North America: Trans-Worldbuilding and the Stephen King Multiverse

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'I don't really map anything out. I just let it happen' (King, in Breznican, 2017: 17)

'There are other worlds than these' (Stephen King, *The Gunslinger*)

Since the publication of *Carrie* in 1974 – or, more accurately, since Brian De Palma adapted the novel for film two years later -- Stephen King has grown into a transmedia powerhouse, an author not only responsible for writing over fifty novels and ten collections of short fiction, but also a dizzying array of transmedia expressions developed and deployed across various platforms over the past four decades or so. King has written comics (for example, *American Vampire*, *Road Rage*); screenplays based on his own work (*Pet Sematary*, *Silver Bullet*); original screenplays for film and television (*Kingdom Hospital*, *Rose Red*); work-for-hire (*Tales of the Darkside*, *The X-Files*); a serialized novel released in instalments, inspired by the spirit of Charles Dickens (*The Green Mile*); non-fiction books (*Danse Macabre*, *On Writing*); collaborations (Peter Straub, Richard Chizmar); music (*Ghostbrothers of Darkland County* with John Mellencamp; Michael Jackson's *Ghosts*); as well as essays, reviews and a steady stream of praise for popular authors, usually proudly displayed on the front cover of novels (commonly known as 'blurb'). For someone who claims that he writes 2,000 words everyday, including birthdays and holidays, it is hardly surprising that King is one of the most prolific authors in recent memory. But even this is only the tip of the ~~iceberg~~ Tower.

At various points in his career, Stephen King has experimented with new media technologies, often in innovative ways, often ahead-of-the-curve. At the turn of the millennium, King published the first online e-book, *Riding the Bullet* (2000), which heralded a seismic shift in the publishing world, accruing downloads of over 400,000 during the first twenty-four hours of release -- averaging 4.62 copies per second -- and jamming Softlock's servers in the process. The following year, King experimented with online self-publishing with a planned full-length novel released in instalments. At the time of writing, King has all but abandoned *The Plant*, but not because it was a commercial flop. In fact, King himself states that he made over half a million dollars in downloads, an enormous figure considering that users could access the document without financial cost, a system that has since become known as PWYW (pay-what-you-want).[1] Although sales tapered off quite rapidly – down from 120,000 for the first instalment to 40,000 for the next – users cottoned onto the fact that they could download each instalment *gratis*, and King pulled the plug to focus on other projects. By 2017, King has yet to return to *The Plant*.

King's new media excursions include embracing Amazon's Kindle platform at a time when authors and publishers feared for the continued relevance of 'the book' and treated e-book readers as evidence that the devil's minions were hard at work making detritus out of print media. In early 2009, King published a novella, *UR*, to launch the second iteration of Amazon's Kindle e-book reader. The story functions as both an 'episode' in King's magnum opus, 'The Dark Tower', and an extended commercial for the Kindle platform -- the technology is featured as an element of the

story itself, with the device being able to access a bevvy of alternate realities. At various moments, King has debuted his short fiction on the e-book platform, such as *A Face in the Crowd* (2012), a collaboration with Stewart O'Nan (which, at the time of writing, remains available on Kindle and audio book only); and novella, *In the Tall Grass*, written with his son, novelist and comic book writer, Joe Hill, which was first published in two-parts in *Esquire Magazine*, then crossed transmedially to Kindle and audio book. King also experimented with key shifts in mobile phone technology, such as adapting the (then) unpublished story, *N.*, which was delivered to users' mobile phones as 'a ground-breaking series of 25 original video episodes', 'the first comic-style book adaptation especially developed and produced for viewing on today's most popular small screen platforms' (Powers 2008).

King is also, of course, a stellar Hollywood film and television brand (Magistrale 2008, 2010; Browning 2009, 2011). Over sixty adaptations bear the author's signature, the majority of which are based on his novels and short fiction, but also branded on texts that the author played no part in creating, many of them extensions licensed by industry contracts[2], including: *The Rage: Carrie 2* (1999), *Firestarter 2: Rekindled* (2002), *Pet Sematary 2* (1992), *Sometimes They Come Back...Again* (1996), *The Mangler 2* (2002), and ten instalments in the 'Children of the Corn' film series which has been on-going for over thirty years -- quite remarkable considering the short story of which the films are supposedly based only runs for thirty pages.

Taking all this into account, then, it is not too much of a stretch to view King's output as transmedially significant in comparison to other living authors.[3] However, despite scholarly work on King continuing to grow apace (for example, see Hoppenstand 2010; Magistrale 2010; McAlfeer 2009; Wood 2011), academics have yet to turn their attention to the author's expansive oeuvre as a valuable case study in worldbuilding. As Matt Hills explains in this volume, '[w]ork on transmediality, despite being concerned with intellectual properties moving across media, has tended to focus on film, television, comic books and video games' (**page number to be inserted once known**). Considering that 'literary fiction is probably the most active experimental laboratory for of the world-constructing enterprise' (Doležel 1998: ix), the fact that literature (novels, novellas and short stories) have been hitherto excluded from transmedia studies requires redressing. It is this I want to focus on in this chapter, considering the ways in which King's imaginary world has been developed, not with coherent worldbuilding in mind and design, but via a recalibration of the world's ontological rules – that is, 'what can and cannot exist, what is and isn't possible in a particular type of storyworld' (Ryan 2018, 74) – at various junctures in order to retroactively subsume various sub-worlds into an overarching 'hyperdiegesis' (Hills 2002). From such a viewpoint, this chapter demonstrates that King's imaginary world should be considered diachronically, that is, 'a gradual, discontinuous creation' which has 'no singular "big bang"' but, rather, 'has coalesced over time' (Hills 2017). Thus, the Stephen King multiverse is an example of what I would describe, in deference to Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch (1995), as 'an unfolding world'.

