

**Macabre Collectibles:  
Collecting Culture and Stephen King**

by

**Seyyed Mohsen Hosseini**

A thesis  
presented to the University Of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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## Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner

Dominick Grace

Professor

Supervisor

Kevin McGuirk

Associate Professor

Internal Member

Ken Hirschkop

Associate Professor

Internal Member

Gordon Slethaug

Adjunct Professor

Internal-external Member

Andrew Hunt

Professor

## **Author's declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

Objects have a significant place in Stephen King's horror fiction and the landscape he has created in his numerous novels and short stories. The human-thing relationship in his fiction, however, has been generally reduced by critics to human-machine relationship. Going beyond this reductive duality and putting more emphasis on *things* in King's horror factory is what this project is about. One of the best examples of *useless* objects known as things in Thing Theory is those accumulated as part of a collection. This study addresses the states of possessing and being possessed developed in the context of collecting in King's selected fiction. Collecting in Stephen King involves more than cataloguing horror features and/or random *bric-à-brac*. There are instances in King's novels where characters are described by their collections, to show their obsessions and deviations. This study goes even further and explores the system of collecting in order to discuss King's career, the genre(s) he is associated with, and the social and cultural condition he has been part of. At the end of this journey, he is portrayed as a collectible himself.

Of the four novels read in this study, *It*, *Needful Things*, and *Duma Key* respectively represent three modes of collecting, that is, systematic, fetish object, and souvenir. The last novel, *Misery*, is analyzed in terms of seriality, the intrinsic value common in all collections. This simple categorization, however, is not the purpose of this study. Concepts of hyperreality and simulation have been used to enrich the discussion in a higher level. Following the example of Eco's "Travels in Hyperreality,"

the goal is to re-visit the selected novels to provide commentaries on King's horror fiction and its significance in American popular culture.

The journey begins with the metaphor of *It* as a *Wunderkammer* and King's systematic collecting of relics of an old genre. The order of things and its epistemological implications are discussed in the peculiar space created in the novel as a cabinet of curiosities. The time-space interactions in the anomalous environment within a collection are covered both in *It* and *Duma Key*. Besides a wider range of narrative possibilities, the heterotopic space in King's sanctuary island of Duma Key provides damaged people with an opportunity to re-member and become full again. The therapeutic function of artistic creativity is also discussed in the context of collecting as a creative activity. The significant role of objects in identity formation finds an eerie dimension when pathological and extreme forms of collecting are analyzed in *Needful Things*. Authenticity, which is of great importance in collecting culture, is another theme in King's little shop of horrors. The concept of fake things in this Faustian parable is expanded to a dichotomy between the real and unreal in King's landscape of horror and his writing career. The chapter on *Misery* considers the fate of the popular author (King himself included) in the context of seriality. The confrontation of a serial writer and a serial killer (both considered as collectors) provides us with a dark image of genre writers bound by market demands and celebrity writers threatened by their fans.

Stephen King, in short, has been created and nurtured in a collecting culture along with other related trends like pastiche and kitsch. He is a macabre collector as much as the constant readers who do not miss a single King.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Kevin McGuirk for the continuous support of my PhD study, for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my PhD study.

I would also like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Prof. Dominick Grace, Prof. Gordon Slethaug, Prof. Ken Hirschkop, and Prof. Andrew Hunt, for their insightful comments and encouragement.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my wife for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis.

**To Maria and Sophia**

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# Introduction

## Stephen King and His Things

Stephen King is the best-known contemporary horror writer and a major player of the genre in general who has provided his audience with a profound understanding of Americans' fears and forbidden desires during his long career. He has been called "a phenomenon" by Michael R. Collings, among others, partly because he gave new life to the horror genre and turned it into a bestselling one, but mostly due to the fact that his success has not been limited to a few hits only. Since *Carrie* (1974), his debut novel, he has been constantly on bestseller lists and single-handedly has made an industry of selling hardcovers, paperbacks and rights to his novels and stories for cinematic and theatrical productions. Except for his *Rage* (published under the pseudonym Richard Bachman in 1977), which was withdrawn from publication because of some controversies and at the author's request, all of his other books are still in print and every new title remains on the bestseller lists for a few weeks at least.

Although King is mostly considered a popular writer, his works have attracted considerable attention from academia and have been the subject of serious critical publications. His career has been explored in various ways, but one aspect that concerns the present study is the idea of *things* in his horror factory. Objects, with their

unique ability to “mediate emotions, relationships and identities” (Attfield 121), have been the subject of discussions in different disciplines from philosophy to anthropology, and have been treated variably in arts and literature. There are, for instance, schools of writing in which a higher level of priority and agency has been given to objects rather than their common symbolic or metaphoric status in service of characterization or plot development in a fictional work. The *Chosisme* genre, with French novelist George Perec (1936-1982) as one of the best known practitioners, portrays “human life mainly in terms of the characters’ acquisition, use, and disposal of objects” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton xi). In another extreme form, objects as the agent or medium for supernatural or demonic forces and experiences are commonly used in gothic and horror writing traditions. William W. Jacobs’ “The Monkey’s Paw,” Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s “The Bottle Imp” are only some of the more famous examples.

There is, however, a distinction between objects and things in a multitude of publications categorized under the broad name Thing Theory. In an introduction to this relatively new branch of critical theory, Bill Brown tackles the ambiguity in the idea of *thing*. According to Brown, we tend to “look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture—above all, what they disclose about *us*),” but we rarely pay attention to their *thingness*. He argues that:

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the window gets filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and

exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (4)

One of the best examples of such a relation between humans and *useless* objects is the complex relationship that develops between collectors and things accumulated in their collections.

The idea of things, and not objects with supernatural properties, as the subject of horror fiction presented itself when I was reading the horrible story of the Collyer brothers, infamous for their compulsive hoarding, who were found trapped and dead in their house full of stuff. The picture that Randy Frost and Gail Steketee give of the Collyer mansion in the prologue to a book on compulsive hoarding is quite similar to the image of a haunted house with no ghosts but full of things:

The house was packed with junk—newspapers, tin cans, magazines, umbrellas, old stoves, pipes, books, and much more. A labyrinth of tunnels snaked through each room, with papers, boxes, car parts, and antique buggies lining the sides of the tunnels all the way to the ceiling. Some of the tunnels appeared to be dead ends, although closer inspection revealed them to be secret passageways. Some of the tunnels were booby-trapped to make noise or, worse, to collapse on an unsuspecting intruder. A cardboard box hung low from the roof of one tunnel, and when disturbed it rained tin cans onto any trespasser. More serious were

booby traps in which the overhanging boxes were connected to heavier objects such as rocks that could knock someone out. (2)

The traps served their purpose and kept the intruders out, but the only people ensnared in them were the two brothers themselves. The menace of stuff portrayed in this story made me think of things and collectors in horror literature, particularly the works of Stephen King as one of the most prominent horror writers.

In King's fiction and the landscape he has created in his numerous novels and short stories, objects have a significant place and "the inanimate is animate," as Tony Magistrale concisely pinpoints (*Moral Voyages* 106). The human-thing relationship in King's fiction, however, has been generally reduced by critics to human-machine relationship, and "malevolent machines," in particular (Egan 201). James Egan, for instance, has done a noteworthy study of *Christine* (1983) and some of King's short stories including "The Mangler," "Trucks," and "The Word Processor of the Gods" (Egan 201-204). Egan's analysis is specifically based on being betrayed by technology in the encounter between man and machines and "the complex, perilous relationship of the mechanical to the humanistic, placing particular emphasis on the destructive psychological interplay of machines and their makers" (Egan 201).

Going beyond this reductive human-machine duality and putting more emphasis on things is something rare in such studies. Things (and not machines only) have a great potential to be the subject of critical analyses because they develop on human intentions and emotions, and turn into extensions to human bodies. Only a few critics have studied *Christine* as fueled and driven by the "residues of the feelings of the

people” who have owned the car (King, *The Shining* 278). Christine is the physical embodiment of all the rage (and, of course, the obsessive attachment) that Roland D. LeBay and Arnie Cunningham feel. The car develops a personality of its own from the concentration and attention it receives from the owners, like a prosthesis gradually blending into their bodies. Similarly, the marvelous word processor in “The Word Processor of the Gods” extends the mental faculties of the main character (who is a writer) to the point that he is able to change his immediate environment and rewrite reality.

Machines such as the industrial laundry press machine in “The Mangler” or the lawnmower in “The Lawnmower Man” can also be regarded as merely inanimate objects that come to life and are animated by demonic powers, which is conventional in gothic literature. This perspective is justified by King’s fascination with the uncanny effect in his portrayal of ordinary characters in not-so-ordinary situations. King’s horrible objects are mostly ordinary objects, and the novelty lies in his depiction of the horror of everyday lives in his “kitchen-sink” novels. This is obviously the simplest and most straight-forward representation of the human-thing relationship in the horror genre.

There are also objects used by the main characters to showcase their extraordinary powers. The telekinetic powers Carrie White uses in her bloody revenge in King’s first published novel, or the “token-object reading” or psychometry power that *The Dead Zone’s* Johnny Smith is bestowed with after his accident that enables him to know things about people by touching objects that belonged to them are examples of this type. These are categorized in terms of the agency given to the human end of the

object-human relationship. In such cases, the objects are sort of a medium for the paranormal abilities of the main characters. They are used to embody their supernatural powers and give those powers a more concrete existence.

## The Collector King

Generally, there are two kinds of relationships between objects and characters in King's fiction, whenever objects have a significant role in the narrative: the first is when a character is possessed by an object of supernatural nature; the second is when a character is terrifyingly possessive towards things (including objectified persons). This study will address these states of possessing and being possessed in King's selected fiction but within the culturally significant context of collecting. The main focus of this project is collecting behaviors (in the narrators and among the characters) and how the context of collecting redefines and adds other dimensions to the human-thing relationship. These are topics that have certainly been undervalued and mostly neglected in other studies.

It has been mentioned in biographical texts on King that he is a collector himself. In an interview with *Paris Review*, he makes it clear that he collects but is not "a huge collector":

I've probably got a dozen signed Faulkners and a lot of Theodore Dreiser. I've got *Reflections in a Golden Eye* by Carson McCullers. I love her. At home I've got one of those old-fashioned paperback racks they had in drugstores. And I have a lot of fifties paperbacks because I love the covers, and I've collected a certain



amount of pornography from the sixties, paperback pornography that was done by people like Donald Westlake and Lawrence Sanders, just because it amuses me.

Despite what he thinks of the extent of his collecting practices, this study will show how King is a huge collector of macabre ideas and how significant collecting is in his fiction. What he has done for the horror genre and its fans is similar to how he describes one of his biggest sources of inspiration and influence in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*: “In the late 1950s, a literary agent and compulsive science fiction memorabilia collector named Forrest J. Ackerman changed the lives of thousands of kids—I was one—when he began editing a magazine called *Famous Monsters of Filmland*” (22-23). Ackerman, as Don Herron mentions, “filled his California home with countless mementos and books, making it a landmark museum *cum* library to weird pop culture” (“Biggest Horror Fan of Them All” 29). King’s accumulation and repackaging of the famous monsters in his fiction is quite similar to what Ackerman did at his home-museum and in the equally popular medium of a cult magazine in order to revive the genre.

Ackerman’s collection of monstrosities was certainly influential, but King’s fascination with horror fiction started after an accidental encounter with random objects he found in a sort of family museum, “an attic over the garage of an aunt’s house in Durham, Maine” (Reino 2). Among the objects he found, there were “his father’s old Avon paperbacks of horror stories and weird fiction, as well as ... discarded manuscripts of horror stories that Donald King had unsuccessfully attempted to publish” (Reino 2). Aimee LaBrie writes that King spent most of his childhood reading comic books and paperbacks and started writing by copying them; “His mother, after reading his first

story and finding he copied most of it, advised him to ‘Write one of your own, Stevie’” (51). In an account of how he sold his first “book” at the age of seven, King explains how he “novelized” one of the many horror movies he watched when he was a child (*The Pit and the Pendulum*, first released in 1961) and sold at “a quarter a copy” on the playground (*On Writing* 35-39).

The practice of recomposing older materials and reselling them continued in his career and was augmented by his ever-increasing encyclopedic knowledge of the genre accumulated during years of reading comics and paperbacks and watching horror flicks. King’s *Danse Macabre* (1981) is an attempt to acknowledge only some of the authors and directors he has been influenced by. It is a catalogue of King’s favorites for his fans and those who have always been curious to know where all those ideas in his stories come from. The book “reveals a deep reservoir of influences that stretch back to Walpole, Poe and Lovecraft, and forward to Harlan Ellison and a myriad of modern cinema directors” (Magistrale, *Landscape of Fear* 106). Numerous references to other fantasy and horror writers he brings into his writing have been noted as one of the characteristics of King’s fiction.

King’s allusions to popular horror movies, television series, paperbacks, comics, etc. —sometimes so obscure that they are known to hardcore fans only—have made his fiction resemble commonplace books. Old commonplaces were essentially scrapbooks into which pieces of information were accumulated and knowledge was compiled. According to Clive Bloom in his introduction to *Gothic Horror: A Reader’s Guide from Poe to King and Beyond*, borrowing in horror writing is nothing new and because “the repertoire of horror is relatively limited and conservative [...] many authors will

combine or develop elements already known to their readership,” and even mix them with other genres (12). The intertextuality found in King’s numerous references to other literary and popular authors is as conspicuous as the intratextuality of his many references to his other works. His insistence on keeping his fiction local and regional by limiting himself to a handful of place settings has mandated cross-references to recurrent places and people in different novels. Derry and Castle Rock, for instance, are two of his favorite places to set up his small-town fiction. This feature makes one think of King’s long list of novels and short story collections as one giant book published in several installments. Heidi Strengell in *Dissecting Stephen King* summarizes how different prominent King critics see his oeuvre in a holistic view:

Among other King critics, George Beahm, Michael R. Collings, and Tony Magistrale refer to King's body of fiction as "the fictional universe of Stephen King" (*Stephen King: America's Best-Loved Boogeyman*, 188), "King's imagined universe" (*Stephen King as Richard Bachman*, 17), "King's universe," and "King's fictional universe" (*Landscape of Fear*, 26), respectively. (5)

The intricate network of references in King’s fictional works—whether to appeal to popular taste or to exploit readers’ already established network of mental images—is on a par with another distinguishing feature of his body of work, that is, his insistence on mentioning “readily recognizable commercial brand names of contemporary America” (Magistrale, *Landscape of Fear* 54). In his fiction, it is hard not to notice parades of brand names, jingles and catchphrases “of late twentieth-century Western

consumerism” (Sears 9). All the realistic details catalogued in King’s fiction, which make each of his novels a time capsule, can be explained by the concept of a “reality effect,” suggested by Clotilde Landais in *Stephen King as a Postmodern Author* as the guarantor of the success of the supernatural effect (5). A notion originally introduced by Roland Barthes in 1968, the reality effect “is produced through an abundance of connotations of the real which create a lifelike effect: descriptions and details to make a place familiar or identifiable to the reader, precise time and space of the narrative, and coherent characters’ textual identity and psychology” (Landais 5). That is one valid way to look at these features, but the *bric-à-brac* effect the reader gets from such details signals a collecting mentality behind them. The mania for collecting ‘stuff’ which was at its height when King was establishing himself as a bestseller writer surely had influences on King and his audience that will be examined from different perspectives in this study.

## Collect the Collector

Collecting in Stephen King involves more than dropping names or cataloguing horror features and/or random *bric-à-brac*. At a deeper level, collecting and collectors are used in characterization. There are numerous instances in King’s fiction (mostly novels and not the short stories) where characters are described by their collections, to show their obsessions and deviancy or how tasteful or reflective they are. In *The Stand* (1978), Nick, the courageous deaf and dumb teenager, who was one of the major characters with a decisive role before he was killed, “had the beginning of a book collection” (652), books from which he mostly gained his knowledge of the outside world and his mature insight. Dan Killian, the executive producer of *The Running Man*

program, as one more notable example, introduces himself as a collector when recruiting Ben Richards for his man-hunt game: "... I'm a collector, you know. Cave art and Egyptian artifacts are my areas of specialization. You are more analogous to the cave art than to my Egyptian urns, but no matter. I wish you could be preserved—collected, if you please—just as my Asian cave paintings have been collected and preserved" (*The Running Man* 51). Another good example is Andy Dufresne in "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption," who collects rocks as a decoy to his escape plan. The narrator lists different kinds of people in prison who start collecting to "divert" their minds and not "flip out": coin collectors, stamp collectors, and postcard collectors (*Different Seasons* 92). What better place to use collecting in order to regain and practice one's sense of ownership and control over things than a prison cell?

There is also Mrs. Anderson, an influential character in "Apt Pupil," whose interest is collecting nineteenth-century postcards (*Different Seasons* 117). What you enjoy collecting "comes all at once," according to her: "[y]ou see something for the first time, and right away you know you have found YOUR GREAT INTEREST. It's like a key turning in a lock" (*Different Seasons* 117). In the same way, Todd Bowden, her teenage student, began his evil bond with Kurt Dussander, the wanted Nazi war criminal, out of a simple interest in death camps, "an interest not much different from the interests of boys who collect coins or stamps" (*Different Seasons* 279), and finally became a serial killer himself. In a similarly extreme case, Ruth McCausland, the town constable in *The Tommyknockers* (1987), has a doll collection and has developed a peculiar bond with the items in her collection. In spite of her career, she is mostly disconnected from the outside world and lives in the miniature world of her doll collection. Long conversations

with inanimate objects have given her the ability to resist the transformation into an alien, or "becoming," longer than the other townspeople.

References to characters' collecting habits and collections might be a common method of creating characters in popular fiction and do not necessarily add any insights, but King's relationship with collecting culture involves more than sporadic collector characters in his works of fiction. This study is an attempt to explore collecting as "a complex and socially constructed activity" (Balkun 80) in order to discuss King's career, the genre(s) he is normally associated with, and the social and cultural condition he has been part of. In one of the seminal theoretical works on collecting, Jean Baudrillard divides objects into "utilized" ones and "possessed" ones based on their functions (*System of Objects* 92). The object that is "completely abstracted from its use" becomes part of a collection and the object of the collector's "fanaticism" (92, 94). This state of being possessed by the possessions is the perfect breeding ground for fears and anxieties. The hunting/haunting experiences explored by King will serve as a springboard to augment our understanding of collecting culture and its implications in his fiction. At the end of this journey, he will be discussed as a collectible himself. He is "one of the most collectible, arguably *the most collectible* of all contemporary American writers" (Schweitzer 153). How this thrilling status keeps haunting the writer is the final point.

## Why Collecting?

What makes collecting—of all different aspects of the relationship between man and objects—qualified to be the framework of such an extensive study? Collecting might

appear to be just an ordinary concept but the large number of writings (academic or not) on the topic suggests otherwise. Scholars such as Susan Pearce, Jean Baudrillard and a few others have worked on the topic more theoretically, but the fact is that the majority of the existing texts on collecting and collectors are of a biographical and historical nature. One notable example of a piece on collecting that starts with a biographical account but moves far beyond is Walter Benjamin's essay on Eduard Fuchs (1870-1940). Benjamin focuses on Fuchs as a collector of caricatures, erotic art and genre painting to promote his "materialist consideration of art" and art history (261, 269).

