close you stand to the Tower now, how close in time.
(200.18-19)
“Read my fortune, then,” he said harshly. (200.21)

Yet you have no idea how close you stand to the Tower now, as you resume your quest.
(275.17-19)
“What do you mean, resume? I never left off.”
At this the man in black laughed heartily, but would not say what he found so funny.
“Read my fortune, then,” Roland said harshly. (275.20-23)

Roland’s tunnel vision applies to more than just his environment; he also appears to ignore any type of established moral code. Morals are few and far between in a world that is moving on, but Roland is more than just a pilgrim; he is a knight. And while he adheres to the way of the gun, he also operates by a fluid set of rules, allowing him to kill whenever necessary. Of course, “whenever necessary” tends toward the vague in Roland’s case.

We hear the first of these examples as Roland tells his story to Brown, the hut dweller with whom Roland spends a night while in the desert. When Brown asks Roland about the current state of the town called Tull, Roland’s answer is curt, final,

and vague. In revision, however, Roland's pragmatic response becomes even more revealing.

"It's dead," the gunslinger said,
and the words hung in the air.
(21.32-33)

"It's dead," the gunslinger said.
"I killed it." He thought of
adding: *And now I'm going to
kill you, if for no other reason
than I don't want to have to
sleep with one eye open.* But
had he come to such behavior?
If so, why bother to go on at
all? Why, if he had become
what he pursued? (21.12-16)

Roland does not act on this impulse, and he castigates himself for the ruthlessness of his thoughts. Still, his first impulse is to rid himself of the nuisance of having to watch his back all night. Roland's instinct is to protect himself, and that instinct requires that he sometimes kills others to do so.

There is a fundamental change in Roland, however, when he encounters Jake Chambers, a lost and confused boy he meets in chapter two of novel, called "The Way Station." Jake has arrived at the way station after being killed in another world by a mysterious cloaked man who pushes him in front of a speeding car.¹² A conflict arises in Roland; while he has vowed that nothing will deter him from the pursuit of the man in black, this boy, speaking cryptically of another world where mysterious machines propel people quickly down the roads and the buildings scrape the sky, has cultivated a small seed of paternal protection in Roland. Perhaps never charged with

¹² Jake and Roland believe that Jake's murderer is the man in black, which is half true; we learn in *The Waste Lands* that the man in black took possession of the body of Jack Mort, a man whose murderous impulses are responsible for Susannah Dean losing her legs in a horrific train accident.

the safety of a child (nor anyone else other than his *ka-tet* as a young man), Roland does not know how to balance his obligation to the Dark Tower with saving this boy's life. There is a subtle change to a passage in chapter three, "The Oracle and the Mountains," in which Roland considers telling Jake what he has learned on his journey:

The gunslinger had a sudden impulse to tell him what he had learned, (132.22-23)

The gunslinger had a sudden impulse to speak to the boy *dan-dinh* after telling him all he had learned, (182.15-17)

This small change encompasses two major elements King focused on to rewrite *The Gunslinger*: character and language. The inclusion of the High Speech¹³ phrase *dan-dinh*¹⁴ signifies Roland's desire to open his heart and mind to his companion Jake while establishing a bond with him. There is also a clarification of sorts: in the original version, Roland merely has an impulse to tell Jake about his adventure. In the revised version, Roland's impulse includes an uncharacteristic desire to share a part of himself with someone else—a child. This is the first time we see Roland consider becoming vulnerable to someone, and it foreshadows the relationship he will have with Jake throughout the series.

Roland's character hybridity—King's own nihilistic twist on Western hero mythology—requires a constant shifting of focus. While the reader first sees Roland as a fallen knight on a quest, his acquaintances see a dangerous foreigner, and his victims may see a murderous heathen. No doubt the man in black sees Roland as an

¹³ High Speech is the "ancient, ritualized language of Mid-World" (Furth 453), the language used by gunslingers and other nobility.

¹⁴ The root word of the phrase, "*dinh*," means "leader, king, or father" (Furth 459).

exasperating adversary. The original *Gunslinger* performs a primitive version of this trick of perception; the reader begins to recognize the killer, the guardian, and the survivor in Roland. But King uses revision as a chance to make these shifts in perception with more sophistication and detail. It is through Jake's eyes that we first get a clear glimpse of how Roland's brutal desperation to reach the Dark Tower clashes with the man's capacity to love. This revision also tells us more about Jake's character, as well as how he and Roland begin to forge a bond that threads through the narrative of the entire series.

As the pair close in on the man in black, Jake, a preternaturally perceptive child, begins to realize that Roland will sacrifice him if forced to. With the addition of just six words, King's revision turns Jake's terrified realization into a devastating accusation:

“You’re going to kill me. He
killed me the first time and you
are going to kill me now.”
(141.32-33)

“You’re going to kill me. He
killed me the first time and you
are going to kill me this time.
And I think you know it.”
(195.15-17)

A short tour of Jake’s home world—a close parallel to our own Earth—is part of the story in both versions of the novel, but in the revised version King adds a glimpse of Jake’s psychic ability, what Roland and other Mid-World inhabitants call “the touch¹⁵. ” This ability is what allows Jake to see through to Roland’s conflicted view of the boy, as well as Roland’s decision to leave Jake’s fate to chance if necessary. Roland’s reply, only slightly modified from the original version, reveals

¹⁵ “‘The touch’ is defined as ‘the ability to read minds...similar to ESP and is half-empathy, half-telepathy’ (Furth 509). Later in the series, it is also referred to as ‘the shining’—a connection with one of King’s more well-known novels.

his ruthless practicality: he lies and tells Jake that he will take care of him (King 1988; 2003, 145/195). While it's clear that Roland feels the urge to protect the boy—even loves him—Jake is essentially the largest obstacle between him and the man in black. For Roland, the Dark Tower is the most important goal, and to reach that goal Roland must sacrifice the boy. While Jake may have cultivated an understandable mistrust of the man, his sudden insight is reached with supernatural ability.

This revelation is added near the end of the novel, but Jake's character is critical to the plot of *The Gunslinger*. While he is only in three chapters of the book and dies in the fourth chapter, Jake has a significant impact on Roland and the story; he dies but is reborn (after a fashion) in book three, and becomes Roland's ward and companion—eventually, in book three, the two accept each other as father and son—until the final novel of the series.

Jake represents what Roland could have become had he developed a conscience; this also makes Jake Roland's obstacle, the part of himself he must overcome to reach his goal. Further, as Roland's offering to the Dark Tower, Jake advances Roland's interests, testing his will and preparing him for the betrayals he must perpetrate in order to continue his journey.

“The Way Station” is the chapter in which Jake and Roland meet for the first time; it is also the chapter in which Jake recounts his “real world” death¹⁶ to Roland and his subsequent and mysterious arrival in Mid-World, giving the gunslinger a glimpse into a completely foreign universe. The addition of several major details

¹⁶ In the second book, *The Drawing of the Three*, we learn that there is an infinite number of universes, and therefore an infinite number of “Earths.” This allows Roland’s ka-tet—Eddie and Susannah Dean, and Jake Chambers—to come from New York, but from different times. This also means that Jake’s real world is probably not the real world of the reader.

about Jake's world and his own life give Roland—and the reader—a fuller picture of the role Jake plays in the action of *The Gunslinger*.