With this in mind, I want to illustrate that the narrative mechanics of the King world developed *transfictionally* (Saint-Gelais 2005, 2011), before moving onto the way in which later installments in The Dark Tower series radically alter the world's ontological rules, allowing for 'retroactive linkages' to function as a form of *transfictional bridging* so as to pull disparate sub-worlds into a shared universe – or, 'multiverse', a common science fiction novum (see Proctor 2017). I will then explore the way that the world's ontological rules permit further extensions across platforms,

such as comics and film, resulting in a kind of *reflexive transmedia storytelling*. In so doing, this chapter challenges the current fetishization of transmedia storytelling in academic and production quarters; especially the idea that forms of adaptation should be barred from transmedia storytelling paradigms (see Dena 2018). I will show how comics based on The Dark Tower novels can function as both adaptation *and* transmedia storytelling, thus complicating conceptual and cultural distinctions between the two.

Transfictional Storytelling and Compossible Texts

Coined by Richard Saint-Gelais, the concept of transfictionality describes a process whereby characters, locations and events inhabit and share the same narrative space. In other words, 'two (or more) texts exhibit a transfictional relationship when they share elements such as characters, imaginary locations or fictional worlds' (Saint-Gelais 2005, 612). Although transfictionality is conceptually heterogeneous and may be activated in various different ways, the concepts of *croisement* and *annexions* – crossings and incorporations – are of particular interest for this chapter regarding King's worldbuilding operations as the joining together of 'two (or more) fictions which the reader had hitherto every reason to consider unrelated, and which now find themselves conjoined in a third text' (84). In order to differentiate between the various operations of transfictionality, the concept of 'compossibility' (Doležel 1998) is necessary to demarcate which texts form the building blocks of the imaginary world. To illustrate, I consider the transfictional bridges between several of King's novels that subsume purportedly isolated texts into a unified narrative terrain. I explain these *world-bridges* conceptually as comprising character, event and geography. The following examples provide outline and illustration (but not exhaustion).

King's mammoth novel, *IT* (1986), for instance, includes several transfictional bridges that subsume and interconnect a variety of King novels into a shared universe paradigm. [4] More than this, however, is that transfictional expressions begin to variously build a network of connections that function as (world) building blocks, feeding into a shared narrative terrain whereby a welter of crossings and incorporations provide substantive connections between fictions. I will use *IT* as an example of transfictional bridge(s), either emanating from, or pointing towards, the text.

Midway through *IT*, the character Mike Hanlon recounts a story once told by his father about a tragic fire at the Black Spot, a local nightclub primarily for soldiers of colour. This nested story within a story is less important than the way in which the narrative provides a transfictional bridge with King's third novel, *The Shining* (1977), through the character of Dick Halloran. In *The Shining*, Halloran is the caretaker of the Overlook Hotel, the central location for the novel's action. In *IT*, Halloran is featured some three decades prior to his introduction in *The Shining,* and the character's inclusion serves as a 'flashback', 'a backward continuation meant to work its way upstream' (Genette 1997, 177). Such a brief appearance (a transfictional cameo, so to speak), operates to substantiate and concretise the King imaginary world as existing within the same narrative space and, thus, pulls *The Shining* into *IT's* narrative orbit (and vice versa). In so doing, both novels become 'compossible' through transfictional relationships. Or, to explain another way, *The Shining* and *IT* novels are compossible texts, which means that they exist within the same imaginary space. On the other hand, however, the film adaptations of *The Shining* and *IT* are

narratively *non*-compossible with their source texts (at least at the narrative level). Given that transfictionality covers a wide ambit and could feasibly include, say, characters crossing over fictions that do not chronological 'fit', such as the panoply of Sherlock Holmes' 'versions' that inhabit discrete storyworlds (Lapoint 2017). To differentiate between generalised instances of transfictionality, we can describe compossibility within a particular storyworld as an example of *canonical compossibility*, which refers to all of the texts written directly by King.

At another point in the novel, Beverley Marsh – like Hanlon, a member of *IT's* 'The Loser's Club' – refers to Frank Dodd, 'that crazy cop who killed all those women in Castle Rock, Maine', a seemingly throwaway statement perhaps for casual King readers, but which nevertheless (hyperdiegetically) incorporates and subsumes *The Dead Zone* (1979) into *IT's* narrative and, by extension, *The Shining*. As a result, an 'event' in one novel can become a transfictional bridge when referred to in another, so that Frank Dodd's murderous spree also appears in the opening paragraph to *Cujo* (1983), along with John Smith, the reluctant psychic-protagonist of *The Dead Zone*:

> Once upon a time, not so long ago, a monster came to the small town of Castle Rock, Maine…He was not werewolf, vampire, ghoul or unnameable creature from the enchanted forest or from the snowy wastes; he was only a cop named Frank Dodd with mental and sexual problems. A good man named John Smith uncovered his name by a kind of magic, but before he could be captured – perhaps it was just as well – Frank Dodd killed himself (King: 1981, 3).