Perhaps one of the most thorough definitions of collecting is suggested by Russell Belk (author of *Collecting in a Consumer Society*) and his colleagues and highlighted by Susan Pearce:

We take collecting to be the selective, active, and longitudinal acquisition, possession and disposition of an interrelated set of differentiated objects (material things, ideas, beings or experiences) that contribute to and derive extraordinary meaning from the entity (the collection) that this set is perceived to constitute.

(qtd. in *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* 3)

There are numerous collections (state or private owned) of antique, rare and precious items, but collecting is commonly known and studied as the middle class's hobby of accumulating and exhibiting mass produced collectibles such as trade cards, postcards,

china figurines, stamps, and so forth. It was actually in the early twentieth century that collecting became possible for members of every social-economic class, regardless of their gender or age.

Before the emergence of the *Wunderkammer* (literally, chamber of wonders), one of the earlier forms of systematic collecting, the term *collection* mostly referred to the accumulation of beautiful and precious objects by affluent members of the society. The classic *Wunderkammer* emerged in the sixteenth century in Europe and originally referred to a room filled with artifacts (antique or not), curious objects and curious animals from all over the world as a precursor of modern museums (Davenne 13). According to Anthony A. Shelton, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, roughly the time when *Wunderkammern* first appeared, “artefacts were valued for their marvelous or miraculous qualities” rather than their pure monetary values (178). However, *Wunderkammer* was still a prerogative of those who had the political and financial means to explore the world in search of exotic objects or at least hire a representative to do so. *Wunderkammer* was “the physical manifestation of [the] newly emerging mentality, which found its [...] myth in the abiding legend of the melancholy prince, not ruling, but ruled by dark, saturnine powers” (Blom 34).

The idea of a *Wunderkammer* with miscellaneous objects collected in one place sounds like something from the past. However, as Umberto Eco shows in his long essay “Travels in Hyperreality” (1975), it still fascinates viewers in our day and has a significant position in American culture. Eco describes a typical *Wunderkammer* as a collection in which



a unicorn's horn would be found next to the copy of a Greek statue, and, later, among mechanical crèches and wondrous automata, cocks of precious metal that sang, clocks with a procession of little figures that paraded at noon. (5)

No matter how incredible such a collection may sound, he believes that there is a large number of similar "collections of inconsequential wonders" all around America: "You have only to go beyond the Museum of Modern Art and the art galleries, and you enter another universe, the preserve of the average family, the tourist, the politician" (6). Strolling around fantastic spaces such as "wax museums, Citizen Kane castles, and Madonna Inns" (31), he repeatedly refers to the hyperreality condition in which real and unreal are seamlessly blended together. With his detailed descriptions of such places, Eco expands on the *Wunderkammer* sensibility and shows how it can be connected with contemporary "American taste and mentality" (5).

According to Jeffrey Abt in his chapter on the origins of the public museum, *Wunderkammer* has had other names such as *pandechion*, *studiolo*, *gabinetto*, *galleria*, *Kunstkammer*, or *Kuntschrank* based on the type of the objects included and the setting (S. Macdonald 120). However, it has often been referred to as Cabinet of Curiosities. In fact, Zoe Trodd in her interesting chapter in *Everyday eBay: Culture, Collecting, and Desire* shows how the Renaissance *Wunderkammer* evolved into the eighteenth century American cabinet of curiosities (79). It must be noted that despite the differences between *Wunderkammer* and those later cabinets of curiosities, the two terms may be used interchangeably in parts of this project to avoid complications. The move from *Wunderkammern* and similar practices of making sense of the order of things by

collecting the out-of-ordinary to the unquenchable desire for order and rationality represented in modern museums is accelerated with the Enlightenment and culminates in the early twentieth century. As Hetherington explains in *Capitalism's Eye*, the objects collected in the *Wunderkammern* were “intended as a source of secret or mystical knowledge,” but gradually “that emphasis on the magical is replaced by [...] that of science and empirical knowledge” (18-19). He continues to point out that the great attention paid by collectors to the “heteroclite, that defied the boundaries of existing classificatory order” (present also in popular culture in the form of “freak shows, the display of strange beasts, a fascination with monsters, wax dummies, ghosts, and the exotic”) gradually changed from the seventeenth to early nineteenth century and was replaced by the modern concern for “stabilizing boundaries and getting rid of the possibility of anomaly” in the mid-nineteenth century (Hetherington 19).

In the twentieth century, museums gradually found their social and cultural status stabilized and turned into one of the pivots of national identity. Private collections, in a similar way, still belonged to a handful of prominent figures but became more specialized. The growing consumer culture changed the climate drastically, and collecting turned into a more popular and inclusive pastime rather than the privilege of the connoisseurs. With the growth of consumer culture, as Balkun asserts, collecting became a widespread obsession throughout the twentieth century (11). Collecting was no longer exclusive to a certain age, gender or social class; children and women now had their collections of less expensive and more available collectibles, and “[a]mong the less well-to-do, collecting was a way to imitate the behaviors of the wealthy” (Balkun 11).

Belk, in his "Possessions and the Extended Self" (1988), provides an estimation that in the Western world "around a quarter to a third of all adults are willing to identify themselves as collectors" (qtd. in Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* 1). It is hard to make a close estimation of the number of collectors, but the expanding industry of the memorabilia and collectibles worldwide, the ever-growing number of private collections exhibited in community centers and museums, the large number of swapping and trading forums, and numerous profit-making online shopping services designed for such purposes are supporting evidence. Due to the importance and significance of collecting as an essential part of any culture, it has been the subject of many different studies and will certainly contribute valuable guidelines in a cultural-literary study of the works of an iconic popular author.

There are certain affinities between collecting and horror genre that make it easy to find examples of collecting behavior in different forms of this genre. Critics have discussed collecting in relation to horror literature mostly in psychoanalytic terms, but as we will see in this study it yields to a wider range of observations and examinations particularly in Stephen King's horror fiction. This project will focus and expand on two main topics: how the unique relationship between the collector and the set of objects targeted and acquired, first, "configures particular ways of knowing and perceiving," as Sharon Macdonald suggests (94-5), and second, plays a significant role in character formation and identity creation. The significance and mechanism of the latter is easier to understand since most of us have had such experiences in our interactions with the objects around us, whether as part of a collection or not. Of the former, it suffices to mention here that a major cause of the trend of collecting wondrous objects and

assembling them into a *Wunderkammer* was “a desire for encyclopedism” or a desire to create a microcosm “in a kind of *theatrum mundi*, or theater of the universe” (Robinson 20). Other topics to be discussed in conjunction with collecting will include wonder, monstrosity, desire, and authenticity, which are all of great importance in collecting as a cultural activity.

## King and Collecting Culture

Collecting, as a popular activity and a cultural phenomenon, has been chosen as the ground for my reading of Stephen King, since he is both a product of and a major supplier for collecting culture. It is a theme in his novels and a descriptor for the relationship of this phenomenal bestselling author and his fans, who have been collecting King for decades now. In an essay, “On Becoming a Brand Name,” King “identifies himself as a producer (and a product) of horror fiction who is known for his product – a brand name author” (Hoppenstand & Browne 13). King’s fiction obviously portrays the social, political, economic, and cultural anxieties of the country he has flourished in. It has been recommended by critics that “anyone seriously interested in the state of contemporary American taste must pay substantial attention to his work” (Schuman 108). The present study is, for the same reasons, more a cultural study than a literary evaluation of King’s selected works of fiction.

Of the four novels to be discussed in this project, the first three (*It*, *Needful Things* and *Duma Key*) are each from different decades of King’s career and arranged in chronological order. The arrangement is not meant to suggest the development of an idea through his career, but to show how the concept of collecting has always been

present in his works. Furthermore, the first three chapters will cover the three major modes of collecting. In her *Museums, Objects and Collections*, Pearce argues that almost all collections can be categorized under three distinct, but not exclusive, forms: “collections as ‘souvenirs,’ as ‘fetish objects’ and as ‘systematics’” (69). Souvenirs, according to Pearce, are “intrinsic parts of a past experience” and are often associated with “a single person” or “a group of people [...] who function in this regard as if they were a single person” (69, 72). The target of the second mode, fetishistic collecting, is objects of desire. What is common among these often diverse and bizarre collections is “partly the obsessive nature of the act of collection, and partly the lack of an intellectual rationale by which the material and its acquisition was informed” (78). Like the “‘personalia’ or ‘memorabilia’” in souvenir collecting that keep one’s personal histories alive, the objects collected passionately in a fetishistic collection “can make manifest a collector’s personality” (71, 81). However, fetish collections are distinguished from souvenirs by the fact that in fetishistic collections “the subject is subordinated to the objects, and it is to the objects that the burden of creating a romantic wholeness is transferred” (84). The third mode, systematic collecting, is basically concerned with taxonomies and is strongly related to scientific methods of organizing species. This kind of collecting is about organization and classification, and “works not by the accumulation of samples, as fetishistic collecting does, but by the selection of examples intended to stand for all the others of their kind and to complete a set” (87). Systematic collections have a more public (not private) nature, and they are “conceived as display” (87).

In spite of their clear distinctive characteristics, the three modes of collecting often overlap and make gray areas unavoidable. One intrinsic value common in all collections is the concept of seriality that is saved for the chapter on *Misery* – the one novel that is examined out of chronological order. I should emphasize the point that the purpose of this study is not to draw lines between these categories and the King novels associated with them, even if that was possible. The sole purpose of this categorization is to help us understand different approaches to collecting and what they reveal about the human psyche and the relation between self and the outside world. This project will focus on highlighting examples of different modes of collecting in Stephen King's works enriched by discussions of hyperreality and simulation in the background. Following the example of Eco's "Travels in Hyperreality," the study will re-visit a selected number of novels in an attempt to provide commentaries on King's horror fiction and its significance in the American popular culture.

The first novel examined in this study is *It*, a compendium of traditional horror monsters. The magnitude of the story, in terms of the multitude of the monsters (all depicted in a shape-shifting creature) as well as the monstrosity of the physical book, makes it appropriate to call *It* a "dark chest of wonders," the expression King actually used to describe his *The Stand*. King has never shown reluctance in making a collage of traditional tropes and characters to populate and run his own circus of horror. The novel *It* is not the first work in which he uses the well-established themes and tropes of horror genre. One of the best examples of his adaptations is his new rendering of Dracula in *Salem's Lot*, but what is special about *It* is that it is a successful attempt to resuscitate all those monsters in one single novel. This novel is where King brings back

all “the immortal figures in ‘the myth-pool’ of modern horror story” (*Danse Macabre* 50).

In the first chapter, we will see how the tradition of cabinet reading for children resembles novel reading. Allan Hepburn in *Enchanted Objects* writes about books which are actually “a collection of type” (130), and compares a book to a museum in the sense that “both are replete with artefacts and curiosities” (154). This analogy best applies to books of fiction and, especially, King’s fantastic worlds and *It* for its “indulgence in monsters” (Collings, *Stephen King Phenomenon* 31). The early cabinets of curiosities (and even today’s museums) and books are “particular forms of the microcosm” (Hides 15). The monstrosity of *It* (the eponymous character) and *It* (both the narrative and the book as a physical container) will be discussed in Chapter 1 with regard to the microcosm of the town of Derry, which is both metaphorically and metonymically associated with *It*.

The story goes back and forth between 1958 and 1985, childhood and adulthood, past and present. Similar to the iconic glass corridor that connects the adult and child sections of the library in the town, Derry, the novel functions like a kaleidoscope, creating illusions of bits and pieces of memories. As Magistrale mentions in *Landscape of Fear*, “in the course of this novel the members of the Losers’ Club move between the two worlds of their remembered childhood and present adulthood to re-establish their own ‘magic lifeline’” (116). The book, like a cabinet of curiosities, contains a lot of wonders, and wonder is the solution to, first, successfully comprehend the real nature of the shape-shifting monster and its place in the order of nature, and second, find the way to fight it back and eventually defeat it. Adults with their tainted visions and their

crippled rationality are not able to do so, and the characters have to arm themselves with credulity and childlike perceptions to finally achieve their end.

There are similarities between King's fiction (as chests of wonder and encyclopedias of monsters and horror motifs) and one of its counterparts in contemporary American culture, the *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* franchise dealing with bizarre events and creatures. The commonalities open up discussions of the role of simulated fantastic worlds and simulacra in the cultural atmosphere King's and Ripley's franchises have been breathing in. Baudrillard's definition of simulacrum as the point at which reality begins to imitate its simulations, first introduced in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), is referred to several times in this study. In Chapter 2, which deals with King's *Needful Things* (1991), this idea will be related to the concerns for authenticity and genuineness in collecting culture. *Needful Things* is basically about unbridled desires to have and to acquire, a critique of America's commodity culture.

In collecting, "the drive to complete the ideal collection can be seen as a drive to complete the ideal self" (Belk 36). Identity formation in relation to objects, of course, is not limited to collectors only and can be a simple correlation between one's self and ordinary household objects, the things one fills one's house and surrounds oneself with: "projecting one's being onto the objects one chooses to live with" (Elsner & Cardinal 3). Collectors learn to be selective in their endeavors to obtain and arrange objects of their desire because it is practically impossible to have a collection of everything and in some cases have every single item in a series. What happens, then, if one is offered the chance to have the ultimate item missing in one's collection, the one that can elevate one's collection from an ordinary selection of interesting objects to one with unique and



priceless ones? By feeding people's desires this way, Leland Gaunt, who owns the mysterious shop, *Needful Things*, pushes the whole town of Castle Rock to the verge of destruction. Acquiring the ultimate piece for their collections brings the shoppers loss and despair. Death is what is waiting for them at the end. Leland Gaunt is an imposter and the merchandise he offers to his customers is illusions only. The victims are so fascinated with his well-articulated pitches and the fake collectibles that they become blind to reality and fall victim to their desires.

When *Needful Things* was first published, reviewer Joe Queenan described it as "the type of book that can be enjoyed only by longtime aficionados of the genre". He found the book "unrecommendable" because:

It is peopled with ultra low-rollers – couch potatoes, barmy widows, small-time hoods – rarely producing a character that an intelligent, *normal* [emphasis his] reader could identify with, much less like.

The book is an unconventional horror novel, and the numerous characters turn out to be the actual monsters when they surrender to their desires. The fragmentary narratives of lives and deaths of these ordinary people build up the holographic picture of the evil of which Leland Gaunt is only a representative. King's book is like Leland's valise at the end of the novel with all the doomed souls locked inside, but it has a better counterpart in the history of collecting. Barnum's "Grand Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan & Hippodrome" was a well-known freak show in the 19th century in which people were collected and displayed as curiosities. Such freak shows, as Trodd explains,

“often included [...] pamphlets chronicling the subjects’ life stories: people became cabinet curiosities, and curious stories were central to the cabinet” (79). Trodd continues that later in the nineteenth century, photographic cabinets of curiosities called “carte-de-visite” cards with pictures of some freaks on each card were produced and offered to collectors (79). King’s *Needful Things* is not that different from an album full of tiny pictures of people from all walks of life who metamorphose into freaks after their desires are triggered by Leland Gaunt.

King’s fascination with words, the obsessive accumulation of them in his novels and how he has been accused of logorrhea are also touched on briefly in Chapter 2. Harlan Ellison, another American bestselling author, believes that “King’s novels with the possible exception of maybe *IT* or the *Dark Tower* books could have been told just as well as a novella” (Magistrale, *Hollywood’s Stephen King* 218). In the case of *Needful Things*, a large portion of the text is the fragmentary narration of life stories of numerous characters. Every single person in Castle Rock turns out to be susceptible to Leland Gaunt’s gimmicks and King has certainly found it more effective to tell everyone’s stories rather than recounting an Everyman’s story. No one doubts King’s wordiness, but there are different views regarding this subject. This study will attempt to find narrative merits in such a style of writing with reference to the topsy-turvy arrangement of items in a confused accumulation of objects in contrast to narrative sterility of the orderly arrangement.

Multiple realities and how illusions and simulated worlds may efface reality and take its place will be discussed in Chapter 3 on *Duma Key* (2008). In this chapter, the relationship between creating a work of art and collecting will be explored. The

simplest way to see this relationship is to emphasize the fact that in creative activities putting things together (letters and words in writing and lines and colors in visual arts like painting and drawing) builds a system of meaning in which, as in a collection, every single item is part and parcel of a whole. The heterotopia inherent to such creations is used to explain the peculiar spatial and temporal relationships governing this surrealistic work of fiction. The ambiguous time and place settings of the story, the confusion caused by the meeting of realities, and the perpetual wanderings of the characters in memory lanes to reach stability are examined in this novel.

Memories have a vital role in the therapeutic effects of artistic activities, suggested in *Duma Key* with a supernatural twist. We often try to anchor memories and aid remembrance by collecting objects as souvenirs. These material objects, sometimes totally irrelevant to the occasion they are anchored in, are paired with images that capture those special moments. The characters in *Duma Key* create drawings and paintings in their attempts to re-member and heal their broken bodies and severed lines of memories. After their traumatic accidents, they have also forgotten words and speak and write in a broken language. Sketching helps them match words with mental images and remember the forgotten language. The healing continues only to the point that the characters realize that Perse, the vampire demon, is sucking on their creativity to forge an alternate reality of her will.

References to the nature and function of fantasy literature and King's fantastic worlds in previous chapters climax in this chapter, where resurfacing of traumatic experiences and their possible effects while reading horror fiction are discussed. Similar to characters in King's fiction, the readers lose touch with everyday reality and plunge

into a whirlpool of horror and terror. The analogy between dreaming and consuming the horror genre will be the vehicle to make some comments on King's horror factory. In *It*, the villainous creature feeds on the fears and anxieties that consume children, and in *Needful Things*, Leland Gaunt feeds on his patrons' desires and the consumer culture they have been victims to. *Duma Key's* Perse, in a similar way, sucks on the creative force of the two artist characters. This form of vampirism is best presented in *Misery* (1987), the novel to be examined in Chapter 4 of this study. The author character, standing for King himself, feeds on the fears and desires of the readers, and his crazy number one fan, representing the targeted consumer for such products, on the other hand, feeds on the creativity of the popular author.

Chapter 4 deals with the tyranny of fan clubs, bestseller lists, and genre classifications in the publishing industry. It will explore how prolific and bestselling authors get entangled in series and sequels; how collector-writers such as King are ritually collected by their fans; and how they are branded as genre writers and are doomed to continue as such. King has long gone beyond being a popular author and a celebrity and has become the subject of "an author cult"; Hoppenstand and Browne in their introduction to *The Gothic World of Stephen King* explain his godly position this way:

The physical products of the author's labor, his books and manuscripts, become icons of worship and hence become of immense money value, inflated far beyond a reasonable worth by the slavish drive of the cult follower to purchase, at any cost, those books and manuscripts. (4)

This explanation, of course, applies to those followers who are seriously collecting limited editions of King but can very well apply to those hundreds of thousands of readers who wait for a new King and line up in front of book stores to buy his new titles as soon as they are out in the market. The ritual-like behavior of the followers and Constant Readers (the term King always uses to refer to the body of fans who reads his fiction on a regular basis) is juxtaposed in this study to *Misery's* image of the fans as idols and the sacrifices the author has to make to satisfy them.