Their first meaningful exchange finds Jake trying—and failing—to explain how he got to the way station. It appears he has suffered a similar kind of memory loss that Roland experiences each time he reaches the Dark Tower. He is able to retrieve memories under hypnosis (King 1988; 2003, 81/108), suggesting that his memories were suppressed as a way to defend himself from the horrific details of his death. The conversation, shorter in the original version, is expanded with information that confuses Roland but is instantly recognizable to the reader.

“I don’t know.” The boy frowned. “I did know. I knew when I came here, but it’s all fuzzy now, like a bad dream when you wake up. I have lots of bad dreams.

“Did somebody bring you?”
“No,” the boy said. “I was just here.”

“You’re not making sense,” said the gunslinger flatly.
(78.9-15)

“I don’t know.” The boy frowned. “I *did* know. I knew when I came here, but it’s all fuzzy now, like a bad dream when you wake up. I have lots of bad dreams. Mrs. Shaw used to say it was because I watched too many horror movies on Channel Eleven.”

“What’s a channel?” A wild idea occurred to him. “Is it like a beam?”

“No—it’s TV.”

“What’s teevee?”

“I—” The boy touched his forehead. “Pictures.”

“Did somebody tote you here? This Mrs. Shaw?”

“No,” the boy said. I just *was* here.”

“Who is Mrs. Shaw?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why did she call you ‘Bama?’”

“I don’t remember.”

“You’re not making any sense,
the gunslinger said flatly.
(103.18-104.9)

We learn several things from this exchange: first, and most importantly, we are told explicitly that Jake is from a place where televisions and horror movies exist. Predictably, Roland’s first impulse is to dismiss Jake’s story as nonsense from a frightened boy, but he does note a tenuous connection between “channel” and “beam,” referring to the beams that support the Dark Tower¹⁷. Roland soon accepts that Jake is from a world other than his own, but he is mistrustful of how and why the boy has been put in his path. Roland comes to believe that Jake represents a test of his devotion to his quest.

Jake’s “touch” was discussed earlier in the chapter; by accusing Roland of knowing that the boy, would be a pawn in Roland’s game and left to die, he displays a capacity for perception Roland believes is born of more than just insight—in an added passage, Roland thinks about his childhood friend Alain’s own demonstration of the touch (King 2003, 242). But King adds more examples of Jake’s supernatural ability throughout the novel, making it clear that Jake will remain a mystery to Roland even after his death.

One of the most intriguing of King’s revisions is also one of his most subtle. In “The Oracle and the Mountains,” we glimpse what could be a psychic split that happens to both Roland and Jake. This split, which unfolds in book three of the Dark

¹⁷ The beams, simply put, support the Dark Tower. They are also portals into and out of Mid-World (Furth 2006, 398). If the beams are destroyed, the Dark Tower will fall, and all of existence will end. Several characters from King’s other stories appear later in the series as Breakers, psychics with immense power who are working on destroying the beams. The Breakers work, mostly against their will, for the Crimson King.

Tower series, *The Waste Lands*, details the paradox of Jake dying in Mid-World during the action of *The Gunslinger*, yet surviving in his own world. By hinting at this event, King signals to the reader that Jake's role in the story of the Dark Tower may not end with his death.¹⁸

King's revisions introduce the very moment a split is created in the minds of both Roland and Jake. Before Jake dies on the bridge, a peculiar event happens on the journey beneath the mountains. In *The Waste Lands*, we learn that both Jake and Roland are losing their holds on reality: for Jake, it manifests itself as two voices in his head, both telling him he is alive and dead, that his adventure with the gunslinger in another world was both real and imaginary. Similar voices haunt Roland, telling him the boy was both real and imaginary, and it is tearing him apart—his ka-mates, Susannah and Eddie, watch his mental state deteriorate as he struggles to both remember and dismiss the boy he watched plummet to his death on a bridge. This split is foreshadowed in an encounter with a demon who takes possession of Jake's body; the addition of the possibility of being “pulled apart” is significant:

¹⁸ Before Jake plunges to his death on the bridge, he delivers what is one of the series' most recognizable lines: “Go then. There are other worlds than these.” (King 1988; 2003 191/266) While it could be said that this line foreshadows Jake's return in *Waste Lands*, King's revisions make the possibility more solid and explicit.

The boy tried to pull his gaze away, could not. And suddenly both eyes rolled up to show the whites. (122.17-19)

The boy tried to pull his gaze away, could not. For a moment it seemed that he might be pulled apart—mentally if not physically. Then, suddenly, both eyes rolled up to the whites. (167.5-9)

When Roland tells Eddie and Susannah about Jake in the third Dark Tower novel, *The Waste Lands*, he calls him “the boy who wasn’t there.” He insists that his memory of Jake is not divided, but doubled (King 1991, 71); that he did not imagine the boy, but that his second half met Jake. Later when Jake and Roland are (re)united, they both acknowledge the maddening duality they suffered, relieved that the voices are gone and they are “all together again” (King 1991, 303). Jake’s encounter with the Oracle does not threaten to tear him apart: it could be the moment in which Jake is separated into two pieces. One part of him lives in 1977 New York City; the other part of him is in a rocky desert with a gunslinger, destined to die. Jake’s first death in *The Gunslinger* was a passage to Roland’s world, but his second death—and the events before it—create the boy’s passage into two worlds.

Jake’s passage between the worlds is also Roland’s passage to the man in black, the mysterious sorcerer he chases throughout the novel. This is stated plainly in the chapter “The Oracle and the Mountains,” when the Oracle tells Roland, “The boy is your gate to the man in black. The man in black is your gate to the three¹⁹. The three are your way to the Dark Tower” (King 1988, 179). This proclamation means

¹⁹ The three to which the Oracle refers are Roland’s future ka-tet, which he meets in the second novel, *the Drawing of the Three*.

the man in black is the center of Roland's quest, an obstacle he must reach, conquer, and pass.

An enigmatic figure through most of the original text, the man in black is much more than he appears. We are shown how much influence the man in black has—not just on Roland's life and his quest for the Dark Tower, but on much of the action throughout the series. Finally, we see the man in black wield power through giving—and withholding—knowledge. From intimating his experiences of other worlds to Roland to revealing a devastating secret to a hapless barmaid, the man in black does what he can to infuriate, perplex, and enlighten Roland as he struggles to reach the Tower.

When we meet the man in black, he is as much a mystery as Roland, which establishes the characters as equals and opposites. While the original novel reveals that the man in black seems to have an edge on Roland, we are still left somewhat in the dark about his identity. But through revision, we learn more about who he is and what his motives might be. In the original version of *The Gunslinger*, the image we are given of the man in black is that of a nameless but incredibly talented trickster, an anonymous sorcerer who holds the key to the door through which Roland must travel to reach the Dark Tower.

But those who have read the complete Dark Tower series and many of King's other novels know that the man in black is King's all-purpose bad guy, a character whose travels take him and his propensity for mayhem far beyond Mid-World. He begins life as Walter Padick, son of a miller in an eastern Barony of Mid-World (Furth 2006, 268); he later leaves his home and enters into the service of the Crimson

King, becoming the King's emissary. We hear his birth name in the revised version of *The Gunslinger*, but we do not learn his back story until the final novel of the series. In addition to his multiple roles in *The Gunslinger*, the man in black appears in a number of King's novels outside of the Dark Tower universe. His most important alter ego is Randall Flagg in *The Stand*, a novel whose strong connection to the Dark Tower series is echoed later in *Wizard and Glass*²⁰. He also shows up, using several aliases, in *Hearts in Atlantis*, where his talent for troublemaking leads to infiltrating various underground civil rights organizations and convincing them to commit acts of violence. With the changes in *The Gunslinger*, we learn more about the man in black's other masks.