In essence, King's opening gambit summarises *The Dead Zone* in a nutshell. Recounting the plot so directly, however brief, as well as demonstrating that the 'small town of Castle Rock' is also transfictional (which I shall turn to momentarily), characters, events and locations often 'crossover' from one novel into another and, thus, 'thicken' the parameters of the imaginary world through *repetitive association*. Put simply, the more that (trans) associations breach the borders of the literary text and puncture the diegetic wall separating one sub-world from another – a wall which is always-already porous and unstable – then the 'thicker' the world becomes 'and the greater the illusion of ontological weight that it has' (Wolf 2012, 247). As a transfictional event, then, the Dodd 'episode' in *The Dead Zone* bears the footprint of that novel and stamps its mark across several books, thus providing a sequence of transfictional bridges that establish multiple connections in one fell swoop, working as a type of *continuity cascading*, with each node in the network activating narrative interconnectivity even further. Beverley Marsh's comment may link *IT* with *The Dead Zone*, but doing so is only the beginning of a much more complex interrelationship between canonically compossible texts.

Transfictional events often occur in conjunction with transfictional characters, such as with Sheriff Bannerman, the law enforcement officer in *The Dead Zone* who recruited Johnny Smith to assist with the spate of murders in Castle Rock due to rumours about his psychic abilities: at this point in the novel, Bannerman seeks out Johnny because he has made no progress in the case of the 'Castle Rock Strangler' (Dodd, it turns out, is a fellow police officer). Bannerman turns up in *Cujo* and meets a grisly end at the jaws of the rabid St. Bernard, while in *The Dark Half* (1989), we meet Alan Pangborn, the newly-elected Sheriff of Castle Rock following Bannerman's death. Pangborn re-appears in *Needful Things*, 'the last Castle Rock

story'.[5] In *Pet Sematary* (1983: 20), a novel that King claims almost didn't see the light of day due to its nihilistic cynicism, Jud Crandall explains that there has been an rising tide 'of rabies in Maine now. There was a big old St. Bernard went rabid downstate a couple of years ago and killed four people.' Whether through the titular canine or his unfortunate victims, *Cujo* is invoked in several novels, establishing multiple world-bridges between various texts.

So, then, what we have here is a series of transfictional border crossings, of character and event, with each reference leading King's Constant Readers, the author's affectionate mode for addressing his most dedicated fans, to another in a complex chain of signification, each ricocheting and reverberating endlessly across the texts of King's multiverse, ontologically thickening the world through repetitive association. However, transfictional characters and events are also thickened by the reoccurrence of environments that form the basis for King's version of Maine and provide the settings for many novels. In *IT*, for example, King sketches out a history of the fictional town of Derry in detail (1986, 196 – 98), as well as developing the more *outré* mythos of Pennywise, 'the apotheosis of all monsters' (6). More than this, however, is the way in which the locale of Derry (as with Castle Rock) serves as the central environment for multiple novels and, in this way, becomes a kind of *transfictional geography*. So, for example, in the 'Derry novel', *Dreamcatcher* (2001), a piece of graffiti proclaiming 'Pennywise Lives', sets off a chain of associations that leads directly back to *IT*, while in the process also referencing other Derry novels, such as *Insomnia* (1995) -- which features the re-appearance of Mike Hanlon post-*IT* and references the tragic fire at the Black Spot recounted in Hanlon's father's story of his father mentioned earlier -- and *11/22/63*, including a chance meeting between protagonist, Jake Epping, and members of The Loser's Club from *IT*, Beverly Marsh and Richie Tozier).

Taken all the above into account, King has developed his imaginary world diachronically, casting transfictional anchors in order to pull disparate texts – which *become* 'micro-narratives' from the perspective of world-building -- into a hyperdiegetic 'macro-structure' (Ryan 1992, 373). This leads us to The Dark Tower saga, a series of eight novels that over time further establishes and develops transfictional relationships via the employment of 'retroactive linkages', permitted by significant alterations to the ontological rules governing 'the world.'

Retroactive Linkages and The Dark Tower

'The man in black fled across the desert and the gunslinger followed' (King, 1).

So begins and ends Stephen King's self-described magnum opus, The Dark Tower, a series of eight novels[6] amounting to over 4000 pages that recalibrates the rules of the imaginary world so that all of King's fiction could be enveloped into an overarching multiverse comprised of parallel worlds. As Tony Magistrale puts it, The Dark Tower

> can be appreciated as a means for unpacking the King canon, an umbrella text encompassing the whole of the writer's fictional oeuvre…The Dark Tower is therefore a kind of Unified Field Theory for King…The Dark Tower is a multi-layered universe in which multiple worlds co-exist (Magistrale 2010, 150 – 51).