Before book publishing turned into a full-fledged industry and mass production of books made them accessible to everyone, and not just a limited number of scholars who were eager and wealthy enough to buy books regularly, book production and book reading were both time consuming and required certain qualifications. In his brilliant criticism of "consumerism of commercial publishing," Michel Butor shows in a concise manner the difference between these two periods:

When the book was a single copy, whose production – required a considerable number of work hours, the book naturally seemed to be a "monument" [...] something even more durable than a structure of bronze. What did it matter if a first reading was long and difficult; it was understood that one owned a book for life. But the moment that quantities of identical copies were put on the market, there was a tendency to act as if reading a book "consumed" it, consequently obliging the purchaser to buy another for the next "meal" or spare moment, the next train ride. (qtd. in Stewart, *On Longing* 33)

In addition to the mass production and consumption of books (and other cultural products), the afore-mentioned repetition and recycling of ideas, images and motifs which has been happening through various media in the past couple of decades draws attention to seriality as a trend in contemporary popular culture. *Misery*'s Paul Sheldon is the picture of the popular author who produces serial and repetitive works to satisfy millions of readers who consume their products. Annie Wilkes, on the other hand, represents readers who read voraciously to put their hands on another book, or just re-read the same title while waiting for their favorite author's next hit. Repetitive print and media products with small variations from one part or episode to the next are so common now that they have become the norm in our time. Such mechanical reproduction and mass distribution of works of popular literature presented in the image of Paul Sheldon as a serial-production machine will be discussed later in the chapter in the context of kitsch culture. Similar to his character, King is believed to be repeating himself and "most of the novels he's written since the early 1990s feel like reruns of his greatest hits, afterthoughts to the titles that still haunt our pop culture's consciousness" (Douthat 14). The repetition factor becomes even more essential when we consider the fact that King's early masterpieces themselves owed much to the works of other authors.

King's *Misery* resembles John Fowles's *The Collector*: Paul Sheldon's (and King's own) situation reminds us of Miranda's, the artist girl who is kidnapped by a killer/collector and becomes part of his collection at the end. The picture of Annie as a serial killer offers the opportunity to discuss serial killing, "the crime of our age" (Richard Dyer, qtd. in A. Macdonald 6), in the context of seriality in the present

discussion. Alzena Macdonald in *Murders and Acquisitions: Representations of the Serial Killer in Popular Culture* argues that

Both the emphasis on the killer's seriality – the repetitive, episodic nature of the murders – and the constant *recycling* of narratives of serial killing are surely an effect of an economic milieu [late capitalism] of rampant production and consumption. (6)

King the collector and serial writer (represented by Paul Sheldon) is eventually collected by his Number One fan and a serial killer. In his collecting mindset, King must be aware of the notion that “any collection comprises a succession of items, but the last in the set is the person of the collector” (Baudrillard, *System of Objects* 97).

Reading these chapters, one must keep in mind that the purpose of this study is not justifying King's literary achievements or asking why his works are not considered as *serious* literature. The present study is mostly focusing on King as a popular author and a product of the popular culture. His image as a collectible celebrity and his frequent presence on bestseller lists for decades were in fact the main reasons to begin this project. Magistrale, as one of the most persistent critics trying to explicate the less appreciated sides of King's fiction to both ordinary readers and literary critics, has tried to promote King's retro fashion in writing. Nevertheless, King has often been criticized for not being innovative and original to the extent that he has been called a hack writer, one who is re-writing the classics only in an inflated style with pretentious references to contemporary American society. Harold Bloom, in Paquette's account, “views Stephen

King as a child who has somehow stumbled onto an adult playing-ground, and he doesn't understand why everyone who comes into contact with this newcomer is so intrigued by his work" (127). The fact is King's collections of scenes and characters from classic horror stories and movies have always excited both the collector-author and the audience by testing their knowledge of the horror and fantasy icons. The excitement one feels by finding references the author has placed in the narrative is comparable to the joy an archeologist feels when digging an artifact out.

Jenifer Paquette states that, "Because the same scenario presents over and over again in King's work, some critics may be tempted to see King as repetitive and unoriginal in his storytelling," and she tries to justify this by bringing examples of other authors who have done the same (148). This project is, in contrast, an attempt to read these repetitions and borrowings in the context of collecting culture and the inherent seriality. It is only because of the utterly derogatory connotations of the term *kitsch* that it has almost been left out of our discussion; however, this study is actually suggesting that King's fiction has affinities to kitsch culture – as one of the characteristics of contemporary Western culture and a trend in collecting – not so much criticizing the quality of his writing, but mostly emphasizing the way he "repackages and stylizes [culture] in a way that reinforces established conventions and appeals to the masses" (Johnston 233). David M. Johnston offers this definition (in an article published in Thomas Fahy's *Philosophy of Horror*) to explicate the role of Kitsch in horror genre, and our study will show how this best applies to the King of Horror's chests of wonder and his macabre collectibles.



# Chapter 1: King's Wunderkammer - *It*

## Introduction

King's 1986 horror novel, *It*, was announced as "his magnum opus and last horror novel" at the time of its publication (Badley 1). King proclaimed that he would not write "straight horror tales" after *It*, and that was exactly the time he began venturing into a "wide generic variety" (Blue 111). In the first decade of his career and before *It*, King experimented with well-worn touchstones of the fantastic such as telekinesis, telepathy, autohypnosis, pyro-kinesis, psychometry, apocalyptic pandemics, werewolves, vampires, and even some surprisingly mundane ones like mad dogs and cars. What distinguishes *It* is that its main antagonist is a demonic entity that represents a large variety of horrifying characters from the tradition. The title character, which I will henceforth identify as Pennywise for the sake of clarity and following the convention of most critics, is singularized as a clown but is the manifestation of all childhood fears. The mysterious villain has no form, at least not on Earth, which is far from the unknowable world in a different universe that it originates from. Pennywise is able to shape-shift to whatever its victims fear the most; it actually feeds off their fears. It prefers hunting children to adults, simply because adults' fears are too complex; as the narrator suggests, "[t]he fears of children were simpler and usually more powerful.

The fears of children could often be summoned up in a single face” (974). Pennywise surfaces in Derry, its “private game-preserve” (974), every three decades and preys on children (and adults sometimes).

A massive book of over 1000 pages, *It* is the story of The Losers’ Club—Bill Denbrough, Ben Hanscom, Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier, Mike Hanlon, Stan Uris, and Beverly Marsh—and their encounters with Pennywise, both as children and as adults. It depicts their lives amid family abuse and bullying in the small town of Derry, and their adventures in the sewers and canals of the town which are haunted by Pennywise and where many lost children “all float down” (205). The story goes on in two parallel time periods—1958 and 1985—and the narrative intermittently shifts between childhood and adulthood of the members of the Club. It gives an account of the lives, hopes, and fears of the seven misfit teenagers in 1958 when they first meet and fight Pennywise, and the same group (except for the unfortunate Stan who committed suicide because he could not bear the burden of his traumatic childhood memories) in their adulthood in 1985 when they meet Pennywise again and defeat it. In their first fight with Pennywise, the monster was injured but disappeared into the sewers to resurface 27 years later. The wounded monster let them grow into adults when their faith is gone and they have lost their monster-killer potentials; after those many years, “[their] perspectives have narrowed; [their] faith in the magic, which makes magic possible, has worn off” (855).

After years, and when they have forgotten everything, the group is called back to Derry by Mike and is reminded of their childhood blood oath to return and finish the monster if it resurfaces. They need to return to the maze of their memories and remember everything before they can begin to fight. They also need to regain their

power of imagination. As is emphasized in the novel, the sense of awe is the quality that distinguishes children from adults. Deep down in the sewer, the door leading to the monster's lair is "a door made only for children"; it is "a door of the sort you might see in a fairytale book" (988). The only person who can lead them in their battle is Bill Denbrough, a writer whose profession is selling horror and nightmares to his readers (949). What he actually does is show the fairytale door to his audience to enter and trace down their fears and nightmares, wrestle with them, and come out clean. The monstrous Pennywise is defeated when the Losers use a ritual called *Chüd* that Himalayans used against *taelus*, "an evil magic being that could read your mind and then assume the shape of the thing you were most afraid of" (642). *Taelus* was the closest equivalent they could find for Pennywise, and the ritual of *Chüd* was a linguistic contest performed like this:

The taelus stuck its tongue out. You stuck yours out. You and it overlapped tongues and then you both bit in all the way so you were sort of stapled together, eye to eye. Then, you start telling jokes and riddles. If the human could make the taelus laugh first, it had to go away for a hundred years. (642-643)

Bill, equipped with artistic imagination, bites the monster's tongue "with teeth in his mind" (1012). After Pennywise is killed, the forgetting begins again and the survivors gradually forget whatever happened to them.

One thing that distinguishes *It* from King's other works is the peculiar nature of its monster. Pennywise is the "apotheosis of all monsters" (6), and has "as many faces as

Lon Chaney" (278), the silent horror film actor nicknamed "The Man of a Thousand Faces." The novel, according to Garyn Roberts, is "an affectionate tribute" to all the monsters from horror movies and paperbacks that young Stephen and other children and young adults of the time had been targeted with (35). King features "a 'who's who' of the horror world" in *It* (Joyce Meskis qtd. in Beahm, *Companion* 38). The novel is so long mostly because it was intended to be "an act of closure" and a summation of the themes of his previous novels and short stories (Beahm 262). King himself has called *It* a "final summing up of everything I've tried to say in the last twelve years on the two central subjects of my fiction: monsters and children" (qtd. in Beahm 263).

King's *It* gives life to the horror monsters of 1930s film classics and their 1950s reruns and remakes (Badley 29). In an interview with *Time* about his ten longest novels, King calls *It* "a final exam on horror," and explains its origin this way:

I thought to myself, 'Why don't you [...] put in all the monsters that everyone was afraid of as a kid? Put in Frankenstein, the werewolf, the vampire, the mummy, the giant creatures that ate up New York in the old B movies. Put 'em all in there.'

The multiple shapes the monster adopts through the novel remind the major characters and the readers of the monsters of older horror stories and movies: the Teenage Werewolf (696), the Mummy (205), Frankenstein's creature (589), the shark in *Jaws* (567), the crawling eye, and haunted houses. King does not limit himself to better-known monsters from horror fiction and movies only. Mike, the African-American character, sees the monster as the giant bird Rodan (255), "the Giant Monster of the

Sky” from the Japanese 1956 movie which was popular in the United States for a short time. King was also inspired by the numerous pulp fictions he used to read as a young man. For example, there are similarities between Pennywise and the “amorphous creature” in Kate Wilhelm and Ted Thomas’s *The Clone* (1965) (*Danse Macabre* 23). Pennywise is in fact a combination of all the horrifying figures who keep haunting the memories of horror fans. In the picture King gives us of children (and, later on, adults) with their fears and their everlasting attempts to overcome those fears and cast them off, he uses the clown image, which is usually regarded as an agent of entertainment. The thousand faces of the monster are not masks, but mirrors “throwing back at the terrified viewer the worst thing in his or her mind” (973).

The reader faces multiple classic horror icons in a constant state of awe. In fact, King’s obsession with the sense of wonder is at its height in *It*. The encyclopedic account of horror offered in the novel, the phantasmagoric narrative, and the peculiar nature of the shape-shifting monster bring to mind the experience of visiting a *Wunderkammer*. The variety of horrors exhibited in King’s small town of Derry is very similar to the accumulation of the curios and the abnormal in a cabinet of curiosities with its microcosmic picture of the world. The main purpose of this chapter is to see how *Wunderkammer* fits as a metaphor for King’s *It* in order to discuss his collecting mindset and its implications in his depiction of marvels, wonder and the power of imagination in his fantastic worlds. Establishing this metaphor will also help us discuss *It* as a notable example of pastiche, a concept that emerged at almost the same time as *Wunderkammer*. The polymorphic monster created in *It* as well as the quilt-like structure of the novel support the idea of *It* as a work of pastiche. King is both the

curator of this hall of fame for monstrosities and the collector who collects parts of an old tradition, no matter how mundane they may sound, and glues them together.

The idea of using the *Wunderkammer* tradition to comment on American culture in mid-twentieth century is basically what Umberto Eco's "Travels in Hyperreality" is based upon. Eco's long essay—written in 1975, almost a decade before King's *It*—takes the readers on a lighthearted journey to a handful of the vast number of wax museums, enchanted castles, amusement parks and fake cities across America explaining the significant role that hyperreality plays "in the average American imagination and taste" (6). The horror hall of fame King has created in *It* will be explored in a similar fashion to see how Stephen King was influenced by and, as well, contributed to American Popular culture. The present chapter will be the beginning of our journey into the private museum of the collector and appropriator of horror tradition with references to hyperreality throughout this project.

## ***Wunderkammer* in Collecting Culture**

*Cabinet of wonder* or *cabinet of curiosities* are two common names for *Wunderkammer*, the encyclopedic inventories that contain various awe-inspiring objects collected from all corners of the world. Collecting marvelous or wonder-provoking objects emerged as a tradition in the Renaissance period. Most of these collections belonged to affluent people showcasing their power and wealth, as well as their good taste in art. These collections were modeled after earlier collections known as *Schatz*, which were popular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries amongst the Austrian rulers. *Schatz* were treasuries of "personal goods" such as family jewels

(Kaufmann 137). The idea of a treasury of gems and precious metals was expanded later and “objects that might be considered to have had either a curious or a sacral value” were added to such collections in order to amuse and impress the visitors (138). The sixteenth-century *Kunstkammer* (another name for such cabinets) involved both man-made and natural objects as a symbolic act of building a microcosm of the outside world.

What was common among the Renaissance *Wunderkammern* was “diversity, abundance, [and] a love of the singular, the odd, and the uncommon” (Joy Kenseth qtd. in Robinson 20); the emphasis was, in short, on the marvelous. Later European *Wunderkammern* as well as American cabinets of curiosity of the 19th century, on the other hand, “were essentially attempts to set up centers to satisfy the demand for scientific knowledge in an enlightened age” (Joel J. Orosz qtd. in Robinson 21-22). Although most scholars see the transition to the science-centered approach occurring only in the changed cultural climate that ensues in the emergence of the Enlightenment, some scholars detect such an inclination towards scientific thinking even in the Renaissance *Wunderkammern*.

*Wunderkammern* were exhibitions of the impossible in the framework of real-world possibilities, the out-of-ordinary within the order of the world. In the history of *Wunderkammern* in the sixteenth century, one cannot miss the obsession with monsters. The emphasis on monstrosity and “everything that exceeded the norm” is clearly manifested in the name of such collections (Davenne 125). The monster served not only to awe the visitors to the cabinet, but also as food for thought and “as a means to stimulate intelligence” (145). Crocodiles, for example, were always present in

cabinets because they were not mentioned in the scriptures and their origin and nature was a mystery:

Swinging in the cabinets' skies, the crocodile raised the question of its origins and its hybrid nature and evoked the aquatic depths from which it emerged. Renaissance man could question the world, for God had allowed him to discover its enigmas. (129)

The *Wunderkammer* was a significant marker of a transitional period "between the theological strictures of the medieval church and the epistemological tyranny of the Scientific Revolution" (Marr 9). The collectors' interest in the extraordinary and monstrous things known as curios was inspired by "the theological reasoning of the Middle Ages" that later "transformed into secular rationalization" (Shelton 184). "God," in the medieval belief, "possessed the power to alter the course of nature and create grotesque deformations and monstrosities that served as ill augurs" (184-185). This fusion between pure devotion to supernatural powers in the form of other-worldly deities and miraculous experiences (which are the foundations of every religion, primitive or established) and early-modern man's attempt to find a logical explanation for all these monstrosities by collecting them and exposing them naked to the eyes of the spectators is present in all these cabinets.

Supporting the idea that *Wunderkammern* were attempts at systematic observation of the world as part of the scientific method that arose in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Andre Leroi-Gourhan, the French archaeologist and anthropologist, states that "[i]n



every civilization the dawn of science begins in the bric-a-brac of ‘curios’” (qtd. in Davenne 13). The “encyclopaedic collectors,” who paved the way for such a development in scientific thinking, were properly called *curieux* in France,

because of their passion for, and commitment to, seeking deeper knowledge of the workings and nature of the universe, and a fuller, perhaps grander, picture of the totality of creation. (Shelton 181)

Although being out of order and out of the ordinary is the first impression a cabinet of curiosity often gives the viewers, these collections were in fact ingenious attempts to understand the order of nature and to organize and classify things. Such endeavors were mostly haphazard and unsophisticated at the beginning, but gradually found their way. In the eighteenth century, collectors had already learned how to go further than “accumulating heterogeneous objects and began classifying their cabinets of curiosities by discipline” (Davenne 16). These cabinets have been the subject of numerous studies, and their epistemological implications are going to be used in our discussion later in this chapter—but not before we take a look at King’s novel as a cabinet of curiosities and establish the metaphor.

## King’s Cabinet of Wonders

Describing his collection of short stories *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* and the variety of pieces found in it, King compares it in the preface to an “Aladdin’s cave of a book” (7), a place where one can find a variety of unusual things. This description well

applies to most of his fictional works, especially *It*. A book can be a cabinet of wonders “as long as what is collected within that space is designed to elicit wonder” (Balkun 129). One form of cabinets in early nineteenth-century America was books specifically created for didactic purposes for children. According to Shirley Wajda, books with details of “natural and man-made wonders” (47) were made in the same tradition of cabinets of curiosities to entice children’s imagination. In a way, “cabinet reading” was suggested at that time as “a healthy alternative to self-indulgent, potentially corrupting novel reading” (Wajda 47). King’s novels have never been hailed by school librarians as *didactic*, but *It*’s format (resembling a commonplace book of popular fairy tales and famous horror characters and themes), its wide reception among adolescents, and its emphasis on the power of wonder support our idea of *It* as a cabinet. Like a museum or other similar collections which are normally seen as fragments of the world, King’s novel is an album-like collection of universal fears, US history, and an insider’s account of a nation’s collective memory. The procession of horror he arranges in *It*, is exhibiting and testing both the author’s and the readers’ knowledge of the horror tradition, exactly like the “final exam” King had in mind.

King provides the readers with an encyclopedic knowledge of the horror genre, and nearly everything that can go wrong in a town where, like a cabinet, “lies somewhere between the infinitely small and the infinitely big” (Davenne 9). Providing a history of the eponymous monster across cultures, he literally models an encyclopedia: the Gaelic name of the monster is Glamour, but different cultures have different names for Pennywise. Native Indians called it Manitou, and Himalayans called it *taelus* or *tallus*. In France, it was *le loup-garou*, or “skin-changer” (*It* 642). These ideas might not have

anything in common and they are probably put together by the creative faculties of the author only, but this is how stories grow: “One [word or idea] leads to the next, to the next, and to the next” (431). Like in cabinet reading, *It* does not merely aim for showcasing wonders and marvels, but opens a theater of information on the horror genre and the devices traditionally used in it.

The wealth of information contained in the novel is not limited to references to books and movies only. It also includes historical accounts of the microcosmic Derry, exactly like the museum in town, the “Canal Days Museum,” started by Michael (Mike) Hanlon who is one of the seven Loser children in 1958 and a librarian and historian in 1985. The museum is filled with loaned artifacts and documents presenting the history of the town and how the Canal, where the monster lives, brought *prosperity* to the town’s people (18-19). Everything has changed in Derry with the passage of time, but the Canal has always been there and is even documented in the oldest picture Mike can find in his father’s collection of old photos he has accumulated from yard sales or secondhand shops and arranged in albums (691-692). The Canal is associated with Pennywise: similar to the Canal and the sewer system that contains the town’s waste materials, “Derry’s accumulative moral waste coalesces into Pennywise” (Magistrale, *Landscape of Fear* 110). The collectibles in the museum are historical evidences of the existence of the demonic creature haunting the town and hunting its children, but are kept as “priceless treasures” in family collections (*It* 19). It seems that everybody in Derry knows about the atrocities going on in town, but they do not care or dare to talk about them. People fake anger and protest against the killing sprees and child murders, but they are actually not really fond of investigating the matter (486).