Through Roland, for instance, we learn that the man in black is also Marten, advisor to Roland's father Steven and the wizard who helps destroy Gilead. When Roland replies to Jake's question about the identity of the "priest" who killed him in his own world, King takes care to give Roland an insight in the revision that he doesn't have in the original version.

²⁰ In that novel, Roland and his ka-tet travel through a "thinny," a rip in a fabric of space-time, and walk into Kansas during the devastating superflu epidemic of *The Stand*.

“No,” the gunslinger said, “but the two of them had some relationship, I think now. Maybe even half-brothers. Marten was a wizard...like Merlin. Do they tell of Merlin where you come from, Jake?”
(94.22-25)

Well, sometimes I wonder about that, tell you true,” the gunslinger said. “If they *were* two, I think now they must have been brothers. Maybe even twins. But did I ever see ‘em together? No, I never did. This bad man...this Marten...he was a wizard. Like Merlin. Do they ken Merlin where you come from?”
(129.6-11)

This extension of reasoning allows King to transform Roland’s skepticism into near certainty; in the original version, it is suggested there is a relationship between Marten and the man in black, while in the revision Roland clearly doubts that the two men are indeed two separate beings.

King’s appreciation for subtlety has evolved over time, and his revisions to character demonstrate that appreciation; many of the additions to *The Gunslinger* are small but significant. One of the briefest changes to the text is also one of the most revealing. In the first pages of *The Gunslinger*, Roland is looking for signs of the man in black’s campground leavings, signs that would “affirm the man in black’s essential humanity” (King 1988, 12). In revision, the change of a single word, from “essential” to “possible” (King 2003, 5), completely changes the significance of Roland’s musings. In the original version, Roland assumes that the man in black is unusually good at hiding his leavings; in the revision, however, Roland considers the possibility that the man in black might not be a man at all.

This small but important tease opens the way for the man in black to share one of many secrets with Roland during their protracted palaver at the end of the novel. In the original version, the man in black reveals his “near-immortality” to Roland,

telling him that he has taken on many faces and personae over the centuries; in the revised version, the man in black takes the opportunity to reveal his not just his own long life, but Roland's as well.

“Not necessarily. I am nearly immortal. I could have taken a face that you more expected, of course, but I elected to show you the one I was – ah – born with. See, gunslinger, the sunset.” (199.26-29)

“Why? I am nearly immortal, as are you, Roland—for now, at least. I could have taken a face with which you would have been more familiar, but I elected to show you the one I was—ah—born with. See, gunslinger, the sunset.” (274.17-20)

His revelation—tempered with another cryptic hint, “for now, at least”—is another heavy hint dropped at Roland's feet. Just as Jake gives us a unique perception of Roland, we see Roland through the man in black's eyes—and we learn that he may know more about Roland's quest than Roland himself.

The man in black also does what he can to shatter Roland's ignorance of the loop he is traveling. One of the most obvious hints of a loop comes from the man in black himself, during the final chapter “The Gunslinger and the Man in Black²¹,” when he and Roland engage in a seemingly endless conversation over the course of a magically prolonged night. While it is not clear if the man in black also travels the time-loop in which Roland is trapped, he appears to have knowledge of Roland's cyclical journey—and delights in teasing him without explicitly revealing the situation. Below is a passage appearing in the revised version of the novel in which nearly all is laid bare.

²¹ In the original novel, the chapter is titled “The Gunslinger and the Dark Man.”

“Never mind. We’ll not speak of him, although you’ll learn more than you cared to if you press on. What hurt you once will hurt you twice. This is not the beginning but the beginning’s end. You’d do well to remember that...but you never do.”

“I don’t understand.”

“No. You don’t. You never did. You never will. You have no imagination. You’re blind that way.” (284.20-285-2)

Of particular note is the subtlety and slyness with which King rewrites the man in black: while his additions are sometimes rather obvious to Dark Tower readers, the hints dropped throughout the revised novel are often brief, discreet and sometimes even humorous. King takes great care to assure that the man in black retains his mystery, but gives him enough backstory to illustrate his power.

King takes several opportunities to tease the reader with knowledge of the series finale through his revisions. Possessing what could be called a dark sense of humor, the man in black mentions his travels in a roundabout way to Allie, the barmaid at the Traveler’s Rest in Tull. When he asks Allie to refill his whiskey glass, he tosses off a saying that is surely unknown in Mid-World:

“Once more, please.” (35.34)

Once more, please. Once more with feeling, as they say in the world next door.” (41.9-10)

Throughout the revisions, the man in black parcels out these poisoned morsels to Roland and the reader. Revision also allows the man in black to reveal the most important—and most enigmatic—secret of all. After dazzling and appalling an audience when he brings a town drunk back to life, he leaves a letter for Allie, a barmaid at the town honky-tonk. In the letter, the man in black tells Allie that if she says the number nineteen to Nort, the recently reanimated town drunk, Nort will

reveal the secrets of death to her. The significance of this addition is difficult to convey in one paragraph, and the concept and importance of nineteen will be discussed in chapter three. King's addition of nineteen through revision could be interpreted as King tipping his hand early. But, just like the man in black, King's aim appears to be to entice new readers (and tease Constant Readers) with this new nugget of information.

In seven books and dozens of characters, King manages to keep his main focus on a very small group of people; while the man in black flits in and out of the story from first novel to final novel, his influence is felt throughout. The knowledge the man in black has in the new version of the novel puts him—even more than Roland—in control of the action and the plot.

Though there are three main characters in *The Gunslinger*, the interaction between the three of them paves the way for the intricate and complex plot structure of the rest of the Dark Tower series. All three characters—Roland, Jake, and the man in black—affect each other's lives in profound ways, with Roland and the man in black depending on each other more than man seems to realize. King's revisions go far toward revealing the relationship between Roland and the man in black, as well as foreshadowing the relationship between Roland and Jake. By giving the main characters more depth, King's revision connects *The Gunslinger* more firmly with the rest of the series.

CHAPTER THREE

In chapter two, we analyzed the actions and motivations of *The Gunslinger's* three main characters, and how King returned through revision to anchor the novel to the rest of the series. By adding details about their lives, as well as adding and intensifying the interactions between them, King gives the characters a depth and a fullness that was difficult for him to capture the first time around. But a broader analysis of King's revisions also provides a more detailed image of the world shared by Roland, his nemesis, and his companion. This chapter will expand the range of examination by investigating King's revision of the world in which Roland's mission begins.

King first imagined Roland's story as an opportunity to create his own epic, a unique mythology constructed from a variety of genres and motifs which would unfold over a series of books. The western and fantasy elements are immediately recognizable, but other influences, like Gothicism, are merely sketched in; King's vision of Mid-World and the planes of existence around it had not been fully conceived when he began writing the first novel. In the original *Gunslinger* text, the complex identity of Roland's world had not crystallized, although readers familiar with King's oeuvre could sense certain elements of the strange, otherworldly setting begin to emerge.