Although there is no scope in this chapter to offer a detailed synopsis of the saga – readers wanting something of that ilk can check out Vincent (2013) or Wiater, Golden and Wagner (2006) – it is worth describing the story in a nutshell.

Written between 1970 and 2003, along with an 'intraquel' [7], *The Wind Through the Keyhole* (2012) -- which chronologically fits in between the third and fourth volumes, *The Waste Lands* (1991), and *Wizard and Glass* (1997) respectively -- The Dark Tower series concerns protagonist, Roland Deschain, the last gunslinger, as he journeys across the lands of Mid-World – and across alternate worlds -- in order to find and protect the titular Tower, which stands at 'the point in time, space and reality where all dimensions meet' (Wiater et al. 2003, 22). The Tower, we come to learn, is under attack from dark forces led by the Crimson King, who readers do not meet until the final book, *The Dark Tower* (2003). In the first book, *The Gunslinger* (1982, 2003), Roland is hot on the heels of The Man in Black, chasing him across the Mohaine desert for reasons not quite clear at this stage. Along the way, Roland meets Jake Chambers, who we learn has been murdered in another world – *our* world, what comes to be known as 'Keystone Earth' in the multiverse, one world among many. Roland sacrifices Jake in order to continue after the Man in Black, who, upon recognizing his fate, utters the oft-quoted words, '[g]o then. There are other worlds than these' (King 2003, 210), illustrating that death is but a doorway to a distinct, but interconnected, reality. As Roland finally catches up with the Man in Black, the reality of the tower, and the multiverse, is revealed:

> Imagine the sand of the Mohaine Desert, which you crossed to find me, and imagine a trillion universes – not worlds but universes – encapsulated in each grain of sand of that desert; and within each universe an infinity of others. We tower over these universes from our pitiful grass vantage point; with one swing of your boot you may knock a billion billion worlds, flying off into darkness, in a chain never to be completed […] Yet suppose further. Suppose that all worlds, all universes, met in a single nexus, a single pylon, a Tower (2003, 229 – 30).

In the second volume, *The Drawing of the Three* (1987), Roland plucks Eddie Dean and Susannah Holmes from Keystone Earth and is re-joined by Jake Chambers in *The Waste Lands*, forming a Ka-tet ('one made from many'). In the final book, Roland reaches his destination alone and climbs the stairs to the Tower, only to discover that the answers he so desperately seeks evade him as he is hurtled back to the beginning of his quest (or, at least, to the beginning of *The Gunslinger*), cursed to battle for the survival of the Tower over and over again, trapped in a time loop (hence, the repetition of the first line in the saga as the final in the series). However, rather than this 'loop', or cycle, being a form of Nietzschean 'eternal recurrence', whereby time is repeated verbatim for eternity, each 'turn of the wheel' represents a different journey for Roland and he is theoretically capable of changing his fate (although he is does not remember his previous adventures). How many 'cycles' Roland has experienced thus far is not known to readers, although it is implied that 'the gunslinger has repeated and resumed his quest many times before' (McAlfeer 2009, 27). Keeping this in mind, King revised the first book, *The Gunslinger*, in 2003 so as to establish greater continuity, tone and tenor with the later novels, we could reasonably view the original version as an earlier iteration of Roland's cycle, rather than rendered illegitimate and non-canonical by the newer, revised tale.

The introduction of the multiverse concept, of a nexus of parallel worlds with the Dark Tower as lynchpin, afforded King the opportunity to begin constructing transfictional bridges between (what was at that point) two incommensurable worlds in order to fuse them together. For over two decades -- or even further back if we accept that King wrote the first sentence in 1970—'The Dark Tower' novels were 'marked by unique alterities' (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 2012, 502), and deemed such 'a distinct departure' (McAleer 2009, 9) from King's other works, that they were occluded from the hyperdiegesis explicitly developed in what we can call 'Keystone texts' to differentiate between Tower and non-Tower novels. King has, in actual fact, provided a series of reflexive commentaries, or 'peritexts' (1997, 8), that explicitly show that it was not until the nineties that he *learned* that both worlds co-existed hyperdiegetically. Writing in the 'Afterword' to fourth volume, *Wizard and Glass*, King explains that he is 'coming to understand that Roland's world (or worlds) contains all the others of my making' (1997). Following publication of the final novel in 2003, King again reflected on this as a *discovery*, explaining that, '[m]y idea was to use The Dark Tower stories as a kind of summation, a way of unifying as many of my previous stories as possible beneath the arch of some *über*-tale' (King 2004, 685). Here, King states that it was during the writing of *Insomnia*, a 'Dark Tower' book in all but name, that he consciously began to view the two worlds as commensurable and compossible, ultimately building transfictional bridges during the period in earnest. In so doing, the ontological rules permitted by the parallel universe novum, modifies and remediates The Dark Tower, from outlier fantasy world occupying the fringes of the imaginary world, or even existing outside of it, to hyperdiegetic centrepiece. It is not that 'all of King's work [is] an outgrowth of the Dark Tower series,' as Wiater et al argue (2003, 22), but the other way around: The Dark Tower is an outgrowth of King's work (although perhaps it would be best to view the worlds as dialogic). That is to say, the panoply of transfictional crossings and incorporations that weave King's fiction into a narrative tapestry began not with The Dark Tower books, but in Keystone fiction, in *Cujo*, *IT*, *Needful Things*, *The Dead Zone*, *Pet Sematary*, and so forth. Without such anchors and bridges, it would not have been possible to activate continuity cascades, with references and quotations ricocheting from one node to another across the narrative network, providing the structure of the world with ontological heft. King's Tower novels may stand at the centre of the (hyperdiegetic) space-time continuum, but the ontological rules governing the multiverse required extending in order to subsume non-series elements into a unified hyperdiegesis.