King's small town setting is a collection of the anomalies (both factual and fictional), and the monster clown is nothing but the town (*It* 34). The presentation of horror in *It* goes as far back as the horrible stories in the Bible, which were "even better than the stuff in the horror comics" (316). Besides, King repeatedly uses stories based on horror scenes in American history. The "fire at the Black Spot" started by "the Legion of White Decency"—the fictional "Northerners' version of the Ku Klux Klan"—in which around sixty African Americans were burned alive, is one of the more explicit ones (426). It is interesting that the two members of the Losers' Club who have a more significant role in defeating Pennywise are Mike (the librarian and amateur historian) and Bill (the fantasy writer). Mike is the only one of the Losers who stays behind in Derry and researches the town's history and Pennywise. What he notices is that Pennywise the clown is always present at horrible incidents that are like blood spots on the history of Derry (480). Mike acts as the guardian of knowledge, and he is the one who retains his memory of the events of 1958, keeps track of the monster, and summons the others when Pennywise comes back. Bill, on the other hand, keeps the fire of imagination alive, and he is the one who faces the monster and crushes its heart.

The panoramic view of the horror that King presents in *It* is like an installation of the horror tradition, an attempt to compile all the ghosts living in the attics of everybody's minds. He takes the readers down the corridors of a horror house. Reading *It* is similar to being inside a *Wunderkammer*: walking in a world full of monstrosities but harnessed ones, safely installed on pedestals or on walls, or enclosed inside glass containers. Comparing the temporal form of a narrative to the spatial form of a cabinet may sound questionable, but is the flow of a viewer's gaze inside the *Wunderkammer*

different from the exploratory moves of readers finding their ways through a narrative? Besides, what is more important than the temporal succession of events in *It* is the procession of monstrosities in and out of the frame of the vivid pictures King has accumulated in this novel.

Taking on Foucault's notion of *heterotopia*, one can see how the heterotopic nature of the *Wunderkammer* is in service to the narrative in King's novel. Heterotopia is a site that "through the process of reflection, makes it possible for the subject to locate him/herself in a place where s/he is not" (Hölbling & Eckhard 93). Heterotopic places have the common characteristic of bringing several "incompatible" times and spaces together in "a single real space" (Smethurst 41). In a detailed description of one of the wonder-full sites he visited in his journey, Eco writes:

As in some story by Heinlein or Asimov, you have the impression of entering and leaving time in a spatial-temporal haze where the centuries are confused. The same thing will happen to us in one of the wax museums of the California coast where we will see, in a café in the seaside style of England's Brighton, Mozart and Caruso at the same table, with Hemingway standing behind them, while Shakespeare, at the next table, is conversing with Beethoven, coffee cup in hand.

(11)

Heterotopic places such as libraries, museums, fairgrounds, and cinemas are all significant in *It* and are usually sites of horror in King's other stories. These are places where freaks and monstrous objects and entities are found: Encyclopedias and

miscellaneous books in libraries, clowns and freaks in circuses and fairgrounds, monsters in movies, etc. Stepping into the cabinet of the novel *It*, one finds oneself visiting a collection of all these.

Of all the heterotopic spaces characterized in *It*, King chooses Derry's sewer system as Pennywise's permanent home. The underground pipes and conduits that are designed to carry off the town's waste matters keep a residue of whatever that passes through and figuratively recounts a dark and suppressed history of the town. The clown has a similar presence in every historical moment that builds the identity of the town and the town dwellers. Both the sewer system and the clown have mirroring functions and build a space of otherness that reflects the upside-down dimension of reality. The plasticity of time and place inside the sewers that makes it similar to the ageless shape-shifting monster provides the narrator with a space that is simultaneously physical and mental and allows him to freely pass the temporal and spatial boundaries. Picking up King's bulky cabinet of curiosities and following the narrator/curator through the narrative, it is easy to see that he could not have gained the same effect without the procession of monstrosities he has arranged in *It*.

## **Cabinets of Curiosities and the Order of Nature**

In the Enlightenment's departure from primitive thinking built upon superstitions and myths, and progress towards a more scientific way of thinking, the role of early cabinet collectors was highly significant. There is a strong relationship between collecting out-of-the-ordinary objects in *chambers of wonder* and imposing order on different entities in modern scientific classifications. Cabinets of curiosities

holding wondrous objects in a kind of haphazard manner were one of humanity's early attempts at plucking marvels out of their habitats (usually remote and exotic places) and putting them together to make sense of the world. The fetishistic attraction a collector feels towards objects that elicit wonder is not exclusive to cabinets of curiosities, but best manifested in them. "In the love of abnormal curiosities," as E.B. Tylor explains, "there shows itself a craving for the marvelous, an endeavor to get free from the tedious sense of law and uniformity in nature" (qtd. in Haddon 73). This sense of defiance of the order of nature in cabinets of curiosities shifts to a desire to organize and make everything more systematic in modern museum collections. Exceptions and anomalies are sacrificed on the altar of modern thinking and seamless classifications. There is awareness of the order of nature and a will to transcend it in both cases, but what is lost in this transition is the sublime sense of wonder.

This spectrum of primitive thinking and scientific thinking, wandering between belief in the supernatural and the natural laws, is something a King reader may find familiar. King believes that "[w]e love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings [...] it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these aberrations seem to imply" (*Danse Macabre* 39). Pennywise is a conglomeration of monstrosities as the manifestation of everybody's fears and anxieties, but it is not the only monster in *It*. The seven Losers themselves can be regarded as monstrous in a sense. King's use of characters with deformity or defects as a subversion of the trend in mid-twentieth century horror movies with their perfect protagonists who were not

representative of the heterogeneous population originates from his belief in freaks and monsters as agents to confound our sense of order.

King's bunch of heroes in *It* are called Losers because they are all outsiders. They may not be perfect kids but they are real ones:

"Losers" ... each of them marked in a physical, identifiable sense as an outsider in the social hierarchy of the 1950s. Bill Denbrough, unofficial leader of the group and brother of the first victim, was marked by his stutter; Ben Hanscom, by his obesity; Eddie Kaspbrak, by his asthma and his hovering mother; Richie Tozier, by the glasses he wore and his "trashmouth" (318); Mike Hanlon, by his race; Stan Uris, physically marked as a fastidious bird watcher, less obviously marked but clearly recognized in the closed world of Derry as Jewish; and Beverly Marsh, by the marker indicating the greatest difference, being female.

(Thoens 127-128)

What King writes in *Danse Macabre* about the unnaturally perfect kids in movies explains his use of such characters with so-called abnormalities (40). In the 1985 part of the novel where the adult Losers come back to Derry for the full-fledged war with the monster to finish the business they left unfinished in childhood, they had their physical (and mental) defects corrected by losing weight, undergoing eye surgeries, overcoming a stutter, and erasing their memories in general. When their childhood weaknesses return after they go back to Derry, they think the long-lost energy of childhood comes back with them, too. When they were kids, the energy was always there, but they always



took it for granted. They never thought that it would slip away, and it would happen while they were asleep, like a visit from “the Age Fairy” (701). They soon realize, however, that as the memories of their childhood find their way back, the childhood abnormalities resurface and they are only able to see the real face of the monster when they have their own monstrosity back.

The grown-up characters in *It* return to their childhood by roaming forgotten places such as the Barrens (where the Losers first meet and build things like a dam and an underground clubhouse out of the stuff they find in the landfill there), the abandoned house on Neibolt Street (where they attack Pennywise in werewolf form with the silver slugs Ben has made), or the thrift shop (where Bill finds his childhood bicycle, Silver, and buys it back). They somehow put bits and pieces of memories together like objects in a collection to try to mend their identities. The mutual relationship between human beings and the objects they surround themselves with has been discussed from different viewpoints in collecting theories. This relationship and the inherent order of things are implied in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s *The Meaning of Things*, which says “men and women make order in their selves (i.e. ‘retrieve their identity’) by first creating and then interacting with the material world” (16). The Losers know they cannot fight Pennywise unless they find themselves through recalling all their childhood memories. To do so, they need to revisit *things* and recollect them all including their fears.

In their childhood encounters with the monster, the characters all believe that they recognize the monster from somewhere: a movie, a book, or even a recurring nightmare. They wrongly believe they can defeat the monster if they pin it down to one

single category—the werewolf, for instance. However, their silver bullets are too small to kill the monster. When the seven Losers merely recognize Pennywise in its partial manifestations and in the form of their individual fears induced and/or boosted by cinematic representations, they do not have a clear understanding of its nature. At their reunion, when they put all the pieces together and remember everything, they see Pennywise’s real face. Similarly, a visitor to a cabinet of curiosities sees more than a combination of several out-of-ordinary and uncanny things. Since the beholder is free of the habituation usually developed with ordinary objects, he/she receives a deeper insight and a novel understanding of the order of the world. The monstrous accumulation of curios affects our patterns of thought and emotion.

To Hoppenstand and Browne, King’s horror does not come from monsters but from the characters’ “faulty perception of the monsters,” and this wrong perception is because they do not see the real face of the evil force and take it as “something harmless or innocent” (“Horror of It All” 13). This idea is often rendered in King’s fiction “as an extended joke. [...] So you think nurses are supposed to be healers, are supposed to be helpers. Surprise! You have yet to meet Annie Wilkes” (13). The element of surprise is present in *It* when the malignant nature of Pennywise, the clown, is revealed to the characters individually, but the joke is further extended to the time of the final confrontation. The real nature of the monster is known only partially at the beginning because the characters do not allow the full potential of their imagination to perceive it. The problem is not their unbelief, but lack of vision. When they are summoned as adults, they still have difficulties understanding the nature of Pennywise: “It changes” from time to time (*It* 490). It seems to be “just some part of the [...] natural order” but

not one that they could understand (491). As long as they are in their adult mindset looking for logical explanations, they will not be able to confront Pennywise.

When the Losers come back to town, they wish they had Stan there to help them with “his ordered mind” (*It* 492). Stan was the one who believed in *order* and had trouble with everything that “offended any sane person’s sense of order” (411). He was “an ordered person,” one “who [had] to have his books divided up into fiction and nonfiction on his shelves” and in alphabetical order (476). Unfortunately, the rigid order he believed in finally failed him and he took his life rather than face Pennywise again. Stan believed that there was a scientific explanation behind everything and there was no supernatural. He was a bird watcher and spent hours observing the world around him through the lenses of his binoculars. He was able to repel Pennywise once with the power of his bird-book. He had faith in science and used his bird-book like the Holy book in exorcism. He could confuse Pennywise momentarily by reading the names of birds as talismans against the monster (407). However, Pennywise finally gets him and he falls prey to the voices from the mysterious universe down there, “a universe where a square moon rises in the sky, and the stars laugh in cold voices, and some of the triangles have four sides” (411), a universe in which there is no logic. Stan, as a child, “had seen a thing that would have driven an adult insane, not just with terror but with the walloping force of an unreality too great to be explained away” (681). He probably committed suicide because he knew that even if there was magic, it would not work for grownups (492).

The Losers know one thing for sure: “kids were [...] better at incorporating the inexplicable into their lives. They believed implicitly in the invisible world. [...] But

when you grew up, all that changed” (510). They were each able to see one of the thousand faces of the monster when they were children, but they did not unleash the full potential of their imaginations to make total observations and see the ultimate face of fear—the giant spider King had to compromise for at the end of the novel. As adults, they finally realize they need to go back to childhood again and embrace fear or they would not be able to defeat Pennywise. When they set their imaginations free as in childhood, the veil is removed and the door to the rabbit hole is opened.

King admits in *Danse Macabre* that he has often tried to put aside “rationality” in his stories to aim for “the sense of wonder” to achieve a more primitive form of “believability” (89). The kind of believability that King endorses here is what a *Wunderkammer* is about. What was special about a *Wunderkammer* was that it provided an unlimited space to build an image of the world outside. Collecting or visiting a cabinet of curiosities was an attempt to push the boundaries of imagination by plunging into wonders. *Wunderkammern* might be regarded with contempt as “the product of a saturnine disordered mind, where superstition and magic combine with ‘pre-scientific stirrings’” (Hooper-Greenhill 79), but the *Wunderkammer* sensibility is what King advocates in his swapping rationality for primitive wonder.

In past decades, the concepts of order and rationality have gone through fundamental changes and have been repeatedly questioned by many thinkers. Foucault, for example, dismantles the established orders and forms of *rational* thinking, and argues that order and rationality have had different meanings in different cultures and historical periods. Writing about systems of classification in his *Order of Things*, he famously mentions a passage in Borges on a probably fictitious “Chinese encyclopedia”

(with its bizarre taxonomies of animals) as his source of inspiration. In her attempt to explicate this notion, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill points out that “the system of classification, ordering, and framing” in that kind of collection is totally “irrational” to the modern people with their obsession for order and classification. However, the same whimsical way of arranging things “would offer new possibilities of classifying the world, and even new ways of living in it” (4-5). The way one classifies objects in collections (whether a museum, an art exhibition, an anthology, or even a private collection of mundane objects) demonstrates how one thinks of the world, but that is definitely not the only way. *Wunderkammern*, which are considered irrational and arbitrary in the age of departmentalized museums, were the Renaissance man’s device to discover the order in nature. The “disordered jumble of unconnected objects,” often “unsystematic and idiosyncratic in composition” (Hooper-Greenhill 79), characterizing the *Wunderkammer* was the sixteenth-century man’s attempt “to collect and assemble the world, to represent the entirety of nature, to picture the world through the arrangement of material things, both natural and artefactual” (Hooper-Greenhill 45). Cabinets of curiosities defied homogeneity and tried to enlighten viewers by awing them with oddities and anomalies.

The wonder (mixed with pleasure) experienced by visitors to a *Wunderkammer* can be seen as the quintessence of the feeling one experiences in “the products of imagination, the inventions of folklore and fairy tales, fabulous beasts of legend, freaks of sideshows and the popular press” (Daston & Park 15). On the origins of myths and legends in many cultures, David Oakes in *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic* explains that those were attempts to face the unknown in order to

alleviate fears. By making the mysterious phenomena familiar, primitive minds tried to fill the gap. A similar process was practiced in the Renaissance cabinets where “fantastic specimens could be found next to ordinary animals; they did not upset the world’s order, but they did question it” (Davenne 145). Monsters tiptoed the fine line separating taxonomies in early cabinets and they were “supposed to provide the basis for scientific explanation at a time when science and legend were not mutually exclusive” (145). The sense of wonder created in such liminal spaces was what distinguished a *Wunderkammer* from other similar collections of biological organisms. To Oakes, our interest in Gothic (and horror) fiction has a similar origin: it helps us overcome anxieties and fears by bringing them to the surface (11). In horror fiction, the representation of fears in the form of monstrous entities, evil characters, and demonic incidents helps us give shape to our fears and anxieties and enables us to face them. As in Renaissance cabinets of curiosities, monsters in art and literature are “illustrations of the conflict between the individual’s buried desires [and fears] and collective taboos” (Davenne 145).

By the mid-18th century, the *Wunderkammer* tradition had been superseded by late modern scientific sensibilities; however, cabinets are to most scholars “the emblem *par excellence* of early modern curiosity and wonder” (Evans & Marr 10). Just as early modernity struggled to balance its newfound commitment to reason with wonder as signified by the *Wunderkammer*, the Losers in King’s novel must struggle to balance reason with unreason. When Beverly tries to use a tape to measure the depth of darkness, she hears the eerie whisper from the drain pipe saying that she will not be able to do so (*It* 413). She has to go down the sewers and embrace the darkness with all

its surprises to understand and defeat Pennywise. Rationality and their grown-up mindset are of no use to *It's* major characters and wonder is their last resort to explain and solve what they cannot think of any explanations for. They need to go back to the past and childhood to comprehend and face the monster.

## No Trespassing - Children Only

In Stephen King's works, children are usually those who "synthesize 'real' and 'imagined' experience" and they often rely on their imaginations rather than their senses and thinking faculties to find their way in the fantasy world (Beahm, *Companion* 8). The tension between the two worlds of childhood and adulthood in *It*, for instance, is stressed with the struggle between forces of wonder and pure rationality. When the Losers come back to Derry, they feel an atavistic fascination with wonder to make sense of the order of nature: embracing the monster to be able to control it. King was definitely affected by his childhood experiences and the general trend in writing fiction in those days. The baby boomers, King stated in *Time* in 1986, were "'obsessive' about childhood" (Badley 51), and they were long disappointed by the strict rationality of the modern age. Cabinet-like museums such as *Ripley's* (and the associated paperback series under the title *Ripley's Believe It or Not*) are mentioned by King as signs of the change in the mentality of his contemporaries. It is interesting that Eco in his "Travels" observes Ripley's museums as the best manifestation of resurgence of the *Wunderkammer* tradition in America. He finds a certain fascination with that tradition in the American psyche and speaks of the abundance of exhibitions of fakes and freaks to fill a cultural void (16).

In his Introduction to *Nightmares and Dreamscapes* (1993), King gives an account of the influence Ripley's publications had on him and on other kids (or even adults) like him:

It was in Ripley's *Believe It or Not!* that I first began to see how fine the line between the fabulous and the humdrum could sometimes be, and to understand that the juxtaposition of the two did as much to illuminate the ordinary aspects of life as it did to illuminate its occasional weird outbreaks. (3)

Later on, he emphasizes how little *reality* means to him: "All too often [reality] is to the imagination what ash stakes are to vampires" (3). In the one single reference to Ripley's ... in *It*, when Bill asks the little boy he accidentally meets in Derry if he believes in the monster, he replies: "I read in my Ripley's *Believe It or Not* book that there was this guy, he got music from his teeth. [...] I guess if I believed that, I could believe anything" (566). And, not surprisingly, the boy actually believed Pennywise.

*It* is one of King's prominent novels on the theme of children and monster(s) that addresses such believability. To King, "children are better able to deal with fantasy and terror," because of "the size of their imaginative capacity" (*Danse Macabre* 102). Imagination can render creatures "of a hundred different possible forms" (118). This ability fades away as children grow older. The grown-up characters in *It* wrongly believe that their childhood defects are gone, but they are ignorant of the fact that they have lost more than that; the imagination, their only hope to beat the evil force, is gone with their childhood too. Imagination is "an eye, a marvelous third eye that floats free"



in children, but “its vision begins to dim” as they move farther away from the prime days (*Danse Macabre* 407). As children grow up, “the boundaries of thought and vision begin to close down to a tunnel,” and it is up to fantasy and horror writers to “bust the walls of that tunnel vision wide for a little while” (407). What happens in *It* is “a dance of dreams, [...] awakening the child inside” (409).

The decay of imagination is what King portrays in his characterization of the adults in the lives of the Losers. The picture King draws of the majority of the parents in the first half of the novel (that is, the irresponsible and sadistic parents) puts them in the position of *the others* in relation to their children. The most terrible thing to Eddie, even worse than the ugly faces of the evil monster, was “his ma’s face” (756). This *otherness* of the parents in the novel is probably why King refrains from showing what kind of parents the seven Losers would turn into later: “they were all barren [...] Seven of them, and not a kid among them” (531). It is suggested in the novel that they are so unwilling to have children because it is Pennywise’s will to keep them away from children and their power of belief. The reader also gets the impression that the Losers insist on maintaining their status as children and resist being totally lost in the aberrant world of adulthood.