It was not until the series' subsequent novels were published that King developed the infinite vastness and horror that are central to this evolving universe. What King eventually creates with the Dark Tower novels—and with dozens of his

other novels and short stories—is a multiverse in which the possibilities are literally endless, an unlimited number of realities that collide with each other every now and then to create snags in the fabric of space-time. We first see these snags in Jake’s back story, coming as he does from a place completely foreign to Roland, yet instantly recognizable to readers as our own Earth (or a version of it). As King’s own ambition for the series and his inspiration for the character increased, so did the scale and significance of Roland’s quest, and *The Gunslinger* evolves from one man’s pursuit of an indefinite goal to a David and Goliath-like battle between good and evil.

Just as King refines the novel’s characters to sharpen its narrative, he uses revision to reveal Roland’s world to us in ways the original novel does not. Readers of the initial version of the novel learned in the afterword that not even King himself knew where Roland was going, or who he was: “But what of the gunslinger’s murky past? God, I know so little” (King 1988, 223). If King’s conception of Roland was little more than a sketch after the first Dark Tower novel, then we cannot expect that King knew much more about Roland’s world²². The reader recognizes that Roland’s universe is bizarre, but the story’s initial setting reads less like another universe and more like a psychedelic western, a weird and brutal wasteland somewhere in our own history or future.

This vaguely vicious landscape was a turn-off for some readers (Vincent 2004, 9). The first Dark Tower novel is sometimes cited as the most difficult to complete, perhaps because of what could be an overreliance on ambiance and a neglect of detail. By concentrating on revising several aspects of cosmology and

²² Bev Vincent makes this point in *The Road to the Dark Tower* (29).

language, the landscape of Mid-World becomes easier to identify; the enhancements succeed at making Roland's world appear both completely alien and vaguely familiar. Revisions introduce the world's unique geography, including reshaping cosmology in its most literal form, with Old Star and Old Mother replacing Polaris in the night sky (King 2004, 120). Other cosmological changes, like the shifting and bending of directions of the compass, give Mid-World its warped and fluid atmosphere. Entities like LaMerk Industries and the Crimson King, as well as the mysterious and ubiquitous power of the number nineteen—pivotal elements King doesn't incorporate into the narrative until halfway through the series—appear here for the first time. These revisions also allow King to introduce the various languages he creates for his characters; from the High Speech Roland speaks as an apprentice gunslinger to the Mid-World argot he hears when he stays in the small town of Tull, the revised novel offers a taste of the rich and intricate patois that emerge later in the reading sequence of the Dark Tower series.

The addition of these components offers more than a glimpse into the overarching theme of the narrative: it offers insights into the author's creative process. In the decades during which the Dark Tower series took shape, King honed his craft with dozens of other novels and short stories, many of which tied into the Dark Tower mythos. While his penchant for languid and baroque terror still goes somewhat unchecked (as is apparent in his 1000+ page horror novels like *It* and his most recent suspense novel, the meandering *Duma Key*), King has learned to tighten his narratives, to establish and maintain a visible thread throughout a labyrinthine series of plots and character developments. The result of this creative growth is

evident in the *Gunslinger* revisions pertaining to cosmology; a wealth of details, the majority not written into the narrative until three or four books into the series, is retrospectively woven into the first novel. These revisions reflect King's decision to strengthen the narrative of the entire series by adding subtle but critical information from later novels; they also fill in the numerous information gaps about Roland's world that stand as obvious shortcomings in the original version.

We begin with cosmology, as King defines the concept in relation to the Dark Tower. In technical terms, cosmology involves the universe as an orderly system; it is the study of how the countless parts of nature work together to create and maintain a particular state of being. In both the initial version and the revision of *The Gunslinger*, we see a universe in the throes of entropy, a fading landscape whose best days are perhaps millennia behind it.

And it is in revision that we see King subtly insert detail and significance into that landscape: where the original novel simply presents Mid-World as a dying land, the revisions seek to explain (or, at least to begin to reveal) both the cause and the effect of this disintegration. As the Dark Tower series progresses, the reader begins to see a pattern in the collapse of the universe—every imbalance is connected, either directly or indirectly, to another, creating a sometimes non-linear domino effect. In the revised *Gunslinger*, the symptoms of Mid-World's disorder are placed into the narrative by agents of chaos like LaMerk Industries and North Central Positronics. The actions of these companies are at least partly responsible for the cosmic distortion of both the world and the cultures in it, which we see in more detail with

isolated contractions and expansions of time, and disorienting moments of directional warping.

By highlighting the destruction created by LaMerk Industries and North Central Positronics, King introduces the element of technology into an otherwise primitive land; he also implies that these corporations have somehow insinuated themselves into the universe's natural order, eating away and weakening its basic structure. Both North Central Positronics and LaMerk are, we learn later in the series, companies controlled by the Crimson King, the infinitely depraved creature whose goal is to destroy the Dark Tower.

First appearing in volume three of the series, *The Waste Lands*, these companies were founded by the Great Old Ones²³ and are responsible for the technology that poisoned the earth, as well as the plants, animals and people living on it (Furth 2006, 177, 207). Furth refers to these new features of the revised *Gunslinger*, succinctly noting the addition of backstory for North Central Positronics: “One hundred generations before the world moved on, humanity made enough technological advances to chip a few splinters from the great pillar of reality” (Furth 2006, 207). The power of technology to corrupt society is a theme that appears in several of King’s other stories—most notably the novella “The Mist,” in which covert experiments by the U.S. military rip a hole in the fabric of space-time and unleash monsters of unimaginable horror onto a quiet Maine town.

²³ Robin Furth identifies the Great Old Ones as “the ancient people of Mid-World” (Furth 2006, 213). They lived hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years before Roland’s own time—and ages before Arthur Eld, Roland’s gunslinger ancestor. They were also responsible for the technology that led to the physical deterioration of Mid-World.

Constant readers of classic horror will recognize in King's work the oppressive threat of darkness and disorder that saturates the work of gothic masters like H.P. Lovecraft, one of King's literary heroes and an influence on the Dark Tower series. David A. Oakes, author of *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic: Lovecraft, Matheson and King*, focuses on King's use of destabilization in his plots, and how he increases the impact of these agents of chaos by making their existence believable: "King uses a few stock characters, such as a religious extremist or a sinister government agent or a corrupt politician, but he gives them depth by providing a history to explain their personality traits" (Oakes 2000, 92). King's fantastical villains are not simply powerful, they are plausible, and exponentially rapid technological advances in the real world have spawned monstrous realities like nuclear weapons and biological warfare—two possible explanations for the sickness and mutations that appear throughout the novel²⁴. The addition of North Central Positronics and LaMerk to *The Gunslinger* gives the desolation of Mid-World both an origin and a credibility; while the universe is not ours, the perpetrator of its damage certainly could be. King's augmentation of Mid-World's history with the two companies enriches and strengthens *The Gunslinger*'s plot; in addition to developing the novel's gothic sensibilities, it also introduces a small element of reality.

In revising *The Gunslinger*, King revisits several themes central to the series—isolation, destabilization, and human nature—and augments their significance with details. The original and revised novels both open with the same desolate desert

²⁴ Note that one of the stock characters discussed by Oakes—Sylvia, the religious extremist—plays a significant role in the beginning action of both versions of *The Gunslinger*. The bloodthirsty Mrs. Carmody plays a similar role in "The Mist."

landscape, showing Roland walking through an endless sea of white and blinding sand. But where the original novel's first chapter is little more than a vague introduction of the story's protagonist and his nebulous goal, the revised first chapter gives us several hints about the world Roland traverses, as well as the things in it. The first of these involve the introduction of the enigmatic fringe culture known as the Manni.