Moreover, many Tower concepts were not introduced in the series, but in Keystone texts, with multiple transfictional bridges pointing *towards* 'The Dark Tower,' as well as in the other direction, thickening the associations between worlds. In *Insomnia*, for example, King developed the notion of the multiverse comprised of multiple 'levels'[8] of the Tower, each level containing an infinite number of parallel worlds, which is further expanded in *Wizard and Glass* when Roland and his Ka-Tet cross into an unfamiliar apocalyptic world and, in the process, transfictionally crossover between diegetic realms. In Roland's world, the borders between worlds have started breaking down, leading to fissures between alternate realities, so when the Ka-Tet come across a newspaper with the headline, 'CAPTAIN TRIPS' SUPERFLU RAGES UNCHECKED' (King 1997, 90 – 91), a transfictional bridge is constructed between The Dark Tower and *The Stand*, fusing the two worlds (although Roland's world and the world of *The Stand* exist on different levels of the Tower).

It was during the nineties that King began building transfictional bridges from 'The Dark Tower' to non-series Keystone books and back again, pulling as many

texts as possible within the shadow of the Tower. The concept of 'Breakers,' psychic children with the power to topple the Tower, is introduced in the novella, 'Low Men with Yellow Coats,' contained in *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999), along with Chief Breaker, Ted Brautigan, who readers meet again in the final volume. The mythos is developed further in *Black House* (2001), a sequel to *The Talisman* (1984), both co-written with Peter Straub. Perhaps the most significant transfictional bridge, however, occurs in the fifth book, *Wolves of the Calla* (2003) wherein Roland meets Father Callahan, a character from his second novel, *'Salem's Lot* (1975), who perished at the hands of vampire, Barlow, and woke up in Mid-World ('there are other worlds than these'). From this perspective, *Wolves of the Calla* functions partly as a sequel to *Salem's Lot,* and short story, 'Jerusalem's Lot' (1978). Here, King's fiction becomes less for casual airport readers and more for Constant Readers (or, more accurately, King's 'Tower junkies'), demanding extensive encyclopaedic competences (Eco 1984, 7) to follow what is happening in the story. A Keystone novel, such as *Insomnia* or *Black House*, becomes difficult, if not impossible, to follow completely without at least some knowledge regarding The Dark Tower. It is perhaps for this reason that The Dark Tower novels have not sold as much as King's other works (which is not to say that they are poor sellers by any stretch).

The fact that these various transfictional bridges are constructed in hindsight dovetails with Wolf's concept of 'retroactive linkages' which

> are most commonly found in the work of author's who have created two or more imaginary worlds and wish to bring them together into one larger creation, so they can be considered as a form of worldbuilding…the term "multiverse" is sometimes used, which describes overall structure resulting from the connection of two or more universes… (2012, 216).

Of course, it could be argued that King employed the use of retroactive linkages to unify his various fictions, always looking backwards in a rear-view mirror. But the concept is most often used to explain the conjoining of two (or more) distinct realities, as with Edgar Rice Burrough's fusing together of the world of his Pellucidar, 'a land inhabited by an intelligent species of pterodactyls,' with the world of Tarzan (Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman 2014, 12).

In 2004, the final volume of the Dark Tower spelled the end of a four-decade journey for King (although he would return to Mid-World with both Kindle novella, *UR*, and novel, The *Wind Through the Keyhole,* and has said he may revisit at some point in the future). But the ontological status of the world – of the multiverse – allowed for the existence of multiple texts existing on different planes of reality, on different levels of the tower, as it were, to coagulate and solidify narratively. This would allow for the emergence of an expanded universe spearheaded by King's author-function as creative consultant, but which would become transauthorial and transmedial. The next section explores The Dark Tower comics, published by Marvel, as unsettling binaries between adaptation and the utopian promise of Jenkins' (2006) seminal, but utopian, definition of transmedia storytelling. I also consider the role of 'orienting paratexts' of the kind that Saint-Gelais (1999) describes as 'xenoencyclopedia' as a way to further explain and expand the world's – or worlds' – ontological rules outside the parameters of the (narrative) world itself.

The Dark Tower Expanded Universe

In 1999, Stephen King was involved in a life-threatening accident, and Roland's quest was in peril, the Dark Tower verging on collapse. During recovery, King promised, not for the first time, that he would write the remaining three volumes of The Dark Tower back-to-back. However, due to the lengthy gaps between instalments, King claimed that the world had become so labyrinthine that he required a guidebook, a story bible that he could consult to ensure continuity between the various books in the series without having to break the flow of writing and risk the story 'growing cold' (King 2012, xiii). To this end, King hired Robin Furth as his research assistant, the result of which was a detailed concordance, designed 'to limit these aggravating pauses by putting Roland's world at my fingertips – not just names and places, but slang terms, dialects, relationships, even whole chronologies' (ibid).