It is contemptible how adults in the novel see the world, and that warns of a lack of power in the adults’ way of thinking and running the world. In the horror tradition of the 1950s, when young Stephen watched movies and read paperbacks, “it was the kids who stood watch [and] stamped the mutant out” while their parents would not even believe it (*Danse Macabre* 42). The one thing that distinguishes kids from adults in such conditions is their wild imagination. The parents in *It* do not want to believe in the

monster hunting their children and unknowingly aid Pennywise and turn out to be its accomplices too. Pennywise targets children who come from dysfunctional families, whose parents cause them misery out of ignorance, incompetence or psychological issues. Every twenty-seven years, a new wave of violence starts in Derry and, although the town is apparently becoming more prosperous, it is dying (480-81). Twenty seven years is, more or less, the time needed for children to metamorphose into horrible creatures themselves, having lost their powers of imagination in the face of the hard facts of life. The return of the Losers to Derry to fight the monster is a symbolic quest into their childhood to get their sense of wonder back.

To King, children are the preferred heroes and also the perfect audience for horror; although they are weak, they “lift the weight of unbelief with ease” (*Danse Macabre* 99). In most of his works, the heroes are either children or adults who have not lost their sense of wonder and the power of imagination. There are also instances where we see the collaboration between these two groups. In *Salem’s Lot*, for example, a child is among the chosen ones to fight the evil force threatening the community. Mark Petrie is “a little boy who has taken the postgraduate course in vampire lore from the films and the modern penny-dreadfuls” (281). Unlike the skeptical adult characters of the novel, he knows well what he is dealing with and reminds himself just in time that a vampire cannot enter his house unless it is invited inside. He also knows the mantra from *Dracula* to distract himself not to be hypnotized by the vampire (240). Mark later joins the two adult characters in the novel that suspect the threat of vampires and try to stop them: “an old teacher half-cracked with books [and] a writer obsessed with his childhood” (281). What makes *It* different from King’s other works is the unorthodox

narrative structure that sees the main characters oscillating between childhood and adulthood. The tension between the two stages and the struggle between embracing wonders and strict reasoning are highlighted more effectively this way. The extra ambiguity that this narrative technique adds to the concept of monstrosity in the novel's theme of "children and monsters" makes it more compelling.

The fact that adult heroes in King's fiction are often those who have clung to a sense of wonder even in old age well explains recurrent writer figures as major characters to challenge the evil force in his novels. In *It*, all the Losers (except for Stan) finally understand the importance of belief in wonders, but it is the writer figure who finally leads the fight. Bill is the one who does not want to think about the adult's stuff; he never wanted to grow up (699). He keeps with his resolution and becomes a horror story writer and, like a shadow of King himself, his last book is "full of monsters" chasing and hunting little children (38). Finally, he is the one who puts the monster to rest forever. In King's world, "adult survival is always predicated upon the survival of the child within the adult—the latter's capacity to summon forth the powers of imagination and simple faith" (Magistrale, *Second Decade* 132).

As mentioned before, Bill is not the only adult character who plays a critical role in defeating the monster. All the information the Losers have on their enemy is gathered by the head librarian, Mike. While the other members have forgotten everything, Mike helps them have their memories back by providing them with the clues to glue their fragmented memories back together and (re)build the picture. The librarian falls short, though, before the final encounter with Pennywise, and the fantasy writer has to lead the group. In his study of "Time and Space" in postmodern films such as Wim Wenders's

*Wings of Desire*, David Harvey discusses the library as one of the two significant spaces where “some sense of identity [can] be forged and sustained” in its peculiar world (317). In Wenders’s film, an old man retreats to the library—“a repository of historical knowledge and collective memory”—to search and “recuperate a proper sense of the history of this distinctive place called Berlin” (317). The old man “sees himself as the story-teller” and he does not want to give up because he is worried “if mankind loses its story-teller then it loses its childhood” (317). In King’s *It*, the library is where the monster is tracked and the call to resume war against Pennywise is originated. The meetings of the Losers in the second half of the novel are also set in the library. However, the guardian of collective memory is stopped by the monster, and another story-teller (a fiction writer) keeps the fight alive.

The library is certainly a site of significance in *It*; however, King makes a distinction between the children’s section of the Derry library and the adult’s section. The two library sections are located in different buildings and are connected by a tunnel, which will be further discussed later in this chapter. This distinction again speaks to the demarcation between childhood and adulthood in *It* and the struggle between rational methods of acquisition and wonder. Interestingly, the second space “where a fragile sense of identity prevails” in Wenders’s film is the circus (Harvey 318). King’s novel opens in a fairground and Pennywise, the dancing clown, holds a liminal position between childhood and adulthood. The clown, which is the symbol and source of wonder for children, is met in the sewers that actually smell like a circus (*It* 13). Reading King’s horror novel as a cabinet of curiosities stresses such liminality that is the characteristic of similar sites (wax museums, cabinet-like structures, and amusement

parks) in which Eco made his observations about the American cultural environment of almost the same time period (“Travels”).

## The Fantastic and the Marvelous

The temporal and spatial characteristics of heterotopias and sites of wonder have made them desirable and proper settings for horror. In a *Wunderkammer*, for instance, there is a fine line between familiar and unfamiliar as well as explicable and inexplicable, and they often bleed into each other. *Wunderkammern* were most often a chamber in a mansion or a hall in a palace, and sometimes the collectibles were simply exhibited in different corners of the collector’s house. The exhibition of wondrous objects of nature and artifice (and sometimes hybrid objects from the two realms) from various times and places in an area surrounded by the usual household items gave the beholders a novel feeling. Similarly, King’s horror fiction puts these dualities (familiar/unfamiliar and rational/irrational) at play with each other. What readers experience is the accumulation and representation of the unknown world (in the form of abnormalities, aberrations, and monstrosities) in a contained space of the known world (usually the conventional setting of a household or a small town). The tension between the two states of belief and disbelief in *It* calls for attention to this feeling of irresolution that is common between cabinets of curiosities and King’s novel.

In one of their attempts to understand the true nature of Pennywise and its origin, the Losers try the “Smoke-Hole Ceremony” that they found in a book from the library about the Indian tribes and their rituals. They lock themselves up in their underground clubhouse with only a little vent in the top and start a fire. Feeling

delirious, they begin to float and enter the void, a timeless place between inside and outside called “Ago, as in once upon a time” (*It* 722). That is when they have a vision of It coming down into their world millions of years ago. To see where Pennywise had come from, they needed to float between real and unreal.

Horror is a subset of the larger genre of fantasy that is defined by Kathryn Hume as “the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal” (xii). In her *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, she continues explaining that the common belief that fantasy came into existence only after the Enlightenment, when anything departing from reality and rationality was considered a form of fantasy, is a narrow definition because “the impulse to depart from consensus reality is present for as long as we have had literature” (30). However, this does not necessarily mean any fantastic fiction is purely escapist. In a more productive sense, fantasy can challenge the rationality of our everyday reality and change our most fundamental assumptions of the outside world.

In a study on fantasy in literature almost a decade before Hume analyzed how fantasy contributed to literary representations of reality, Tzvetan Todorov had introduced a new definition for the fantastic. In his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, he defines “the fantastic” as a concept which stands between the uncanny and the marvelous. Making a distinction between these two genres, he explains:

If [the reader] decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to

another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous. (41)

Todorov's ephemeral *fantastic* is basically the moment of hesitation between the two states of belief and disbelief of the supernatural:

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.

(25)

Todorov's theory of "the fantastic" has been criticized mostly for the confusion that his choice of terminology creates. However, the moment of suspension between "total faith" and "total incredulity" that is emphasized in his theory is precisely what a visitor experiences in a *Wunderkammer*. Cabinets of curiosities appeal to both the intellectual powers of the viewers and the sense of wonder evoked at the marvels on display. The intellectual norms are questioned and manipulated but are not negated by the marvelous things in the cabinets.

The marvelous (not to be mistaken with Todorov's ambiguous genre), according to Ann Swinfen, is what constitutes fantasy. It includes "anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world" (5). Marvels often have an aura of other-worldliness and take the observer to this other world. The fantasy writer, Swinfen

argues, creates a world that needs a “secondary belief” on the part of the audience to be successful. However, this secondary world receives its credibility from “our normal experience of the primary world” (5). In other words, the world of fantasy “in no way conflicts with the exercise of [man’s] other principal faculty, his reason” (5). The marvelous has a feeling of monstrosity around it because “the ‘marvel’ [...] is essentially that which transgresses the separation of realms, mixes the animal and the vegetable, the animal and the human [...] It is metamorphosis, which turns one order into another” (Roland Barthes qtd. in Davenne 125). The marvelous might be out of the ordinary, but not necessarily impossible. The pleasure one experiences when facing marvels and curiosities in a *Wunderkammer* does not require suspension of one's critical faculties to believe the unbelievable. It is actually motivated and nourished by such faculties.

Similar to a *Wunderkammer* that creates an in-between space, King's *It* hangs somewhere between the two states of belief and disbelief. The unnamable *It* is a monstrous entity that comes to Earth “*in the ago, a million years back, maybe, or ten million, or eighty million*” from another world (722), but it is as familiar as all the fears, anxieties, and atrocities running now in this world. To fully understand the nature of the monster, it is not enough for the Losers in their adulthood to suspend or manipulate their reasoning abilities. They need to be able to experience the emotional engagement necessary to be thrilled by the other-worldly marvels but never reject the possibility that such monstrosities exist somewhere in their real world. In King's fiction, children are empowered by their wild imaginations and the resultant believability. What he always endorses is the sense of wonder that “brushes aside the established sense of



possibility and imposes itself as the center of belief” (Irwin 155). Children just know that “the world [is], after all, full of wonders” (*It* 839).

The kind of fantastic horror that King writes, with traditional and non-traditional fictional monsters within heavy sociocultural and political subtexts, demonstrates that those other worlds are not totally strange to the real world the reader comes from. One of the ways fantasists create wonder is by “inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* ‘new’” (Jackson 8). King has proved that he knows well how to intertwine the familiar with the unfamiliar, and to employ wonder. This in-between position he usually aims for is best symbolized in the image of the glass corridor that connects the adult and child sections of Derry’s library. The image can stand for the time tunnel that moves the narrative between the two time periods in the novel until past and present synthesize. However, the critical role played by the two story-tellers mentioned before gives the corridor a more significant position in terms of the desired equilibrium between rational and irrational. King’s emphasis on imagination does not mean he is siding with irrationality and total submission to what many literary critics dismiss as “juvenile nonsense” (Maynard 12); his fantastic worlds occupy a position on both sides of belief and disbelief of the supernatural. In the *Wunderkammer* sensibilities, reason and reality are mere arbitrary phenomena. Being awed at the wonders in a cabinet is not a senseless act of escapism, but part of accepting new orders of things. The assemblage of marvelous things in a *Wunderkammer* and their arrangements were once thought to be irrational and entirely haphazard. Nonetheless,

there was an epistemological purposefulness in those collections and their supposedly random classifications (Daston & Park 272-3).

## Conclusion

The novel *It* is a hall of fame of horror icons and a directory of well-known characters in fairy tales, science fiction, and horror fiction. Using names and themes from the tradition in a different setting, King treads a fine line between being derivative and creative. Don Herron in *Reign of Fear: Fiction and Film of Stephen King* claims that “almost every element of his writing could be traced” (220). He believes that King is “one of the Greatest Appropriators”:

King certainly is [...] a Great Regurgitator, swallowing literature, pop literature, film, culture, and pop culture whole. After brief digestion, he spews it forth again, and apparently feels he is giving his readers the benefit of his life experience, for such seems to be his life experience. (220)

In his pastiche of generic characters and his recycling of the older ideas and images devised by previous authors, King has excavated the remnants of the cultural products he had consumed in his childhood. Pastiche (or pasticcio, literally meaning a pâté made from diverse ingredients) flourished in the same time period as *Wunderkammern* were popular in Europe. Due to the increasing demand for Renaissance art for growing collections, artists started borrowing from masterpieces in demand and created their own generic art products (Hoesterey 2). When King first

appeared in the publishing industry and made a name, as Hoppenstand and Browne observe, “the predominant taste [in popular literature was] sex/money/power thrillers and romances” (“Horror of It All” 1). King was a prominent member of the group of writers (such as William Peter Blatty and Dean Koontz) who revitalized the horror genre and made the 1970s a new phase in the American horror scene. He breathed new life into old monsters and capitalized on the sense of wonder his out-of-ordinary agents of fear and dread created. The main characteristic of pastiche, in its every variation, is that the elements it is composed of are collected piece by piece from various sources. King found materials in both canonical literature and popular culture to satisfy the ever-increasing market for more affordable and accessible works of literature. The chest of wonder he has created/collected in *It* is the prime example of his pastiche to answer the demand for monstrosities from popular literature fans to consume and exhibit on their book shelves.

King does not agree that he writes his horror under the influence of childhood trauma; however, he accepts that he is repeatedly “retooling” (the expression King uses in *Danse Macabre* for his borrowing habit) materials collected during his childhood history with the horror genre. All the books he has read and the movies he has watched come back and haunt him from time to time; they have left their scars on King and there is a sense of revisiting all those monsters and horrors in every new story he tells.

Praising Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991), the Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1978, King describes him as the writer who “has made the cataloguing of devils, angels, demons, and dybbuks a good part of his career” (*Danse Macabre* 120). In fact, King has done the same cataloguing in his career, especially in the early years. In the first decade

of his career, there are various examples of his recycling of “the monsters that have haunted the movie screen, mass market novel and other popular media for decades” (Roberts 35).

The novel *It* was King’s ambitious effort to practice retooling everything he collected in his career as a horror writer. After almost a decade, he could no longer limit himself to one type of monster and one kind of fear. He made an attempt to depict horror in the most universal way possible and created this polymorphic monster simply called It. The collective malignancy of the shape-shifting monster is pictured against the collective power of a bunch of Losers who have gradually lost their childhood power of belief, and who only at the end realize they need to go back to childhood to be able to kill the monster. Imagination is as hard to define a concept as the monstrous Pennywise, but it was used in opposition to rigid scientific thinking for the purpose of this discussion. King’s romantic approach to childhood and imagination might seem simplistic and questionable, but it is such an indispensable ingredient of his fiction and has been noted by him as the main subject of his various works that it is impossible to write about him without discussing that. The transition between childhood and adulthood and the tension between human perceptive abilities in these two stages in King’s *It* are the concepts that the *Wunderkammer* metaphor helps us better understand.

King is discussed as a curator, an artist-collector in this chapter. The catalogue of fairy tales and classic fantasy stories and movies that he has put together in his cabinet-like massive book is chosen as a good example of his collecting mindset. That is the main reason cabinet of curiosities, where we see the “desegregation of the borders

between [...] collectors and artists” (Davenne 9), were chosen as the ground for our discussion. *Wunderkammern* and cabinets of curiosities, with their unique status in collecting culture, were used as a model to discuss the role of marvelous, wondrous and monstrous in King’s landscape of horror. Their emphasis on extraordinary objects and creatures, the peculiar nature of the marvels accumulated in them, the significant role of wonder in their production and consumption, their liminal position between pre-modern believability and modern rationality made them perfect metaphors for our discussion of *It*. King’s monstrous novel ignores the lines between different types and sub-genres to create a memorial of the horror genre. The shape-shifting source of horror in the novel blurs the inside and outside evil, and what is included in the novel is not limited to anything but its creator’s imagination and memory.

In accord with the pastiche tradition, King is an imitator who collects names, tropes, and ideas from the past. His creative part in the process of producing popular works of fantasy and horror is the way he digs old and forgotten pieces, polishes them and exhibits them in a new setting. In his borrowing and retooling of these images and ideas, he also provides the merits and pleasures of reading classics for those who might not be capable enough to enjoy the originals. King is a collector/curator who has opened the doors of his *Wunderkammer* to the public and millions of fans have been visiting those chambers of wonder. *It* is just one of his best-selling exhibitions that can be taken as another example of Eco’s “America of furious hyperreality,”

... [a] more secret America (or rather, just as public, but snubbed by the European visitor and also by the American intellectual); and it creates somehow

a network of references and influences that finally spread also to the products of high culture and the entertainment industry. (“Travels” 7)

Similar to the significance that Eco attributes to numerous hyperrealistic reproductions of art, history and nature in America, King’s collection and reproduction of a literary tradition in a *Wunderkammer* also explains his position as a phenomenon in the American culture.

## Chapter 2: Curse of Collecting – *Needful Things*

### Introduction

One of the main reasons Stephen King is read and appreciated by millions of readers, not only in the US but also in all the other countries where his books have been published and sold, is the fact that he writes about ordinary people in extraordinary situations. The mutual relationship and the transaction between people and things is one of the features of ordinary lives which can lead to bizarre situations if they go to extremes. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton in their *The Meaning of Things* state that “[p]ast memories, present experiences and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment” (ix). The way individuals are influenced by the objects they have around them and the meaning things give to their sense of self demonstrates well that possession of objects (and not certain objects only) largely determines who we are. The influence is obviously intensified when the special bond between collectors and their collections of objects is considered and the act of desiring and acquiring objects becomes more of an obsession. This is when collectors are actually possessed by the objects they believe they are possessing.

There are references to collecting in many of King’s works of fiction, and descriptions of characters’ collections of various objects are commonly used in his

novels and short stories for the purpose of characterization. However, *Needful Things* (1991), a Faustian parable, is his only novel that directly addresses collecting behavior and the dark (or better to say, opaque) side of the obsession with objects. This unconventional horror story is built upon excessive forms of collecting and their implications. The novel presents a seemingly endless list of purchases made at a mysterious shop called Needful Things and the pranks the buyers are required to play in return. The reader is immersed in a myriad array of events and sometimes confused by the large number of characters in the novel. However, what links all these characters is the way they obsess over objects. The novel is a panorama of consumerism and the cultural peculiarities of “1980s postmodern capitalism” (Sears 221). At the surface level, it might seem to be about Leland Gaunt—the shop owner—as a supernatural entity, but *Needful Things* is about the haunted psyche and how our obsessive and compulsive behaviors can bring out other vices and ruin souls.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton believe that “things actively change the content of what we think is our self, and thus perform a creative as well as reflexive function” (28). This is due to the attention directed to the objects in one’s immediate environment. Similarly, buying things is usually the result of a need or desire and requires mental investment and attention by the buyer. The process of obtaining things heavily engages one’s own self. In *Needful Things*, the new shop opened in Castle Rock, the customers literally sell their souls to Leland Gaunt to be able to collect their objects of desire. This “bargain with the devil” is one of the common themes in King’s fiction that has been addressed directly in *Needful Things*, “where the pact is literally made” (Strengell 9-10). The customers are added to Gaunt’s collection of lost souls as soon as



they bargain for a desired item and agree to his evil intentions. In every collection, the significance of each item depends on the collector's will; it is the collector who is the "ultimate arbiter, deciding over admission and expulsion, over order and arrangement, over value and beauty" (Blom 169). *Needful Things* is where things (and people) find a new identity as a result of being added to a collection.