In the world of the Dark Tower, time and space are peculiar elements; the Manni seem not only to understand this, but to venerate and use its mysteries to practice their faith. The Manni are a religious sect, their rituals and way of life a not-disharmonious cross between Eastern mysticism and the American Amish. "Their worship seems to center, at least in part, on traveling between worlds," Furth notes in the *Concordance* (2006, 187); we learn more about the Manni, their way of life, and their multidimensional travels when they are introduced in volume five, *Wolves of the Calla*.

In addition to traveling between universes, the Manni practice meditation and eventually learn to separate their spiritual selves from their corporeal selves. In the first pages of the revised *Gunslinger*, the narrator remarks that Roland's desert-inflicted thirst would not harm him so acutely were he a Manni holy man, that he would be able watch his body dry out with "clinical, detached attention" (King 2003, 4). This unnamed physiological ability bears resemblance to some of the rituals performed by our world's Buddhist monks. And like monks, the Manni believe that controlling the body's automatic functions is an important means to achieve spiritual freedom; for the Manni, that freedom facilitates physical travel throughout the

universe's infinite iterations—that is, between the parallel universes of King's fragile, fractured cosmos.

More similar to Buddhist monks are the Manni in their self-imposed isolation; through a revision to the history of the hut dweller known to Roland only as Brown, King introduces Brown's early life with the Manni:

“You speak as the Manni do.

“I was with ‘em a while, but that was no life for me; too chummy, they are, and always looking for holes in the world.”

This was true, the gunslinger reflected. The Manni-folk were great travelers. (12.5-13)

This exchange gives the reader several new pieces of information. It confirms that the Manni's lives revolve around traveling the “holes in the world,” the entrances into other universes made by rips in existence. Further, Brown's assertion that he removed himself from Manni society establishes the insular nature of the group. No one can be a Manni layman—membership in this community requires total commitment to their way of life. The phrase “too chummy” refers to how exclusive the Manni clan is; the community is close-knit, and as distant with the outside world as they are intimate with each other. It's worth noting Sylvia Pittston's Christian congregation is similarly small and insular; nearly all of Tull attends Pittston's church, but the town is tiny and there are only a few residents, like Allie, who do not attend. And Pittston herself is a traveler—it is implied that she reached Tull by using unknown means²⁵. It is possible that Pittston arrived in Mid-World in a manner

²⁵ Roland muses to Allie about Sylvia Pittston's origins: “And he guessed the preacher-woman had come a lot further than from the dwellers or even the desert. How had she traveled so far? By way of some old machine that still worked? A train, mayhap?” (s71) The train is also an allusion to the hyperintelligent train who takes Roland and his ka-tet to *The Stand*-era Kansas in volume four, *Wizard and Glass*; the train travels through a hole in time to get to Kansas.

similar to Jake—perhaps she passed through one of the many holes in the world and was delivered to the Mid-World town of Tull to play a role in Roland’s journey.

The Manni serve as a parallel to Pittston’s congregation in several ways, and the addition of the Manni—along with the extraction of several Christian motifs throughout the novel and their strangely pagan replacements—results in another enhancement of the geological and cultural aspects of destabilization inherent in *The Gunslinger*. Further, Pittston’s actions blur the line between good and evil: while she denounces the Crimson King in her sermon as being he who leads “men into the flaming bowels of perdition” (King 2003, 67), she brags to Roland that she is carrying “the child of a great king” (74), presumably the child of the Crimson King. Her position as a religious leader is tainted by her desire to bear the Crimson King’s heir. This dichotomy makes Pittston another example of destabilization: she is a threat to Roland’s quest, but she is also caught between the forces of the White and the Red.²⁶

Like Pittston’s own shaky balance between good and evil, the precarious positions of *The Gunslinger*’s characters are reflected by the off-kilter state of the clock and the compass. Both time and direction, though linear, are elastic in Mid-World; before King added a reference to the Manni, Brown acknowledges to Roland that time is “funny out here” (King 2003, 16), that as time passes it leaves people dazed and broken in its wake. In the revision, the line is slightly augmented: “Time’s funny out here. Distance and direction too” (13). That Roland watches the sun setting in the “not quite true west” also illustrates the strange flexibility of direction, another focus of Manni worship. King’s introduction of the Manni in the revised novel

²⁶ Gunslingers call the force of good the White; the force of evil, the Red. The color is associated with the Crimson King.

foreshadows Roland's voyages into other universes, an essential part to the narrative of the Dark Tower series. It also provides a plausible explanation for Jake's arrival at the Way Station: how else would a young boy from the New York metropolis of our world come to be stranded in the middle of a vast desert in the world of the Dark Tower?

Finally, Jake's arrival can be used to give credence to the Manni's beliefs. It is often the style, not the substance, of a religion that makes it unique—and if the Manni can travel between worlds, then it's possible that "forgetful folk"²⁷ could use the holes in the world as well and as often as the Manni do. By introducing the Manni in revision, King establishes from the very beginning that inter-dimensional travel is possible—and that it will become an integral part of Roland's quest.

The Manni's talent for traveling is just one example of the fluidity of reality in Roland's universe, and King continues to add details that expand the view of that universe. The original first chapter does give us an idea of how the distortion of space and time affects Mid-World, but the cause of that distortion is unknown; we know only that some past catastrophe must have set this world's dimensions out of alignment. It is not until we read the revised text that we have a clearer idea of what the catalyst for this disaster might have been. Clues emerge in the form of revelations about the novel's central human conflict. The original *Gunslinger* pits Roland and the man in black against each other as opposites and equals, two men fighting to reach the Dark Tower and possess its secrets. But the subtle revisions in the early chapters suggest that far larger causal forces underlie the actions of these characters.

²⁷ This is what the Manni call non-believers.

Several of these revisions also help to explain the visible scars on the skin of Mid-World. Early in the novel, we learn that mutations in both animals and people are common in Mid-World, and that the mutations are just one of the symptoms of whatever has poisoned the land. The condition of the slow mutants, phosphorescent and horribly disfigured humans Roland and Jake encounter in the tunnel under the mountains, does not initially appear to have a cause—but with King’s revisions, we can infer that the byproducts of LaMerk’s machines may have perverted nature and created the slow mutants and other similarly affected life forms. In revision, the physical toll taken on the land is emphasized when Roland orders hamburgers at the Traveler’s Rest; he doubts Allie’s insistence that the cows the hamburger is made of are indeed from “threaded stock.” “*Threaded stock my ass*, the gunslinger thought. *What you got in your cooler came from something with three eyes, six legs, or both—that’s my guess, lady-sai.*” (King 2003, 29.4-6) The poisoned legacy of North Central Positronics and LaMerk is inescapable—it’s present even in the food.

The revised version offers deeper revelations implying that Roland’s ultimate enemy is not the man in black but someone much more powerful and ominous: the Crimson King. The King himself does not appear in the revisions and we are given his name only once, though his presence and influence are felt throughout. We are introduced to both him and his covert agencies, LaMerk and North Central Positronics—two companies whose sinister technology may have hastened the slow decay of Mid-World, and whose actions threaten to topple the Dark Tower. With Roland’s ultimate enemy revealed, *The Gunslinger* becomes more than just a setup

for a long epic—the revisions discreetly place clues about who and what Roland must fight in his final battle.