In 2007, Marvel Comics announced a comic series based on The Dark Tower novels. Beginning not with *The Gunslinger*, but with the back-story of Roland's early years as depicted in *Wizard and Glass*, the first mini-series, *The Gunslinger Born*, works as an adaptation of King's fourth series novel. The series was overseen by King as creative consultant, thereby utilising his 'author-function' to brand the comics as legitimate entries in The Dark Tower mythology, and plotted/ outlined by Furth. Although King did not write the script – that was superhero comic alumni, Peter David -- his authorship is evoked in promotional paratexts as with, for example, a press release from comic distributor, Diamond:

> King is directly involved in the creative aspects of the project, supervising all editorial and visual content…Robin Furth…is outlining the Dark Tower comic book series, providing scene-by-scene plotting and maintaining the continuity and consistency of each story arc' (quoted in Vincent 2013, 145).

By indicating King's active involvement, paratexts of this kind work to convince readers that the comics will be faithful to the novels and should be considered authentic contributions to hyperdiegesis. King, of course, always maintains his position as grand poobah, or 'pope of the magisterial,' offering 'definitive, official rulings on matters of canon' (Parkin 2007, 252), but also endorses Furth as a 'secondary author,' perhaps bolstered by her painstaking *Stephen King's The Dark Tower Concordance* (which has since been published in two volumes and then collected as a single compendium amounting to almost 700 pages of imaginary world facts and details); and, perhaps most importantly, (paratextually) blessed by the pope himself. As with authorship discourse in general terms, King's stamp of approval, his imprimatur, serves a commercial function, a promotional strategy that points toward authenticity. By constructing authorship hierarchically, with King and his oeuvre occupying the highest level, emphasizes that the hyperdiegesis is not democratic, whereby all texts are awarded equal footing, but, instead, underwritten by several layers, or strata. Within such a *stratified hyperdiegesis*,[9] the King imaginary world can be seen as comprising multiple levels of text as with, for example, the canonical rules that governed the Star Wars universe prior to Disney's takeover in 2012, whereby a hierarchical taxonomy was introduced, providing readers of the Expanded Universe of texts *outside* the cinematic saga with official rulings from the Pope – here, George Lucas, or proxy-body Lucas Licensing -- describing the various levels of

canonicity (Proctor and Freeman, 2017). In so doing, the Star Wars film series consistently remains as lynchpin of the imaginary world, the saga's own Dark Tower.

Viewing The Dark Tower comics as *only* adaptation, however, is complicated by narrative details and scenarios that

> expand on things that are not mentioned or only briefly alluded to in the novels. The journey back to Gilead is greatly expanded. For the sfirst time, readers learn how Farson's forces regroup after their defeat in Hambry and rise against Gilead, eventually sacking it. The climax of the series is the battle of Jericho Hill, where the gunslingers made their last stand' (Vincent 2013, 144).

In this light, the current 'no adaptation rule' (Dena 2018) in transmedia storytelling becomes freighted with cultural distinction, continuing the 'constant denigration of the general phenomenon of adaptation' in academic terms (Hutcheon, 2006, xi; see also Stam and Raengo 2005). 'Transmedia storytelling is not *mere* adaptation', writes Ryan, the term 'mere' constructing a binary relationship, or 'moral dualism' (Hills 2002), between 'good' (integrated, coherent) transmedia and 'bad' (parasitical, redundant) adaptation. In Henry Jenkins' seminal definition (2006), both adaptation *and* licensed spin offs are deemed unworthy of the transmedia storytelling appellation. The idea that 'an adaptation is understood as a version or retelling of the original, whereas an extension goes beyond the original' (Jenkins 2017) is complicated and confounded by The Dark Tower comics, which ultimately work, *contra* Jenkins and Ryan, by collapsing the dualism between the two models.

Neither should we consider adaptation as a form of transfictional process, as Saint-Gelais argues,

> precisely because of this goal of diegetic equivalence, which is incompatible with the profoundly transfictional actions of extrapolation and expansion: adaptations do not intend to continue the story, much less suggest new adventures for the protagonists (quoted in Wells-Lassagne 2017, 8).

This notion of 'diegetic equivalence' dovetails with Jenkins' 'redundancy' and Ryan's 'mere' distinction; that is, adaptation is primarily nothing more than straightforward replication and reproduction, an equivalency that is transported across platforms monolithically. The Dark Tower comics, however, work as adaptation, transfictional and transmedia storytelling, as 'an extension of The Dark Tower series, one that provides additional tales to supplement the original tales and additional depictions of the scenes and characters' (McAlfeer 2009, 24). I am not suggesting we venture down the post-structural rabbit-hole, casting aside signifiers and concepts as we go: it is vitally important to construct theoretical models with which to examine popular artefacts. Indeed, how else would scholars be able to analyse texts and worlds without coherent framing principles? King's multiverse, however, convincingly illustrates that general ('one size fits all') rulings often fail to cope with the complexity of imaginary worlds. To this end, I would argue that each world needs to be explored and examined based on its own identity, idiosyncrasy, and narrative architecture.