Leland Gaunt's shop always seems to stock the deepest desires of each shopper. Describing his shop, he says that "*everyone in the WORLD belongs here, because everyone loves a bargain. Everyone loves something for nothing ... even if it costs everything*" (*Needful Things* 669). Some of his merchandise, like the pendant which eases pain or the toy which predicts the outcome of horse races, apparently has supernatural powers, but most of the items, such as the Sandy Koufax baseball card or the carnival glass lampshade, are innocent collectibles which may be found in every household or personal collection. Nevertheless, no object is just an object when it comes to collecting. Even those simple objects have the magic to charm their buyers into believing they possess a priceless rare item. Norris Ridgewick is astonished when he sees the Bazun fishing rod in the window of *Needful Things*. He loves the fishing rod for two reasons: "what it was and what it stood for" (149). Apart from being one of the best rods in the world for lake and stream, the rod was a memorable object that stood for all the good times he had with his father when he was only a child. When his father died, his Bazun rod disappeared too. It was lost like the beautiful world Norris had at that time (150).

As Sears suggests, many of the things sold at *Needful Things* "rely on nostalgic recollection and childhood desire for their effects" (220). However, not all customers at *Needful Things* make a purchase because they feel nostalgic about the objects. There are

characters who are attracted to objects as serious collectors. Chuck Evans, Myra's husband, is a collector of World War II memorabilia (*Needful Things* 446). Myrtle, Buster Keeton's wife, has a large collection of porcelain dolls because she finds collecting comforting and she believes it alleviates the agonies she is experiencing in her married life. She loves dolls because they never talk, shout, or do anything that would make her miserable (268). Nettie Cobb, another character from King's large pool of characters in this novel, has a modest collection of lampshades. She is so seriously attached to her collectibles that she even killed her husband for breaking one of them. She is so overprotective towards her collection that she decides to stand guard at home to watch the antique glass lampshade she has bought from Gaunt (163).

Brian Rusk, the 11-year-old boy who becomes Gaunt's first customer, has a collection of 1956 baseball cards. Cora, Brian's mother, has a collection of Elvis Presley memorabilia: a ceramic Elvis figure, a porcelain Elvis beer-stein, and lots of other nice Elvis things. From *Needful Things*, she buys a pair of sunglasses supposedly owned by Elvis that she believes has supernatural qualities. She experiences all sorts of sexual fantasies about the King while wearing the glasses. Cora's best friend, Myra Evans, who shares an interest in Elvis collectibles, buys a framed photo of Elvis with similar qualities. Holding it in her hands, she can fantasize dancing with Elvis, French kissing and doing various other things with him till she has an orgasm. Like other townspeople, she is willing to pay any price only to possess the object of her desire.

Gaunt knows about the troubled relationship among the townspeople, the rumors, the feuds and, in short, has access to the reservoir of evil forces existing in every small town usually hidden from newcomers and strangers under a deceiving

façade. He convinces his customers to play a prank on a neighbor, a friend, or a random person from the town to pay for what they have bought. He likes bargaining, but he likes pranks better. Some of the tricks look innocent, like throwing mud at someone's sheets and clothes on the clothesline or dropping a provocative letter in someone else's mailbox, but they are mostly nasty ones such as killing a neighbor's dog. However, the customers are so fascinated by whatever they have bought from Gaunt that they would do anything to keep it (254). Gaunt knows that wanting something and needing it are two different things. When people need something badly, like a junky, they will be willing to do anything to get it (*Needful Things* 120). He takes advantage of their needfulness and the fever of commerce to drive the whole town to violence and madness.

Gaunt soon finds an apt pupil and an assistant in town: Ace Merrill, the petty criminal. What first attracts Ace to Gaunt's shop is a manuscript by his late uncle apparently showing where he had hidden his buried treasure before dying (*Needful Things* 369). His uncle, Pop Merrill, a miser who owned a junk shop called The Emporium Galorium, left him nothing but some worthless "trading stamps" when he died (370-71). Ace finally finds his uncle's so-called treasure, but it is just more trading stamps and some rolls of pennies. Unlike other customers of *Needful Things*, who finally realize that their *valuable* objects have been shams only, he is duped into thinking Alan Pangborn, the sheriff of Castle Rock, has stolen the money. One way or the other, the townspeople are possessed by the evil because they want to possess some object they wrongly believe is worth it (293).

The frustration and the conflicts that originated from Gaunt's pranks build up to the point that the entire town is in chaos. The first serious incident is the bloody fight between Wilma Jerzyck, the town bully, and Nettie that ends in murder. Everybody is so full of rage and frustration that they readily buy guns from Gaunt to go after each other (*Needful Things* 584). Alan Pangborn feels devastated by the soaring crime rate. He finally realizes how to fight Gaunt: "Magic—wasn't that what this was all about? [...] And what was the basis of all magic? Misdirection" (685). Gaunt misdirected his customers with fake objects and Alan decides to play the same trick on him. His weapon is a magic can that belonged to his deceased son, "a fake can [...] with a green snake inside" (684). Alan successfully confronts Gaunt, but the town is already burning. *Needful Things*, published as the last Castle Rock story, ends with the destruction of the fictional town that King's readers had visited several times in his previous works.

In a discussion of the significance and nature of collecting in America, Leah Dilworth points out that collecting has mostly been regarded as "a potentially aberrant behavior, signifying obsession, fetishism, or pathology" (5). This darker side of collecting will be discussed in the present chapter but not from the common psychoanalytic point of view. The darker emotional and psychological sides of the human-thing relation will be touched upon in order to discuss a "commodity culture, in which the purchase of a desirable item—whether a rare baseball card or piece of Elvis memorabilia—seems to promise the buyer bliss" (Coddon 14). The townspeople's obsessive behaviors towards their objects of desire and the fact that they are willing to sacrifice everything in order to acquire a fascinating item for their collections is frightful. The compulsive buying and the obsession with their purchases is, however,

only the beginning of their depravity. Things get worse when they realize they have traded their souls for fake objects only disguised as what they need and desire. They fall victim to Gaunt's gimmicks and buy useless objects that are wrapped up in narratives.

This question of the authenticity of the objects will be expanded into a discussion of the reality/illusion dichotomy later in the chapter. What is offered at *Needful Things* is not the rare and precious object that is advertised. Leland Gaunt is only an imposter who sells his customers stories and pulls the wool over their eyes. He does his best talking people into buying what they believe are comfort objects, and turning themselves into slaves by agreeing to be the devil's advocate. The objects supplied at Gaunt's mysterious shop are merely make-believes and simulations. What we see in *Needful Things* is "the triumph of mental images over external reality," which is part of David Lomas's definition of simulacrum in his *Simulating the Marvellous* (306). The transactions between Gaunt and his clients and the fabricated realities he offers them as genuine and real will be discussed in the context of Jean Baudrillard's and Umberto Eco's hyperreality and will be compared to King's career of selling fictional worlds and alternate realities. This comparison is not meant to discredit the social critique King usually makes with his horror fiction. It actually intends to show how, similar to Gaunt's customers, the audience is left with disillusionment and a clearer picture of their selves when (and if) the fantasy wears off.

The *horror vacui* that King exhibits in his narratives and the extraordinary attention he pays to details is certainly one of the main features that give his fabrications the *more-real-than-real* effect. The detailed and singularized images of man-thing transactions created in *Needful Things* is a good example of the picture King

usually presents of a bunch of *authentic* individuals rather than the broad-brush picture of an Everyman as the protagonist. The narrative in *Needful Things* is carried by a chorus of smaller characters and pawns. This particular approach to storytelling and characterization necessitates the episodic and fragmentary form of the novel, which will also be discussed in relation to collecting. Hoarding, a notorious form of collecting, will serve as a metaphor for King's love of cataloguing in general and his countless number of characters and narrative snippets in *Needful Things*.

## **Possessed by Shadows**

In collecting culture, the always-present need for acquiring new items and expanding on the collection is a common obsession among collectors. Finding new items for one's collection can occupy every collector's attention. In psychological studies on collecting behaviors and the possible causes behind them, it has been suggested that collecting is "an instrument designed to allay a basic need brought on by early traumata and as an escape hatch for feelings of danger and the reexperience of loss" (Muensterberger 47). Many collectors begin their intimate relation with certain objects for the immediate relief they offer them, and continue expanding on their collections only because of the sense of "pleasure and wish fulfillment" they feel along the way (47). The remedial relation that is supposed to be a source of comfort and reassurance, however, can sometimes be the cause for anxieties and traumas itself when it comes to the extreme forms of collecting.

Things entrap part of us when we are in contact and have interaction with them for a while. Our intentions and attentions leave some markings on objects, and the

residues of the histories objects have had with different owners stain them. Alan refuses to clean his car because he does not want the memories of his deceased wife and son to be gone. Riding in that car with the stains and smells is like “riding with the ghosts of his wife and his younger son” (*Needful Things* 60). He mourns his lost family by looking at their belongings. There are long passages where Alan contemplates objects and reviews memories of his family like watching a video and rewinding it again and again. This melancholic attitude and the role of objects as bridges between past and present as well as dead and alive explains only part of the emotional value of objects. The relationship between humans and the objects in their immediate environment is undoubtedly beyond the souvenir function of things as reservoirs of past memories. The relation is mutual and objects affect us as much as we affect them. The nature of human-object transactions becomes even more inexplicable when a fetishistic bond between the subject and object is involved. Compulsion, possessiveness and obsession are some of the major areas where the pathological side of collecting starts to dominate. *Needful Things* is one of the best examples of King’s fiction that highlights all these features in its account of the darker side of humans’ fascination with objects.

The affection that Gaunt’s customers show towards objects becomes problematic as soon as they favor things over their family, friends, and neighbors. They find solace in things rather than in their relationship with other people. In *Needful Things*, there is no price tag on any of the merchandise. It is the sort of shop where the shopkeeper asks, “How much do you think it’s worth?” (*Needful Things* 57). It is the customers who decide the price. However, the dollar figure the shoppers suggest is only a small part of what they have to pay. The other part is the evil things they promise Gaunt to do to

someone else in the town. What they do is to barter their souls for an object of desire. Leland Gaunt plays on his customers' fascination with things, and wishes his customers were as "full of wonders" as Brian, a child with a vivid imagination who is very open to suggestions (30). Brian finds it fun to have a collection and has worked hard to get some of the more expensive items in his collection. He turns out to be Gaunt's first customer and is talked into buying what he thinks is a valuable Sandy Koufax card. Although he knows he is being consumed by the obsession, he cannot stop himself repeatedly checking the precious baseball card he has bought in *Needful Things*. He wrongly believes he has made a good bargain, not knowing that the price he is going to pay for that card is his life. The consequences of the "deed" he agrees to do as the price for the collectible card weigh so much on his conscience that he finally commits suicide.

Nettie has similarly paid high prices for her collection. After being abused for many years by her husband, the one thing that drove her crazy enough to kill him was a broken carnival glass lampshade from her collection: "he had broken something she *really* needed, and she had taken his life" (*Needful Things* 95). She spends some time in Juniper Hill Asylum for her love of things, but she can just think of buying "the only thing she needed to complete her modest collection" as soon as she sees the lampshade in Gaunt's shop (94). It makes her happy because the possession of the thing gives her satisfaction; however, she cannot imagine that one day she will be the victim of somebody else's passionate love for a thing. Hugh Priest's desire for a fox-tail he finds in *Needful Things* is so overwhelming that he agrees to commit a crime for it. These characters all seem to be possessed by *useless* objects which are stripped of their utilities to become part of a collection.



Reading the characters' internal monologues while they obsess over their treasured objects, one can feel the vibration of their apprehensions, fears, or worries. Gaunt's customers are all suffering from isolation and guilt. Such feelings are intensified by their obsessive attachment to inanimate objects that they believe can solve their problems. That is how the evil entity starts feeding on their greed and desires, first and, fears and insecurity, after. This is similar to how Pennywise derived its power by feeding on characters' fears and desires, as discussed in the previous chapter. Children in *It* were consumed and adults had an unwritten agreement with the devil to close their eyes to the murders. People in Derry were more prosperous and successful than the average American citizens of their time as a result of the compromise. Castle Rock inhabitants of *Needful Things* make a similar deal with the devil and sell their souls in hope for satisfaction and security. Things they buy from Gaunt are supposed to serve as tokens of the happy life they all aspire to but, as we will discuss, disappointment is also added to the malevolence that accompanied the objects.

Needful Things, the shop, looks like a sanctuary to the townspeople, somewhere they can find their dreams come true. However, the real image of the shop is what Alan sees in his nightmares: he sees a "mammoth store," called Endsville, with everything one can think of on its shelves. The voice in his sleep calls those things "fool's stuffing" (*Needful Things* 198). Such a store is normally thought to be a haven for consumers, but to Alan it looks like a hellish place in which whatever he touches turns into a remnant of his dead son's burnt body (199). He tries to flee but is stopped by an invisible hand. In another analogy given by the narrator, Hugh Priest is described having a nightmare of watching a game show called *Sale of the Century*. The contestants are bleeding from

their ears and eyes, but they are all happy with the stuff they are accumulating (247). People in Castle Rock go into business with the devil to find solace in an object they believe gives them comfort and relieves all their pains and anguish, but the stuff turns out to be illusory.

Most of Gaunt's customers realize that they are possessed by shadows. Things they exchange their souls with are like *comfort objects* to them that they need in the absence of the joy, security, success, and mental peace they are missing in their lives. Nonetheless, the most these fake objects can offer them is illusions and hallucinations. Every person who had a transaction with Gaunt starts hearing voices and seeing things (*Needful Things* 247). Paranoia is one symptom that all Leland's customers experience after they take their newly-acquired collectibles home to cherish. The desires Gaunt plants in their minds or the already-existing ones he nourishes are like "poison," destroying their lives in silence (529). There is something "alive" in the objects they have acquired that is eating them. That thing is the reptile of desire, shame or fear that abides in their obsessive minds. The reality they have created with the objects around them is, in fact, an illusory image of what they believe is real. In the shadow play of *Needful Things*, what adds a greater significance to the intensity of the already pathological relationship between man and objects is the juxtaposition of authentic and fake. Nothing is really what it is claimed to be in *Needful Things*.

## Con Men and Counterfeits

King's novels and short stories have frequently been discussed for their strong sense of uncanniness and how the ordinary or normal is subtly elevated to a

supernatural level. The undecidability that creates the momentum in the uncanny effect can be seen in three different areas in *Needful Things*: the selection of objects which are supposed to be out of the ordinary but are later discredited, the simple shop owner who is unmasked as a con-man and finally turns out to be an ageless evil entity, and the ordinary town dwellers who are proved to be hiding their ugly souls behind their normal-looking faces. All the action and tension in the narrative is built in the transitions between the two states of authentic and fake in their various manifestations in the novel.

What does Gaunt really sell? He tells Ace that “perhaps all the really special things I sell aren’t what they appear to be. Perhaps they are actually gray things with only one remarkable property—the ability to take the shapes of those things which haunt the dreams of men and women. [...] Perhaps they are dreams themselves” (*Needful Things* 370). All the objects Gaunt has sold the Castle Rock inhabitants turn out to be fakes. Apparently, they have never existed in the first place and have been the products of the buyers’ fascinations and imaginations. Norris realizes the charming Bazun rod he bought from Needful Things is only a piece of dirty bamboo, and he tries to commit suicide because of the disillusionment. He wants to believe it has been replaced by someone who is holding a grudge against him, but he knows well deep inside that there has never been a rod; it has all been an illusion (667). Similarly, when Buster runs from the police to go back to his Winning Ticket game, “the horse-player’s Ouija Board” (215), and have some joy, he finds it ruined and dismantled. He first thinks that *They* have ruined his possessions after ruining his reputation, but then suspects

that the thing had been in that hopeless condition from the very beginning and he had not wanted to see it. He had imagined everything all that time (609).

Leland Gaunt persuades the customers to buy fake and fabricated objects advertised as rare, unique and authentic. By making fake objects that look real enough to the audience and then inventing narratives around them, Leland Gaunt convinces the consumers that they were real and exactly what they needed. He is actually selling them narratives. The art of the shopkeeper in *Needful Things* is figuring out what everybody's desires and fantasies are and then satisfying them by offering solutions in the form of material objects. But are things, especially collectible ones that are mostly stripped off of their original function, different from the stories woven around them? Gaunt, the great story-teller, knows perfectly well that authenticity does not matter as long as his business pitches sell.

In his first visit to *Needful Things*, Brian is introduced to a splinter of petrified wood supposedly from Noah's Ark. Gaunt tries to give it a sense of authenticity by emphasizing its antiquity and rich history. He tries to be persuasive by emphasizing the fact that authentication of that item was nearly impossible but he has a certificate from M.I.T. that carbon-dated the splinter to two thousand years ago (*Needful Things* 30). Obviously, he calls the other similar items on the market fake: "There must be four thousand people in the world today trying to sell pieces of wood which they claim to be from Noah's Ark—and probably four *hundred* thousand trying to peddle pieces of the One True Cross" (29). A look at websites offering such collectible items like eBay shows that Gaunt has a point there.

According to James Clifford in his *Predicament of Culture*, “In the West ... collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity” (218). With mass production of consumer products, Blom argues, the “hunger for the real, the unique and the rare” (167) has become stronger because authenticity is valued even more. However, mass produced collectibles and memorabilia made it possible for almost everybody to have a sort of collection of their own. Mass production paved the way for democratization of collecting. The new condition freed the hobby of collecting from the tyranny of mostly wealthy and powerful collectors who were the only ones to have the means to acquire rare, antique and authentic collectibles of a different nature. Instead of the few authenticated originals, now collectors are offered a myriad of smaller narratives built around mass produced collectible items. In Polly’s visit to Gaunt’s shop in her dream near the end of the story, all the rare and precious items are gone and replaced by either ordinary mass produced ones or in tattered shape. In the absence of the glamorizing descriptions of Gaunt, she sees stuff on the shelves and in cases which “were a catalogue of the timeless, the tasteless, and the useless” (*Needful Things* 670).

Alan notices that Gaunt’s customers go inside the shop individually; it is very rare that they go in groups. He thinks he knows why: “wasn’t that how con-men worked? They split you off from the herd, got you on your own, made you comfortable” and then offered their pitches (*Needful Things* 469). Rosenthal and Schäfer in their *Fake Identity?: The Impostor Narrative in North American Culture* argue that North America has a rich history of imposters and identity fraud because of its special condition as “a cultural contact zone and immigrant society” (16). The question of identity was even a

more important issue when King was born. In the fifties and sixties, “individuality was threatened by capitalism’s promise of happiness through consumption” (Mueller 193). The dark image that King provides of a small-town America, where every individual is in pursuit of happiness and a new identity through consumption and acquisition of certain commodities, even if it costs their humanity and mental peace, is what he experienced as a young man. The Castle Rock people try to build a new personality or mend their broken one by adding certain objects to their collections or just adding a desired object to their properties even if it is not really needed. Accumulation of objects is like putting pieces of a puzzle together to build their identities and personalities. What Mary Balkun suggests about “the commoditization of the self” in *The American Counterfeit* applies to the customers looking for new selves in pawnshops or similar places: “The construction of a new self (or the refusal to accept the self imposed by society) is akin to the creation of an object, with all that term implies (the self can now be sold, traded, owned, copied, and even collected)” (12).