They also increase the scale of that battle; instead of a lone gunslinger blindly fulfilling some long-forgotten fraternal obligation, Roland becomes the only man who can conquer the entity seeking to destroy all of existence. By introducing the Crimson King and his companies in revision, King places Roland’s ultimate enemy at the beginning of his quest. This helps close the loop of Roland’s journey to the Dark Tower—coupled with the *déjà vu* he experiences throughout the beginning of the revised novel, these hints are a subtle signal that Roland is doomed to suffer the punishment of his quest over and over, carrying the burden of his deeds to the top of the Tower and down again, like an amnesiac Sisyphus.

In the revised version of *The Gunslinger*, the reader learns of the two companies when Roland does; however, there is a dim spark of recognition for Roland. Roland first hears the name of LaMerk in Sylvia Pittston’s church, in a fiery speech during which Pittston demands her followers destroy “the Interloper,” presumably Satan: “It’s *him* that stands behind every fleshly pleasure...him who made the machines with LaMerk stamped on them, *him!* The Interloper!” (King 2003, 67.17-19). Pittston suggests that the company’s technology has somehow led to the spiritual deterioration of the town, but there’s strong evidence that what the companies left behind also led to the physical deterioration of the land. Roland’s faint recollection of LaMerk serves two more purposes: it offers another hint that Roland has experienced this scene before, and it introduces a disorientating instance of *déjà vu*—another destabilizing moment for Roland.

Of course, knowing who controls LaMerk and North Central Positronics means that Sylvia Pittston's dreaded Interloper is not Satan, but the equally depraved Crimson King—and this helps change the role the man in black plays in Roland's quest. Although he is now cast as an agent of a higher evil, his role is not diminished; in fact, we learn more about Roland's nemesis through revision, including the fact that the man in black is some sort of quasi-immortal supernatural being. This change, however, elevates the danger of Roland's quest: he is not just fighting evil, he is preparing to fight the Crimson King, embodiment of the Red.

In the original final chapter of the novel, "The Gunslinger and the Dark Man," the man in black tells Roland that he, the man in black, is "the furthest minion of the Dark Tower," and "Earth has been given into my hand" (King 1988, 205-206). The revision of that line in the renamed chapter ("The Gunslinger and the Man in Black") implies that the man in black is the minion of one much more powerful than himself, and he tells Roland that "Earth has been given into that king's red hand" (King 2003, 285). We recognize that the man in black's master is the Crimson King, the personification of the evil and perversion that has so damaged Mid-World and threatens the Dark Tower. This information helps the reader understand who and what the man in black is: while he is Roland's nemesis, he is as much a gateway as Jake. In order to save the Dark Tower, Roland not only must pass through the man in black's cosmic roadblocks, but he must wrest control of the universe from its greatest threat.

Part of understanding the scope of Roland's challenge requires understanding the scope of his task: saving countless planes of existence by defeating the Crimson

King. Stephen King's revision of the cosmology of *The Gunslinger* goes beyond the natural and tangible world; he pays particular attention to the psychic and spiritual world as well. Serving as a means of worship for the Manni, the "holes in the world" have unleashed a number of twisted and dark forces of power, and we learn more about their origins. We also begin to learn how these mysterious forces affect Mid-World, if not exactly why. While the introduction of the Crimson King is a major addition, the creature is never fully revealed; we know only that his main goal is to destroy. The King's identity is not the only important mystery Stephen King introduces in revision, however, and perhaps the most powerful mystery introduced has psychic and spiritual implications—the concept of nineteen.

Throughout the Dark Tower series, nineteen is one of several mysteries that remain virtually unexplained. Some of King's revisions correct as well as clarify, and underdeveloped or ill-fitting concepts that appear to have significance in the beginning of the series—like the Beast and the Ageless Stranger—are either absorbed into other plot arcs or discarded altogether. The concept of nineteen is singular among these examples: the number is introduced in *Wolves of the Calla* (book five), and aside from the Crimson King himself, nineteen exhibits the most ominous potential to derail Roland's quest. But revision does not make its purpose any clearer; in fact, while the power of nineteen is displayed in revision, its true origins and ultimate purpose are never illuminated. This also impacts the role of the Crimson King because he does not control nineteen; it is a force apart from, perhaps even above, the King's influence, and yet another formidable obstacle for Roland to overcome. In revision, we see nineteen destroy—Allie is driven mad by the revelation of its secrets.

Through the disembodied Oracle, we also see nineteen set a path for Roland to follow on his quest for the Dark Tower. Nineteen appears to be tethered to neither good nor evil, which makes it another element of destabilization for Roland.

The difference in length between the original and revised novels is no more than twenty pages, but the most important new information also accounts for the revised novel's longest passage. The conversation between an undead Nort and Allie about his resurrection, and the letter written by the man in black and delivered to Allie by Nort, introduce the mystery and power of the number. In the letter, the man in black tells Allie if she speaks the word nineteen to Nort, Nort will reveal the secrets and horrors he experienced while he was dead. In Allie's hands, nineteen is a time bomb that will annihilate her soul, yet the man in black knows she will succumb to its power. "Sooner or later, you will ask," the man in black writes (King 2003, 49). She does, and the result is a stark change in Allie's last moments. Allie goes from begging Roland to spare her life--"He's got me O Jesus don't shoot don't don't don't—" (King 1988, 59.13)—to begging him to take it "Kill me, Roland, kill me! I said the word, *nineteen*, I said, and he told me...*I can't bear it*—" (King 2003, 80.7-8).

We see nineteen destroy Allie, but the true nature of nineteen is still unclear. Because the man in black, we later learn, is an emissary of the Crimson King, we could assume that nineteen is a tool used by both entities to wreak havoc on the world. Yet when Roland leaves Jake to speak to the Oracle in the chapter "The Oracle and the Mountains," we discover that Roland himself may be able to use nineteen to further his own ends. Numbers are powerful omens, even in the original version of

the novel, and the Oracle gives Roland a cryptic bit of information that adds up to nineteen. King adds this hint in revision through the Oracle:

Yes, three is mystic. Three stand at the heart of the mantra. (129.33)

Yes, three is mystic. Three stands at the heart of your quest. Another number comes later. Now the number is three. (178.13-15)

The other number is not named, nor is the exact role it will play in Roland's quest. Later in the series, however, the narrative reveals that number to be nineteen. And while the number and its purpose is still a mystery even after revision, King's introduction of it through revision establishes Mid-World as a place in which even Roland's own purpose, in relation to the events happening to and around him, is called into question.

For all the mysteries introduced into the narrative through revision, King's insertion of several different dialects and languages is an addition that elucidates. The function of language cannot be separated from the overall thematic functions of cosmology: just as cosmology deals with the order of a system, language gives names to the parts that compose that system. Throughout the series, we are presented with a progressively diverse number of languages and patois. In the first novel, the residents of Tull speak an old-fashioned, twangy dialect that reminds the reader of John Wayne westerns; by the final novel, *The Dark Tower*, Roland is speaking a consonant-filled foreign language with a Child of Roderick.²⁸ In revision to *The Gunslinger*, the

²⁸ Appearing to suffer from some genetic form of leprosy, the Children of Roderick are a nomadic tribe of slow mutants (Furth 2006, 203), similar to the mutants Roland and Jake encounter in the chapter "The Slow Mutants." In a scene in *The Dark Tower*, Roland learns more about his ultimate destination from a Child of Roderick before killing him.

languages also contribute to the sense of disorientation: these exotic words are dropped into the narrative with almost no explanation, heightening Roland's sense of bewilderment throughout the novel.