To complicate matters further, Furth admittedly contradicted several events depicted in the novels, which led to questions and queries from fan-readers regarding

the canonical status of the comics. To explain how the comic books could be conceived as compossible, then, Furth addressed the aporia directly in an essay contained within the first issue of mini-series, *The Man In Black* (2012):

> When I think about differences between the novels and the comics – and there are many of them – I always keep in mind Jake Chambers' famous phrase, "there are other worlds than these". The Dark Tower contains many levels, and within those levels are parallel worlds which mirror each other, but which are not exactly alike […] I always view the Dark Tower comics as existing in one of these parallel worlds. If the Dark Tower novels exist in Tower Keystone [Roland's world], or the central world of The Dark Tower universe, then The Dark Tower comics exist in a spin-off world (Furth 2013, 4).

At this stage, King had all but become *deus absconditus* (Krzysztof 2017, 84), and left Furth to wander areas not fully developed or explored in the mythos (although King's author-function would remain active as creative consultant and executive producer).

> I monitored them really closely at the beginning. I wanted to make sure everything was on track and going the right way […] After they went off on their own, I didn't want to junk up my head with their storylines […] I've got this one book coming out, *The Wind Through the Keyhole*, and there might be more after that, but if they are, they won't be influenced at all by whatever's going on in the comics. You know what Roland always says: there are other worlds than these (King, quoted in Vincent 2013, 105).

On the one hand, this certainly appears to be a narrative gimmick, a 'get-out-of-jail-free' card that aims to address and resolve the fannish commitment to 'textual conservationism' (Hills 2002, 28). On the other hand, however, the ontological rules of the imaginary world expressly license the inclusion of multiple worlds, with The Dark Tower at the centre, so the comics can be viewed as occupying a different (perhaps lower) level of the Tower, but, perhaps most importantly, legitimately part of (stratified) hyperdiegesis. Discursively evoking the multiverse in such a manner aims to envelop compossible and non-compossible texts into a *trans-compossible* structure, thus serving those who read for hyperdiegesis. Whether or not fans embrace these rulings as legitimate is another question entirely and beyond the scope of this chapter. In any case, the point here is not specifically about defending ontological rules, but about the way in which King and Furth discursively engage with readers to convert discontinuity into contiguous hyperdiegetic framings.

That said, such strategies are not developed in imaginary world co-ordinates, but, instead, via what Jason Mittell describes as 'orienting paratexts,' which reside

> outside the [hyper]diegetic storyworld, providing a perspective for viewers [and readers] to help make sense of a narrative world by looking at it from a distance – although as with all such categorical distinctions, actual practices often muddy such neat dichotomies. Orientation is not necessary to discover the canonical truth of a storyworld but rather it is used to help figure out how the pieces fit

together or to prose alternative ways of seeing the story that might not be suggested or by or contained within the original narrative design (2015, 261-62).

From this perspective, worldbuilding occurs not only in the textual world, the dominion of narrative, but also in paratexts, through the delivery of exposition and explication. Viewing these elements as somehow 'outside of the world' is problematic, however: '[a]nalyzing worldbuilding narratives is nearly impossible without acknowledging that one of their major constituents is the proliferation of various appendices, additions, expansions, supplements or paratexts (Krzysztof 2015, 87). As Jonathan Gray argues, *the text* 'is a larger unit than any film or show [or comic, novel etc] that may be part of it; *it is the entire storyworld as we know it*' (2010, 7, my italics). Paratextual framings are thus integral components of worldbuilding, actively forming part of 'the text' rather than reduced to 'a body of extra-diegetic supplementary commentary' (Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. 2012, 502). Just as the Tower contains an infinite number of levels, each level comprising an infinity of universes, as a narrative component of the text-world, so too does the Tower function on a metatextual level, drawing attention to its own construction. Taking this into account, then, The Dark Tower comics can be viewed as a kind of *reflexive transmedia storytelling*, whereby the multiverse concept is invoked paratextually to reflect upon, account for, and resolve, the hyperdiegetic tension between compossible and non-compossible texts.

Consider also the film 'adaptation,' *The Dark Tower*. Released in 2017, after over a decade in 'development hell,' the film takes significant liberties with the source text(s), setting the ground for fidelity complaints from Tower junkies. Indeed, *The Dark Tower* film is in no way a reductive 'diegetic equivalent' of *The Gunslinger* but, instead, transposes and translates elements from across the mythos, selecting and re-appropriating from various books in the series. Remembering that Jake Chambers was murdered in Keystone Earth, his death opening the doorway to Mid-World, and being sacrificed by Roland as he feverishly pursues the Man in Black across the Mohaine desert, neither event occurs in the film. In the lead up to the film's theatrical release, promotional paratexts explicitly marshalled The Dark Tower not as adaptation but as a sequel. By taking Roland's end-point in the novels as a starting point, his continuous looping through time, the film represents the beginning of his quest as a new turn of the cycle, a fact supported within the text as the Man in Black says, 'once more around the wheel, old friend (thus also showing that he is aware of Roland's destiny). 'It is, in fact, a continuation,' claims director Nikolaj Arcel, before name-dropping King and (re) activating authorship discourse. 'It is a canonical continuation. That's exactly what we intended and what Stephen King signed off on' (quoted in Lussier 2017).