Alan is right that Gaunt is not the innocent businessman he claims to be. The first impression customers have as they enter Needful Things is that they know the shopkeeper from somewhere. This can be due to the suggestive abilities of Gaunt himself or the fact that he stands for human vices everybody is living with every day. Deception here is not seen only in the way Gaunt persuades customers in Needful Things. Self-deception has also a strong resonance in this novel, where characters develop fetishistic relations with objects to the point that a picture, a pair of sunglasses or any other object becomes so suggestive to them that it provides them with gratification and even sexual satisfaction. In collecting terms, fetishism is when

individuals, instead of going after their desires and fulfilling them, “attend perversely [...] to something else, the fetish, which thereby functions as an impediment, a delaying mechanism, with respect to the attainment of their desire” (Krips 32).

The Castle Rock people are not more genuine than the objects sold in *Needful Things* either. Gaunt’s customers are all fabricated personalities easily manipulated. The faces they are wearing around are obviously not their true faces. Their real faces are seen when they bargain for their desired objects and discuss the price they are willing to sell their souls for and go into a deal with the devil. Gaunt, the con-man, knows the intricacies of their fake identities and successfully goes below the surface with the narratives he builds around fake objects of desire. His business is cloning selfish zombie-like creatures that would do anything to satisfy their fetishistic desires.

Alan figures out the real nature of Gaunt’s business when he doubts the authenticity of the letter about Polly’s dark past and the footage that putatively shows his own family’s car accident. Gaunt is totally aware of Alan’s desire to know what exactly happened in the last moments of his wife and only son’s life. He knows Alan cannot resist the temptation to watch the fabricated video. Alan is initially deceived, but he changes his mind when Polly talks sense into him. He does not buy Gaunt’s stories because, as Sharon Russell observes, there are small inconsistencies and traces of forgery in them (132-3). A common element among the forged copies of antique objects or valuable collectibles is the subtle differences which either function as the signature of the arrogant forger to break the tyranny of the original and subvert the artistic power of the master, or have slipped in inadvertently because of the incompetence of the copyist to capture the soul of the original work and imitate the thing of beauty. In *Leland*

Gaunt's case where his knowledge of the deepest and most private feelings and emotions of his clients and almost everything about their past is his most noticeable characteristic, the first explanation is more probable. Out of vanity, he left touches of his darkness in the copies of reality and truth he offers the sheriff. This folly costs him a lot at the end and he has to leave Castle Rock without the valise full of souls he has collected (*Needful Things* 719).

What propels the narrative in *Needful Things* is not the distinction between truth and truthiness but the believability that is a product of the hesitation between authentic and fake. These moments of hesitation which are elongated in Gaunt's elaborate narratives and relatively shorter in Alan's magic shows in the final battle scene run throughout the phantasmagorical container of the novel. Providing a clear-cut distinction between authentic and fake may not be an easy task, but the dichotomy can be revealing in regards to King's fiction if it is expanded to an even more complicated duality of real and unreal.

## **Even More Real than Real**

There is a lot to say about the fake objects sold at Needful Things and the fetishistic relation that the townspeople experience with these objects. However, going to a higher level of explication, the discussion of the real/unreal dichotomy will clarify some of King's thematic and stylistic choices in his fiction. The objects sold at Gaunt's shop get their authenticity from the narratives behind them, from the images created by Gaunt in the buyers' imaginations. His narratives, mostly based on religious tales, celebrity cult and other cultural myths, give authenticity to fake objects. Like in



hyperreality—where appearances seem more real than the *real*—the double illusions transform fantasies to reality and affect the buyers' lives. In his account of sites of hyperreality to which Americans retreat from time to time for solace, Eco compares them to Superman's Fortress of Solitude (4). He explains that in such establishments, "for historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of a reincarnation. To speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real" (7).

Among all the townspeople, only Alan is not deceived and consumed by these false appearances. Alan and Gaunt are both magicians, but of different kinds. Leland Gaunt is the ageless demonic figure coming from a distant time and place, like Pennywise. He had begun his business hundreds of years ago "as a wandering peddler on the blind face of a distant land, [...] a peddler who usually came at the fall of darkness and was always gone the next morning, leaving bloodshed, horror, and unhappiness behind him" (*Needful Things* 583). Gaunt is a vampire feeding on his victims' power of imagination and believability. There is no child with the unrestricted imagination and unbound perception to fight this monster off like in most of King's novels. Alan, though, has kept the sense of wonder in him alive and is still in love with magic tricks and shadow plays. The weapons he takes with him to fight Gaunt are his son's magic toys. Instead of allowing himself to be fed with Gaunt's false images and illusions, Alan plays along and acts out his own fantasies: "the paper snake that became momentarily real," the hand shadows, and "the paper flowers that had turned into a bouquet of light and a reservoir of power" (727).

Other Needful Things customers, on the other hand, are willing enough to buy the fabricated presentations. It is as if they are wearing glasses like the Elvis sunglasses with which Cora Rusk experiences sexual fantasies. As soon as they step into Gaunt's shop, they see things which are not real and do not even exist. Most of his customers are collectors looking for special items to complete their collections, but even those who are not considered as collectors have similar experiences when they enter Needful Things. Cyndi Rose has no intention of buying the Lalique vase but starts seeing it differently and as a good bargain: "Now she looked at it more closely and saw that it really *was* a nice piece of work, one which would look right at home in her living room" (53). Ordinary objects adorned with the aura of originality invented around them invite every onlooker to participate in the collecting game.

The new trend of collecting mass produced objects and the disappearance of the sovereignty of authenticity and antiquity in collecting society has a paradoxical nature which is common to the postmodern time. Although authenticity and originality are valued even more in this era, postmodernism sees no distinction "between 'high' or 'serious' art and mass popular art or kitsch" (Pearce, *Contemporary* 177). The fake and the pastiche have been produced for "those whom circumstances debarred from possession of originals" since the Renaissance (Hoesterey 3), but mass production of such items at its present scale is a relatively new phenomenon. Horror, like other types of popular literature and genre fiction, is similarly written mostly for those who love reading but are not competent or motivated enough to read works of high literature. What King has done in his writing career has significantly helped develop the wide recognition and the vitality this genre has had. Popular literature and best-sellers, as

opposed to high literature, obviously existed a long time before King started his career; however, he boosted popular literature to an unprecedented level. Harold Bloom, in the introduction to his 1998 collection of critical views on King, insists that “King will be remembered as a sociological phenomenon, an image of the death of the Literate Reader” (3). Bloom also believes that King has nothing original to say and is simply appropriating classics of the genre. He is not the only critic who thinks that King’s work is pastiche only and that his ideas are mere clichés expertly retooled to appear original.

Copy or original, the fact is that King’s fiction sells in millions mainly because it is accessible and believable. When Alan uses magic against Gaunt in *Needful Things*, it “works because the audience [both Gaunt and the readers] is tricked into believing” (Russell 138). As discussed in the previous chapter, this emphasis on believing and believability is one of the major attributes of King’s fiction and is highlighted by his regular use of the uncanny in his works. The great attention paid to details and the recurrent use of proper nouns or brand names to give the stories a sense of reality and familiarity distinguishes King from other contemporary popular authors. In early Gothic, there were two main categories of *rationaly explained* or *supernatural* sources of horror, but what King has done in his fiction and the innovation he has brought to modern horror is “rational supernaturalism” (Winter, *Stephen King* 21). An essential element of horror fiction, Winter explains, is “the clash between prosaic everyday life and a mysterious, irrational, and potentially supernatural universe” (18), and King has skillfully reflected that in his works. The line between real and unreal is so fragile in his fiction that readers are not even sure if the fictional world has been fabricated for

amusement purposes only or is actually the darker, less visited side of the reality they are inhabiting.

In her famous division of forms of fantasy, Kathryn Hume explains that a work of fiction can be related to reality in four different ways: illusion, vision, revision, and disillusion (55). King's horror is not purely escapist and does not create illusory worlds for readers to comfort them in a world totally disengaged from reality. Neither does it try to disillusion readers by replacing their realities with nothing. There are didactic messages in his moral voyages in the world of horror, but King often leaves the fates of the characters undecided at the end or does not go beyond suggestions and implicit clues as to what finally happens to them. The engagement with reality and how characters and events are so familiar and plausible even in the most outrageously irrational situations pushes King's horror fiction toward the literature of vision. Different images he creates of the world make one think that his fiction "invites us to experience a new sense of reality, a new interpretation that often seems more varied and intense than our own" (Hume 55).

George Beahm in his *Companion* observes that King's fictional reality "earns the power to subvert our sense of the real, by showing us a world we think we know, then revealing another view of it entirely" (4). The fictional world of Castle Rock is not so different from the one readers experience every day. What makes it fantastic is the darker side of reality which is revealed in Gaunt's bleak shop. The diversity of characters and life styles that meet at the pivotal Needful Things and share the obsessive relation with inanimate objects is an unveiled presentation of our reality. King's fictional world feels more real than reality because it covers a wider ground.

With his mastery in writing dialogue and weaving life events and mundane experiences together with great attention to details, King “creates the sense of a shared nightmare. It is no dream; it is a consensual or culturally produced virtual reality” (Badley 20).

One of the major questions dealt with in postmodern literary texts is the ontology of the world(s) depicted in the text and contemplating which one is *more real*. Considering the halo of mediated virtualities that surrounds us and the alternative worlds that all claim to be genuine and true, it is impossible to decide which ones are more real and how this decision matters at all. The ambiguity between uncanny and marvelous that Todorov talks about in his discussion of the fantastic has been criticized for its ephemerality, narrowness, and exclusiveness (Huber 57). However, the moment of hesitation that he identifies between the supernatural and the extraordinary with a rational explanation (as discussed in the previous chapter) can be useful here too. With various life stories of ordinary people with ordinary fears, anxieties, wants and desires, *Needful Things* is perfectly tangible and believable for the readers even though the antagonist of the novel is an evil entity right out of fairy tales.

What critics write about King’s cinematic style of writing with his attention to details and elaborated descriptions reminds us of what Eco says about Ripley’s museums:

The authenticity the Ripley’s Museums advertise is not historical, but visual. Everything looks real, and therefore it is real; in any case the fact that it seems real is real, and the thing is real even if, like Alice in Wonderland, it never existed.

(“Travels in Hyperreality” 16)

Eco emphasizes the significance of Ripley's in America because America with its hodgepodge of ethnicities and fake cities like Las Vegas has one thing in common with Ripley's: both of them are "the masterpiece of bricolage, haunted by *horror vacui*" (23). It is not strange, then, that Stephen King, who has been brought up in such a culture and has been the product of the cultural industry of movie theaters and cheap paperbacks, produces such novels packed with multiple references to popular culture and brand names, and heterogeneous character types. "Once the 'total fake' is admitted, in order to be enjoyed it must seem totally real," Eco believes (43). This applies well to the whole amusement industry, and horror fiction of which King is one of the most renowned practitioners.

The real, in Baudrillard's account of simulation, is "produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks" (*Simulacra and Simulation 2*). In King's representation of reality, the building blocks are words and images. Baudrillard emphasizes that "simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (3). This is the perfect ground for King's tales of the fantastic with their true-to-life representations of human hopes and despairs. Baudrillard's analogy of Disneyland as a microcosm for *real America* in his attempt to explain hyperreality applies well here in two ways: like Baudrillard's Disneyland, the horror genre is "a space of the regeneration of the imaginary" or what he calls a "waste-treatment plant" (13). Reading King's fiction with the vast array of monsters and freaks as well as the references to fairy tales is like touring Disneyland; "the dreams, the phantasms, the historical, fairylike, legendary imaginary of children and adults is a

waste product” that must be recycled (Baudrillard 13). From another point of view, King’s horror fiction, and specifically *Needful Things*, is similar to Disneyland being an objectified profile of Americans, “down to the morphology of individuals and of the crowd” (12). Following our discussion of cabinets of curiosities from the previous chapter, his books are like displays giving a miniaturized model of the real world. The aberrant behavior and anomalies magnified in his horror fiction look familiar to the audience because they are derived from reality and are not other-worldly entirely. What is represented in King’s horror fiction is only the darker and less visited sides of reality.

Explicating hyperreality, Eco argues that re-presentations of reality exhibited in places such as wax museums look so authentic that “the ‘completely real’ becomes identified with the ‘completely fake’. Absolute unreality is offered as real presence” (7). Reality is faked and to make it look more authentic and real, lots of attention is paid to details to make the absolute fake even more real. In his travels in hyperreality, Eco looks at some “instances where the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake” (8). Truth is revealed when reality and unreality are not distinguishable anymore, and total believability is possible only when “falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of ‘fullness’, of *horror vacui*” (8). King’s cluttered account of the unspeakable reality, of unbridled desires, and of obsessive attachment to things in *Needful Things* is fabricated as “a mimetic representation on a vastly smaller scale” (Hall 106). Similar to *useless* objects hyped by extravagant false narratives but revealing the buyer’s true realities, King’s novel uses games and illusions to show readers the darker side of their being.

## King the Hoarder – A Cluttered Novel

King's novels (at least those published after he had proved himself as a bestselling author) are not edited except by the author himself and are all printed in thick volumes. Even his fans "have confessed that they too find King's books verbose" (Beahm, *Companion* 31). Michael Morrison states that "excess" is King's trademark in style (qtd. in Badley 38), and there are critics who call King "a helpless victim of logorrhea" (Reino 12). *Needful Things* was marketed as "The Last Castle Rock Story," and it seems that King has insisted on including every single person living in the fictional town in this final visit. They all shop at Gaunt's and start playing "innocent" pranks on each other to the point where the entire town is in chaos. King's insistence on bringing all characters from the fictional town of Castle Rock into *Needful Things* rather than building a handful of stronger characters, along with providing vivid descriptions and using signposts from our daily landscape, has enabled him to make his characters as believable as possible. The random assortment of men and women of different ages and every walk of life also supports the universality of the issue being addressed in the novel.

King's accumulation of people's life stories forms some kind of meaningful whole at the end, but the hodgepodge format has been blamed for weakening the structure. It has been suggested that the repetitive nature of these snippets gives permission to the readers to skip the pages with no worries of missing anything important from the narrative. However, the fact is that the obsessive attention to details that King usually invests in his fiction is further intensified by the fragmentary form of *Needful Things*. In his review of the novel, Grady Hendrix argues that "This is the book where King cleaned



out his basement, threw all his old tricks into the incinerator, and burned them up.” This is true in some sense, but it is better to call the novel an example of *hoarding* in fiction writing rather than an *uncluttering* exercise. The pieces of lives that King puts together here are not like the interlocking and tessellating pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; they are rather heaps of “demographic signs” (Badley 27) which the reader has to follow the *goat paths* to pass through. In studies on hoarding, clutter is called “the wild dimension of the object” (Attfield 150). It is an oversimplification to call King’s practice here an uncluttering treatment in order to get rid of the unwanted objects to provide some breathing space. The (dis)order in the haphazard accumulation of people and their desired objects in *Needful Things* seems to have another function.

Collecting is different from accumulating random objects for no specific reason. The goal of collecting is certainly to build a collection in its perfect definition; it is a constructive activity. Although hoarding is usually discussed as an extreme form of collecting, it has generally been distinguished from proper collecting in the sense that it follows no order and does not build a homogenous collection. Making a distinction between collecting and hoarding, Sara Knox states that “the collector stands for order and the particular, while the hoarder stands for chaos and the arbitrary” (287). King’s *It*, as discussed before, is a collection of the extra-ordinary and is about the order of things in the universe. King the hoarder in *Needful Things* is not much occupied with order in that sense, but deals with chaos and multiplicity. Non-linear narrative is mixed with fragmentary stories of different characters. The repetitious account of their transactions with Mr. Gaunt and their subsequent interactions with their objects of desire create meaning as a result of the order in disorder. These smaller narratives accumulate and

build up towards the climax, but the climax is the total destruction of town and the loss of those lives. The characters are developed only to be destroyed at the denouement.

One can never say that if *Needful Things* had a more limited number of characters and was organized and structured differently it would be a better read or not. However, this long reflective excerpt from “The Object is Always Magic: Narrative as Collection” written by Gregory Howard in the online magazine, *The Collagist*, might be thought-provoking here:

When I was little I tried to collect baseball cards but I couldn't bring myself to care. I tried stamps and coins and little spoons with state names on them but I didn't care about them either. I thought I should collect something, but I didn't know what to collect or why. Until I started writing I was very organized. My rooms were always clean and all of my stuff was meticulously placed. Everything had a proper place. Once I started writing, once I began to think of myself as a writer and to write my first short stories, my room got messier and messier. I kept bringing in junk—scrap metal, an old window, broken toys, a rusty saw—and I kept putting the things I already had in "the wrong place," leaving them where they weren't supposed to be. In Chapter 33 of *Life: A User's Manual* Georges Perec presents two cellars. The Altamounts' cellar is described as neat, tidy, and clean. What follows this description is a long list of objects. Just a list. In contrast the next cellar, the Gratiolets' cellar, is described as basically a rubbish heap. Here, instead of a list, Perec contextualizes each object. We find out that old typewriter was used by Francois Gratiolet to create invoices when the factory

they owned decided to modernize, that an old overcoat was worn by Olivier Gratiolet after he was taken prisoner in 1940 and kept until he was released in 1942. We are able to peruse a box of curling photographs and are told all about the different family members appearing in each photo. Almost every object in that dingy and disorganized space comes with a story. The lesson is this: stories come from mess and unexpected juxtaposition.

Unlike *It*, in which multiple faces of fear are molded and framed one after the other to form a neat catalogue or a spotlighted wax museum of horror icons only to end with the compromised and pathetic spider-like creature as the ultimate representation of the monster, *Needful Things* opens up narrative possibilities and expands the horizons of imagination by its messy structure of bringing random subjects and objects (where there is no real distinction between them) into the murky atmosphere and building up narratives around them. Non-linearity and fragmentation in *Needful Things* have resemblances to goat paths in a hoarder's den that guide the traveler among heaps of life histories. The narrative is made up of "heaps of fragments" (in Fredric Jameson's terms in his *Postmodernism*). Similar to hoarding cases, total destruction comes closer to Castle Rock and its inhabitants as the accumulation of things progresses. The narrator is a collector but indulges in junk materials and dark obsessions to build up a monstrous effigy of desire only to be burned and destroyed at the end. King's familiar logorrhea and *horror vacui* style might be disapproved of and criticized by both critics and readers, but they are appropriate for a story about the excessive forms of collecting.

King the hoarder could not have selected a few objects and characters only to tell his story; this heap of dysfunctional things (objects and subjects) *is* the story.

## Total Fragmentation

In *It*, the narrative is constantly moving back and forth between the two time frames and as the story goes on and approaches the climax, the beat gets faster and the segments get shorter. In *Needful Things*, the segments are structured by character portraits. The narrator gathers bits and pieces of every character's vices (and virtues, if any) and builds up the structure. Almost all of the characters are introduced by their needs and desires and are summarized in the objects they swap their selves with and sell their souls for. The snippets of different people's lives in the novel are in no special order and connected through individuals' bizarre relationship with objects and their ruthlessness towards others when it comes to their needs. Gaunt is able to push the town and its dwellers to the edge because "he knows how to take small human defects and connect them to create mass destruction" (Russell 137). He regards himself as "an electrician of the human soul" and "cross-wires" his victims to possess their souls (*Needful Things* 339).