In several instances, King portrays simple English as a foreign language for Roland—which makes sense, since we learn later that English is not a Mid-World language. A new passage shows Jake's futile attempt to explain the concept of television to Roland (King 2003, 103.18-104.9); the scene illustrates just how little Roland knows or believes about the origin of his young companion. In another passage, the man in black tells Roland that he has just been shown the “universe;” with an almost ham-handed irony, Roland has never heard the word (King 2003, 283.3). As more dialects are added, Roland’s character develops an uncertainty that is only sketched in for the original novel.

But these revisions also give us more information about Roland’s future encounters and challenges. In the revised *Gunslinger*, we “hear” the tongues that we will hear again later in the series: the rough pidgin of the lawless residents of Lud in *The Waste Lands*; the lyrical patois of the farmers in *Wolves of the Calla*; the alien vocabulary appearing in *Song of Susannah* and *The Dark Tower*. These various languages establish the otherness of Mid-World while giving us insight into the lives of their speakers—they also illuminate the similarities between their world(s) and our own.

The first of King’s linguistic changes deals directly with the cosmology of the novel. In the initial version of the novel we learn from Sylvia Pittston’s small congregation that Christianity is not a major religion in Mid-World, yet there are

casual references to Christianity throughout the novel. To repair this crack in Mid-World's mask, King changes the names of several holidays: All Saints Eve (King 1988, 32) becomes Reap (King 2003, 38), and it is sharproots, not pumpkins, that children carve to decorate their homes. Roland's childhood reminiscence of the Easter-night dance (King 1988, 150) becomes a recollection of the Sowing Night Cotillion—this event is also known as the Commala (King 2003, 205), a word and concept that plays a significant role in volume five, *Wolves of the Calla*. Commala also ties *The Gunslinger* to the residents of Calla Bryn Sturgis, who mark the night when they harvest their rice fields with reverence and celebration.

Changes like these allow King to create a completely new mythology and new belief systems. These changes also diminish the role of religion in Mid-World's mythology, taking the control of one's destiny away from faith and leaving it to cosmic chance—and those unimaginable forces are just as random and mysterious in revision as they are in the original novel.

The new language in the revised version of *The Gunslinger* obscures Roland's view of the world, but it serves to give the reader a more detailed picture of Mid-World. Words and phrases from each of the six subsequent novels are woven into the revised narrative, dropping hints of varying significance; several words are connected to concepts central to the major themes of the novel. Later in the series there are words that are revealed to be common in Mid-World; the word *sai* comes from Roland's own High Speech, but it is used in low speech as well. First appearing in *Wizard and Glass*, it is roughly translated as "sir" or "madam" (Furth 2006, 463). Other words, like "cully" for "lad" and "sissy" for young girl, contribute to the

quaint, old-world feel of the towns and the people Roland encounters during the first volume of his story. These words help sculpt the society in which Roland finds himself after the world has moved on.

Other words tell us about Mid-World's code of behavior in some of its societies. *Dan-dinh* is a combination of two words appearing in books four and five; it means "little leader," *dinh* meaning "leader" or "king"²⁹." It is a phrase that can also signify the opening of one's heart and mind to another person—the act of someone making himself completely vulnerable to another person. Roland's impulse to speak *dan-dinh* to Jake foreshadows his growing love for the boy, as well as Roland's coming betrayal.

Then, there are words whose meanings greatly affect how certain plot elements of the novel are regarded. In fact, the smallest word that King adds is also one of the most important: *ka*. A High Speech word meaning (among other things) "destiny," it is first used in *The Drawing of the Three*, and becomes the keystone of Dark Tower mythology: it represents fate, life force, and duty (Furth 2006, 459), all things which weld Roland to his quest for the Dark Tower. The first line in which it is used in the revised *Gunslinger* is transformed so that Roland is not simply thinking casually about his fate, but relinquishing his future to an unknowable and all-powerful force:

²⁹ There's a bit of a conflict with the words "dan" and "tete"—both appear to mean "little," and it looks like King confuses their meanings from time to time. The term "dan-tete," meaning "little savior" or "baby god" (Furth 198) is later used to describe the son of Roland and the Crimson King, Mordred.

Yet he liked Brown, so he pushed the thought out of his mind and got the rest of his water. What came, came.
(18.9)

Yet he liked Brown, so he pushed the thought out of his mind and got the rest of the water God had willed. Whatever else God willed was ka's business, not his. (15.18-19)

Ka is used throughout the revised novel, and is never explicitly defined; the reader, however, can determine its meaning from its use. It is not the only new word that goes undefined—there are three words introduced that are as enigmatic as the concept they define. In the chapter “The Slow Mutants,” Roland remembers a confrontation between himself, his mother, and Marten, Steven Deschain’s advisor (and, as we find out later, an alternate identity of the man in black). Roland recalls the infrequency with which he sees his mother Gabrielle, and we are given a snippet of a nursery rhyme she sang to Roland when he was a child:

He saw her seldom now, and the phantom of cradle songs had almost faded from his brain. (160.12-13)

He saw her seldom now, and the phantom of cradle songs (*chussit, chissit, chassit*) had almost faded from his brain.
(221.19-21)

We do not see these words again until the final volume of the series, and we learn that they are High Speech numbers: seventeen, eighteen and nineteen. *Chassit* is nineteen, the all-consuming secret that the man in black plants in Allie’s mind like a poisoned seed. Knowing the word’s meaning tells us that Roland has most likely known of the mystery of nineteen since he was a child, though its import was never fully revealed to him.

Over the decades, Stephen King has painstakingly created a universe that encompasses an immense amount of detail; from his characters to his landscapes,

each new element contributes to the impossibility of the world of the Dark Tower. By revising and adding several new pieces of cosmology and language, King gives *The Gunslinger* something the original version did not have: a direction. In revision, Roland has a past beyond his childhood entrance into knighthood; the fate of his homeland is given a cause, and Roland's own quest is given a purpose and the possibility of an endgame. Filling in the blanks with regard to cosmology and language, King gives the revised version of *The Gunslinger* a connection to the other Dark Tower novels, as well as a more clearly rendered identity of its own.

CODA

Roland Deschain's path to the Dark Tower has given us a chance to observe the growth and development of one of America's most successful—and perhaps one of our most underrated—writers. In controlling the evolution of the Dark Tower series, particularly with his return to revise *The Gunslinger*, Stephen King shows that he is capable of maintaining a complex saga with a great degree of literary vision and craftsmanship. This thesis has explored King's focus on refining elements critical to the narrative arc of the series, and has demonstrated *The Gunslinger*'s influence on King's larger body of work. While he is commonly labeled a horror writer, the revised novel shows how King synthesizes his influences and experiences into stories that transcend his brand. Most importantly, the revised novel most clearly defines a theme central to nearly all of King's fiction: the human struggle between salvation and sacrifice.

Textual analysis of *The Gunslinger* has given us more than just an insight into the novel; it has revealed a considerable amount of information about its author. Stephen King is a writer who, despite being boxed in by his success as a horror writer, possesses a wealth of knowledge about culture—from classic poetry to current cinema, King's passion for literature is diverse. But the original version of the *The Gunslinger* demonstrates that knowledge does not always translate to ability.