Incidentally, Roland's loop is enforced by lack; that is, according to Furth, Roland requires the Horn of Eld, a novum that he left on the battlefield of Jericho Hill, to enable him to break the curse upon reaching the Tower. Until Roland is in possession of the Horn, his 'journey must endlessly repeat' (Furth 2012, 468). So it is that King himself tweeted an image of the horn with the words 'last time around' attached, describing the film as potentially Roland's final spin of the wheel. Indeed, our first sight of Roland in *The Dark Tower* film shows that he is clearly in possession of the Horn of Eld.

Despite the film failing to set box offices alight – although, according to Box Office Mojo, it has collected $111 million against a budget of $60 million, hardly a out-and-out failure – plans are in the works for the development of a television series based on the prequel elements in *Wizard and Glass*, illustrating that Jenkins' transmedia storytelling model may be in the series' future, although only time will tell how this will turn out. As a sequel, the film also constructs several transfictional/ transmedial bridges that lead back towards King's non-series work, including *IT*, *The Shining* and *Cujo*. This neatly brings us full circle.

Conclusion: Trans-Worldbuilding?

As a case study in worldbuilding, then, the Stephen King Multiverse shows that (fetishized) transmedia storytelling is but one element in a complex chain of trans-associations. Saint-Gelais' concept of transfictionality shares common principles with transmediality, most notably those crossings and incorporations that occur intramedially before spinning off into transmedia, and transauthorial, locations. Viewing 'true' transmedia storytelling as *the* dominant factor in imaginary world architecture needs re-adjusting to account for the variable ways that such worlds are constructed, whether diachronically or otherwise, and that worldbuilding can sometimes be quite messy and knotted, *contra* utopian transmedia storytelling. This chapter, however, has only scratched the surface of King's multiverse. I have not yet touched on the 'trans-temporal' (Freeman 2015) attributes of the world, nor have I engaged with King's oeuvre as *trans-generic* (which is not the same as generic hybridity although that is certainly a factor). King may be best known for horror fiction, but works such as *Dolores Claibourne* (1992), *Gerald's Game* (1992) and *Different Seasons* (1982[10]), to name a select few, obscures the author's bibliography and compartmentalises it into neat and tidy genre-boxes. Whether or not King eventually returns to Roland's world as promised, perhaps filling in gaps between instalments or spinning off into other co-ordinates, the world of The Dark Tower continues to be adapted and augmented in comics, film, on Kindle (the Dark Tower novella, *UR*), and an online alternate reality game, *Discordia*, which introduces new character, Arina Yokova, who upon learning about Roland's loop sets out to break him free. Yet despite these many instantiations, Roland's journey may only be at the beginning. As King constantly reminds us, destiny – or Ka, in the vernacular of Mid-World – is but a wheel. One thing, however, remains the same in all iterations hitherto:

'The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed.'

Bibliography

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[1] Perhaps the most famous example of PWYW was Radiohead's *In Rainbows*, although King pipped them to the post by almost a decade.

[2] Author/ industry contracts of this kind usually include licensing rights to produce sequels.

[3] Adaptations of Shakespeare plays and texts based on Frankenstein and Sherlock Holmes, for instance, far exceed adaptations based on King's work in terms if quantity.

[4] The concept of the 'shared universe' is commonplace in comic books, pulp fiction (Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman, 2014) and science fiction worlds.

[5] Although *Needful Things* concludes with the demise of Castle Rock and was promoted as the final novel to be set there, King has at various times returned to the small town. In 2017, it was announced that J.J Abrams and Stephen King would be collaborating on an anthology series featuring many of King's popular characters called *Castle Rock*, which will be available on streaming platform, Hulu, sometime in 2018.

[6] In chronological order, the Tower novels are as follows: *The Gunslinger* (1981; 2003); *The Drawing of the Three* (1987); *The Wastelands* (1991); *Wizard and Glass* (1997); *The Wind Through the Keyhole* (2012); *Wolves of the Calla* (2003); *Song of Susannah* (2004); and *The Dark Tower* (2004).

[7] Wolf describes an intraquel as 'a narrative sequence which fills in a narrative gap within an already-existing sequel element' (2012: 378).

[8] This idea of a multiverse comprised of layers is featured in Michael Moorcock's *The Sundered Worlds* (1961), the first book to use the term 'multiverse', which was coined by Moorcock himself (and not the quantum physicists) (for more on multiverses in popular culture, see Proctor, 2017).

[9] Thanks to Matt Hills both for suggesting the term, 'stratified hyperdiegesis,' and for discussing this idea in personal communication. I am grateful for Hills' permission to use the concept in this chapter.

[10] *Different Seasons* is an anthology of novellas and includes 'Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption,' 'The Body' (filmed as Stand by Me) and 'Apt Pupil.'