It is clear that King's original vision for *The Gunslinger* involved a mix of influences; what wasn't clear, however, was how those disparate influences created a cohesive narrative. Elements of fantasy and science fiction were evident from the

start, as well as a soupçon of horror—but, as the novel’s small initial press run and sparse attention from mainstream media revealed, the original novel, which existed for nearly a decade as a stand-alone work, wasn’t easy to categorize. That is because the novel was, frankly, a near-miss; even in 1982, Stephen King’s work was incredibly popular, yet his first true break from the horror formula was all but ignored. Such a departure should have been successful; but a story is usually successful because of strong characters, a fascinating setting, and an intriguing plot. King’s original effort, while ambitious, was incomplete—a mere sketch of a larger saga. The young writer’s vision had not fully developed.

But after years of honing his craft with other works, King returned to *The Gunslinger* and translated his knowledge into coherent literary versatility, and strengthened the foundation of what would become his most influential story. With a mature craftsman’s eye, King returned to the work of a young man and gave it the focus it needed. The result is a novel that gives the reader what it should have imparted the first time around: a direction.

It is worth noting that, even with the first version of *The Gunslinger*, King shows readers that he is no one-trick-pony—he is capable of writing more than just an effective horror story. But King’s broader body of work—those beyond the emerging Dark Tower series—proves that the genre-breaking muscles he flexed in the earliest serial form of *The Gunslinger* continued to strengthen: written in 1978, *The Stand* predates *The Gunslinger* in major publication (but not in conception), and is an example of King’s affinity for fantasy and science fiction. An allegory that lays out a literal battle between good and evil, *The Stand* also serves as an introduction of

Randall Flagg, known in other worlds as the man in black. And *Needful Things*, published in 1991, demonstrates King's ability to integrate dark humor and biting satire into horror. A series of novels written under the pseudonym Richard Bachman contain elements of horror, but often focus on the personal choices of characters, and the strange consequences of those choices. Despite being written under a pseudonym, the main theme of *Blaze* shows that King also continued to develop the themes that first surface with impact in *The Gunslinger*: the choice between self-preservation and sacrifice drives the majority of King's works.

Blaze, published in 2007³⁰ and described by King as the last Bachman book, deals with the abduction of a baby for ransom. The kidnapper, a mentally handicapped man named Clay Blaisdell, develops a deep bond with the child despite his original motivation. While the book's plot is weak and the ending is an abrupt, confusing mashup of fantasy and hard crime, at its core is the ability of a man to weigh his own gain against the well-being of another person.

We saw this theme play out as King revised his first Dark Tower tale. In *The Gunslinger*, Roland's own inner turmoil is exposed when he must choose between saving Jake, or continuing his quest. In revision, a simple choice—the boy or the tower—becomes much more complicated as we learn more about Jake's own backstory and the stakes of Roland's quest. Roland must now choose between saving the Dark Tower and saving the boy, as well as his own soul.

³⁰ The textual parallels between *Blaze* and *The Gunslinger* are even more striking. *Blaze* was written in the early seventies, very close to the time King began to write the first version of *The Gunslinger*; as with *The Gunslinger* he heavily revised *Blaze* after many years, varying through with the themes that first surfaced some thirty years ago. Further, Clay Blasidell's name is mentioned, somewhat obliquely, in the revision of *The Gunslinger*; this could be another way of connecting the world of the Dark Tower with another King work.

The Shining, perhaps one of King's best known titles, dumps its main character into a similar situation: Jack Torrence, the groundskeeper of a haunted hotel, must choose between sacrificing himself and allowing the malevolent force of the hotel to drive him to murder his family. This all-or-nothing position forces a character to make the ultimate choice—he must choose to save himself and let others suffer, or to sacrifice himself so that others will survive. With *The Gunslinger* and many of his other novels, King reveals that—as in real life—the decisions we make for ourselves and others are rarely simple. While the costs of our real-world choices are rarely as high as those King's characters must pay, his aim is to prove that his character's lives are not so removed from our own. Stephen King connects his readers to his fantastical stories through the authenticity of his characters, and through the universal theme of salvation and sacrifice.

All of these themes are implicit in the original *Gunslinger*, and play out with even more impact as King refashioned the novel. This thesis illuminates a dual narrative legacy: a novel that benefits from revision, and a series that benefits from a stronger opening. But this thesis also reveals the writing style and inspiration of an author who is determined to leave a literary legacy aside from his substantial mainstream success. Stephen King is an author whose quest, like Roland's, will never end—he will continue to create worlds whose mysteries, like *The Gunslinger*'s, unfold to reveal a varied and fascinating path.

APPENDIX

The following is the first page of 84-page collation I created for textual analysis of *The Gunslinger*. The grid illustrates how the revisions were recorded and categorized.

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Text: F&SF Oct. 1978</i>		<i>Text: Plume 1988 (1st paperback ed.)</i>		<i>Text: 2003 Revised (paperback ed.)</i>		<i>Variant Classification</i>
			The Gunslinger (part one)		The Gunslinger (part one)		
		11.5	Parsecs	3.4	Eternity		authenticity of terms
		11.5-6	White; blinding; waterless; without feature	3.5-6	It was white and blinding and waterless and without feature		style
		11.10-11	crust of alkali had been a highway and coaches had followed it.	3.9-12	..crust of alkali had been a highway. Coaches and buckas had followed it.		cultural authenticity
			[omitted] The gunslinger walked stolidly,	3.14-4.1	The gunslinger had been struck by a momentary dizziness, a kind of yawning sensation that made the entire world seem ephemeral, almost a thing that could be looked through. It passed and, like the world upon whose hide he walked, moved on. He passed the miles stolidly,		continuity of plot arc; cosmological
		11.17	At the seventh or eighth, he would not have been thirsty;	4.5-6	Had he been a Manni holy man, he might not have even been thirsty		cultural (language)
		11.21-23	He was not seventh or eighth. He was fifth. So he was thirsty, although he had no particular urge to drink. In a vague way, all this pleased him. It was romantic.	4.9-16	He was not a Manni, however, nor a follower of the Man Jesus, and considered himself in no way holy. He was just an ordinary pilgrim, in other words, and all he could say with real certainty was that he was		main character; cultural

					thirsty. And even so, he had no particular urge to drink. In a vague way, all this pleased him. It was what the country required, it was a thirsty country, and he had in his long life been nothing if not adaptable.		
		12.1	Finely	4.17	Carefully		style
		12.2	his hand.	4.18-20	his hands; a plate had been added to each when they had come to him from his father, who had been lighter and not so tall.		main character
		12.5-11	The holsters were tied down with rawhide cord, and they swung heavily against his hips. The brass casings of the cartridges looped into the gunbelts twinkled and flashed and heliographed in the sun. The leather made subtle creaking noises. The guns themselves made no noise. They had spilled blood. There was no need to make noise in the sterility of the desert.	4.23-5.3	Rawhide tiedowns held the holsters loosely to his thighs, and they swung a bit with his step; they had rubbed away the bluing of his jeans (and thinned the cloth) in a pair of arcs that looked almost like smiles. The brass casings of the cartridges looped into the gunbelts heliographed in the sun. There were fewer now. The leather made subtle creaking noises.		style

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