Reading these intertwined narratives of different people's obsessions over objects is like looking at a holographic representation. The hologram image is a relatively new means of creating illusions in contemporary popular culture. King has used the hologram technology in *The Tommyknockers* where people from the haunted town create a holographic image of the town hall tower which had been destroyed in an explosion to avoid suspicion and police interference. They take a picture of an old photo

of the exploded clock-tower to produce an illusion of the tower to fool the outsiders into believing that the explosion was nothing serious and to cover the degree of harm; they intended “to project a gigantic magic-lantern slide in the sky” (*The Tommyknockers* 354). The illusion is so real that it replaces reality with no difficulties.

In an interesting study of holograms in popular culture, Sean Johnston writes about “the first published short story to use a hologram as a plot device,” William Gibson’s ‘Fragments of a hologram rose’” (460). *Needful Things* is definitely not about holograms but the structure and the arrangement of the snippets make this statement from Johnston on Gibson’s story relevant: “... each person represents the fragments of another through the limitations of their relationship, just as the fragments of the hologram show the whole image from a different angle” (460). In King’s novel, the common characteristic between different characters is their excessive and obsessive collecting habit and their transaction with the devil. The tricks they play on the others make the connections and, like an image, pieces come together to build the ultimate scene of damnation and destruction.

Even in a collection of ordinary objects like dolls, match boxes, etc., collected items produce an aura of fascination and wonder as a result of being accompanied by other objects of similar nature. In *Needful Things*, individuals are summarized in objects they desire and these reified subjects are showcased in each other’s proximity. Since every transaction with Leland Gaunt comes with an evil deed, the whole town is like a collection of vices. Little acts of evil may be unnoticed, but when they come together and are woven into a narrative involving the whole population of a town served in a single dish of a horror novel they present aspects of human nature more effectively.

According to collecting studies, possessing different objects can reveal some personality traits of the owner in two modes: it differentiates the subject from the others by emphasizing some unique qualities, and at the same time, integrates the self with other individuals who happen to have the same taste and desire and possess a similar object (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 38). The expressive quality of objects and the fact that nowadays our possessions are often mass produced consumer objects make this differentiation and integration processes complicated. Since objects are like extensions of their owners, overlaps may appear and the material appendices of people may get tangled. On the other hand, in the process of acquiring commodity products, objects are personified and gain an identity as a result of being owned. An object that was once one of many similar ones is singularized by the transaction and finds an identity in relation to the owner's identity and the other objects in the environment. The centripetal/centrifugal process of identity formation and individuation portrayed in the relations between the (falsely) individualized objects and the objectified individuals of the novel is what King's hologram is built upon.

In his shop, Leland Gaunt gives the false impression to his customers that the fake objects they are offered are unique and especially made for them. This fake identity based on false authenticity is summed up in the title of the novel; *Needful Things* both refers to the objects fetishized by the characters and the full-of-need creatures those characters turn out to be. The horror in *Needful Things* is the *thingification* (term borrowed from Aimé Césaire's "Discourse on Colonialism" but in a narrower sense and a different context) of subjects and social relations in the small town of Castle Rock. Gaunt's customers wrongly believe they have something unique and have gained some

personality by owning that thing, but the truth is they have degenerated into playthings of a *businessman*. The price they pay for their needed objects is playing evil tricks on people sometimes they hardly even know. They are unaware that they are not even individuals anymore, but faceless pawns of evil Gaunt.

It is a contradictory quality of collecting that all characters in *Needful Things* become more private and secretive when they obtain their object of desire. Among collectors, there is always the dilemma of having a collection to cherish privately, and at the same time, being tempted to go public with their collections to attract others' admiration and acknowledgment. Selfishness and their load of fears and anxieties do not let the characters in *Needful Things* be open about their fantasies and memories. Everybody goes into a cocoon of possessiveness. The fragmentation of society follows the fragmentation of subjects' personality. "Pathology of privacy" (the term used by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton) turns individuals into themselves and the meaning of community is lost in the compartmentalized environment with selfish members. Expanding on the differentiating quality of owning objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain that the word "diabolic" refers to everything that "throws apart" and "separates," and evil is "what separates the self of a person into conflicting forces, what divides one person from others, what sets us people against the cosmos" (40). Things go wrong in *Needful Things* as soon as the possessiveness of the characters separates them from their selves and the others. Mental breakdown of the individuals is followed by social disintegration and this is all due to their total reification and obsession with things.

Identity formation is no doubt one of the key terms in different forms of collecting, whether bizarre or banal. The fragmentation resulting from too much engagement with objects is one of the pathological symptoms in excessive forms of collecting. What was previously observed in the author's tendency to hoard words, images, and small narratives in *Needful Things* is intensified by the fragmented selves of the characters obsessed with objects. The form King has chosen for this novel is also in complete agreement with the mental state of the characters and the chaotic milieu in which they live.

## Conclusion

In the novel's epilogue, "You've Been Here Before," which is similar to the prologue, indicating a circular and repeating event or a recurrent pattern in almost everyone's life, the narrator mentions that the story is about the "aggravations" resulting from soulless business-like transactions that have replaced human interactions (*Needful Things* 3). It is the story of the obsessions and extremities that all of us might have, but in different forms. In response to those who expected *Needful Things* to be a horror novel and treated it as such, King asserts it is "a black comedy about greed and obsession" (qtd. in Wood, *Literary Companion* 129). He mentions in his interview with *Paris Review* that he had actually written a satire on contemporary American economics where "people will buy anything and sell anything, even their souls." The novel has instances of King's usual fantasies, but it is definitely not a conventional horror fiction. Nevertheless, the dark truth about human nature and the characters' obsessive disorders (and their degree of gullibility) that brings destruction



to themselves and all the other members of the community make the readers shudder with horror.

*Needful Things* is about the dehumanization of Castle Rock's citizens. John Sears in his valuable reassessment of King's gothic discusses how Leland Gaunt "intrude[s] destructively from indeterminately external non-places (geographically and historically distant, exotic, alien) into the space and lives of small-town America" (159). There is, however, a thin line between the external and internal evil forces. The social isolation of the characters and their unhealthy attachment to inanimate objects is as evil as the dark intentions of Leland Gaunt. This is actually one of the major characteristics of King's horror fiction: the demon is as close as ourselves to us. Gaunt, the master illusionist, leaves little room for resistance against his deceptive tales, but the role of self-deception cannot be ignored in the horrible fate awaiting the Castle Rock people.

There is a resemblance in the openings of *Needful Things* and *Salem's Lot*: in both books, a shop opens in a small town and, not surprisingly, both shops sell collectibles and antique items. Their merchandise is not useful items but things which normally feed the customers' desire for expanding their collections. Writing about collecting culture is the perfect ground to examine the blurry boundary between need and desire. Search for identity through collecting stuff and the process of reification in consumer culture are two different dynamics, but because *Needful Things* is based on the excessive forms of collecting (like fetishism) it seems valid to discuss thingification in this context. *Needful Things* is a dream shop where customers find the chance to "express themselves as subjects through desire" by the act of shopping (Hetherington 150). Everybody's desires are fulfilled here at what the customers wrongly believe is a

discounted price. This dingy place is where everyone is able to see their true character in an object of desire. The curiosity shop is, in fact, a little shop of horrors. Customers take the things they always wanted and leave their souls behind.

Leland Gaunt is a collector of souls; they are to him “what trophies [are] to the hunter” (*Needful Things* 340). Like other collectibles, his collected souls have no practical value and he does this for amusement only. The pleasure is in the act of collecting. The businessman/collector is finally defeated and has to leave without the valise full of souls (719), but the harm had already been done. Gaunt was after the whole town with all the residents and he got them all easily. The townspeople were like “the mall-zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*” as Alan observes (314). “Pride of possession” is what Gaunt has made “the cornerstone of [his] career” and it has been successful (460). His customers are in pursuit of illusions and they are sold some. Gaunt, the con-man, weaves tales and disguises his fake merchandise with stories of authenticity, antiquities, and value. The townspeople are so possessed by their fantasies that the mental images replace reality, and delusions follow.

Gaunt’s business of selling narratives and exploiting his customers’ fears and desires is significant in its similarities to what King does as a fantasy writer. Regardless of their purposes, both Gaunt and King unveil darker dimensions of reality and show their audiences their true selves. Creating fantastic things out of ordinary objects and arranging a freak show as large as a microcosmic town are two other similarities between their businesses. Gaunt is an unknown evil entity from distant times and places, but is presented as an ordinary merchant. The *rational supernaturalism* and other techniques that King uses to boost the believability of his stories help in winning

the hearts of millions of readers and making that moment of hesitation between real and more real a true revelation.

King's wordiness, his obsession with details, and the fragmentary structure of most of his novels have always been the subject of negative commentaries; however, they are highly effective and proper in the case of *Needful Things*, a non-conventional horror novel of the pathological forms of human-thing relationship. King the hoarder could have never felt more at home than among this heap of junk and fragmented people.

## Chapter 3: Re-Membering and Collecting – *Duma Key*

### Introduction

The narrative nature of collecting, in its form as a systematic accumulation of *things* and the endless narrative possibilities that the tale(s) associated with every piece in a collection—individually and in relation to the other pieces—provides the collector/narrator, is the main idea in our reading of Stephen King's *Duma Key* (2008). This less well-known work of the master of horror features the evil creature, Perse, but it is also a commentary on the process of artistic creation and the mutual relationship between the artist/creator and the outside world. King focuses on the magic of art and its therapeutic functions in the form of re-membering and quilting the self in this novel. What makes this work distinct from most of other King's novels is the importance of memory (rather than the significance of imagination) and the pivotal role that a painter plays as the selected form of artistic creator (instead of his usual writer characters). This chapter is going to examine *rememoration* or recollection in the context of collecting as well as the concepts of time and space in the narrative of collections in *Duma Key*. The time/space relations will be discussed both in relation to the setting of the novel and the collection of things inside the narrative unity of the paintings. There

will also be a glimpse into King's landscape of horror in general based on how artists toy with reality and unreality in this novel.

In *Duma Key*, after a nearly fatal accident which cost him his arm, his job, and his wife, Edgar Freemantle is living only an imitation of life, which everybody else is trying to convince him is as good as the real one (139). He is advised by his psychologist to move to some distant place both to forget the traumatic incidents and to remember his faded pre-accident memories and forgotten language due to possible brain injuries. He is also advised to take up sketching, something he used to do when he was a child, to help him heal. He needs to do that because according to his psychologist, Dr. Kamen, he needs "hedges against the night" to protect his mental health (*Duma key* 20-21). He moves to Duma Key, a small island which he later finds out gives "broken people" like Edgar special powers (366). The island is "a powerful place for ... certain kinds of people. It magnifies certain kinds of people" (207-8). This is what Jerome Wireman, a former lawyer who has survived a suicide attempt and becomes Edgar's best friend on the island, thinks of Duma Key. Wireman knows it because he has found the ability to read minds since he moved to the island.

Edgar unknowingly rents a villa previously inhabited by well-known painters such as Salvador Dali and Keith Haring. The Big Pink villa has hosted many painters and artists because Edgar's elderly landlady and neighbor, Elizabeth Eastlake, "turned [it] into an artist's retreat" (*Duma Key* 422). According to local legends, she was a child prodigy herself and showed great talent in drawing when she was very young. Edgar takes on painting only as a hobby and a mental work out. His paintings not only help him recover very quickly, but also turn out to be more than good and are offered a show

by a local but reputable art gallery. The healing starts with remembering; however, it turns out that the paintings have the magic power of prefiguring future events and causing changes in reality. Edgar realizes that he has not been the only one with such a gift and that Elizabeth had similar experiences when she was drawing. Elizabeth is not drawing anymore, but she keeps a collection of small china figures on a table: “It was crowded with model buildings and china figurines: men, women, children, barnyard animals, zoo animals, creatures of mythical renown” (178). She recreates life with her collectible figurines now that she does not draw for reasons only disclosed later in the novel.

A demonic entity is invited into his life during Edgar’s process of recalling past memories, and it becomes clear that Elizabeth had the same experience and that was why she stopped drawing. Perse, the vampire-like creature who had caused little Elizabeth a lot of troubles and had been finally imprisoned by her, finds a new medium and returns to Duma Key on a ghost ship through Edgar’s paintings. It floats on his ocean of creativity and brings misery and death to those who own one of Edgar’s ominous paintings. In his attempts to fight Perse, Edgar eventually realizes that the only way he can stand against that evil force is to re-member the whole history between little Elizabeth and Perse and use his creative forces to fix the distorted reality. The solution is finally found in fragments of childhood memories piled in a red picnic basket full of little Elizabeth’s—then known as Libbit—drawings left forsaken in her now-abandoned mansion’s attic. Putting the drawings in order is like trekking a memory lane that shows Edgar what happened between Libbit and Perse and how he can put things in order again. Edgar is informed of the whereabouts of the basket much earlier in the

novel, but he *forgets* about it. Elizabeth knows it is Perse's weapon to make one forget certain things and to remember others instead (*Duma Key* 501).

Edgar is supposed to “drown [Perse] back to sleep” as he learns from Libbit's memories (546). He is determined to face the danger and finish the job mostly to avenge the murder of his younger daughter, Ilse, who was the only person from his past life who stayed close to him until she became a victim of Perse's curse. She was invited to the island only to visit his exhibition at the art gallery and now she was gone. Ilse comes back from the world of the dead and appears to Edgar as an apparition of a sand girl to persuade her father to quit fighting and join her on the ghost ship, where “I can be the way you remember me. Or ... you don't have to remember anything” (*Duma Key* 757). It is not easy for Edgar to resist the temptation of the peace he is offered in oblivion, but he finally defeats Perse and takes revenge for his own and Libbit's lost loved ones.

*Duma Key* is about memories and recalling; for both Edgar and Elizabeth “drawing was how [they] remembered how to remember” (685). It is generally believed that we are the total sum of our experiences and how we recollect them. The fact that Edgar remembers by painting a jumble of memory objects, or that the key to the mystery of Perse is in a basket full of Elizabeth's childhood stuff, reminds us that we all “use the past as an arena for self-identification and recall moments from childhood through the collection and preservation of physical objects” (Geraghty 6). More generally, every object in our living environment has a share in the formation of our identity; however, things in a collection and their arrangement represent the identity and personality traits of the collector with more clarity because of the purposefulness of

the act of collecting and the context the objects are introduced to. According to Potvin and Myzelev in their introduction to *Material Cultures*, “the common denominator amongst these objects is the collecting *subject*, whose identity then binds these objects together in a sort of visual and material biography” (2). Any collecting practice is an act of self-definition, and any collection is a narrative of the self.

Apart from its self-defining characteristics, collecting is an act of creation and provides collectors access to a fantasy world created by themselves. The re-production of the real can be seen as the purpose of different sorts of artistic creation in *Duma Key*: that is, the reality is, in a sense, re-created as a time-space that knows no boundaries between the ordinary real and the unreal. The two major characters of the novel, Edgar and Elizabeth, create alternate realities (or unmask darker sides of the reality that we know) in two different time periods and the clash between these multiple realities is what builds the story. The temporal and spatial characteristics of these realities in relation to the outside world and the serial nature of their artistic creations will be discussed in the context of collecting. Since surrealistic paintings and dream-like experiences have a major role in *Duma Key*, my discussion of changes in our perceptions of time and space will be complemented by ideas from the Surrealist movement.

Like most of King’s works, *Duma Key* is self-reflexive and bears references to his creative job. What Edgar and Elizabeth create in this novel and how they manipulate reality is basically similar to what King does in his horror fiction. Clive Barker believes that King’s key to success and one of the most common elements in his fiction is that “he describes the confrontation between the real and the fantastic elements so believably that the reader’s rational sensibilities are seldom, if ever, outraged” (61). He does not



build a parallel reality from scratch or build on top of what we believe as reality by introducing dark forces into it. In his horror fiction, King often reveals an entire new view of the reality we believe as familiar to us (Barker 62). Bosky in another chapter from *Kingdom of Fear*, refers to Peter Straub's remark that in good horror the evil and monsters do not just "come out of the blue, as something invented"; they are actually living with the characters and are already embracing them (260). The strong sense of the uncanny in King's works is because what we experience in King's fiction is both present and absent in our everyday reality.

This *absence-presence* oscillation and the subsequent feeling of *security-insecurity* are psychological roots of the two cultures of collecting and horror writing/reading, and are part of their pathologies. These two cultures both create situations to embody absences: forgotten memories, unfulfilled desires, returning specters, fallen-through-the-cracks pieces, and anything that has been metonymized by things. This emphasis on phantoms and absences gives the systems of meaning created in both these activities a *diabolic* nature. Similar to two previous chapters, the final sections of this chapter will go beyond the novel at hand and try to provide some brief comments on King's horror fiction in general. The distorted representations of the real world in the paintings in *Duma Key* are supposed to be amusing ways of escaping trauma, but they turn out to be the petrified kernel of reality. Mieke Bal in "Telling Objects" proposes a narrative perspective on collecting and quotes from Žižek's *Sublime Object of Ideology* that collected objects do "not offer us a point of escape from our reality but ... the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel" (109). It is too ambitious to discuss the nature of horror and its functions in a few pages,

but the way reality is avoided, questioned, and manipulated in King's *Duma Key* makes it inevitable to look at the matter from a wider perspective. In short, this chapter will focus on *telling objects* and the narrative aspects of collecting with some emphasis on the diabolic nature shared by collecting and horror writing/reading.

## Galleries of Mind

*Duma Key* is the story of *lost* individuals on an island who go on perilous quests to find their selves by regaining their memories, armed only with their imaginations and their creative powers. Drawing helped Elizabeth to remember words and past memories that she had lost in an accident when she was a child. However, after the intrusion of Perse, she had to stop drawing and forget about all the horrible things that ensued. She decided to be a patron of art, instead, and collect china figures and arrange them as a safe "exercise of imagination" and a risk-free replacement for drawing (*Duma Key* 560). Without her memories, she has been living in a semi-comatose state for a long time and is now used to spending most of her time rearranging her china figurines and building worlds of her own (159). Like a goddess, she creates life through arranging and rearranging things in her collection as well as patronizing other artists.

Elizabeth's new tenant, Edgar, is another broken person who has chosen painting for its healing effects. The blankness of a canvas resembles how Edgar feels about his past in his first attempts to re-member: "... white is the absence of memory, the color of can't remember" (*Duma Key* 560). Putting lines and colors together on the blank paper or canvas is how bits and pieces of memories resurface to both Libbit and Edgar who desperately try to mend themselves by remembering. What they did when

they started sketching was drawing themselves “back into the world” (564). They tried to collect their scattered pieces together and make themselves whole again. Artists, in this sense, are not much different from collectors and how they perceive objects in their collections. They are the ones to decide how to organize things, which one to add and which one to omit. Collecting, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a means of giving meaning to the self and creating an identity for the collector through an interactive relationship with the collected objects. In collecting culture, the objects portray the collector and collectors are defined by the items included in or excluded from the collections.

The images of Elizabeth’s drawings stacked in a basket or Edgar’s paintings exhibited in an art gallery provide King with a vast number of opportunities in this narrative of remembering. Framed representation of the past also played a significant role in *It* where the Losers look for traces of Pennywise in photo albums. Albums are the epitome of the concept of selective representation of the past and collages of pieces of history. The blank spaces in an album, like the distances between exhibit units in a museum, stand for the ellipses, what has been forgotten or just omitted. While paging through an album or visiting a museum, one has the feeling that past and present are intermingled into a timeless zone where one can relive memories. It is as if past and present are stapled together (*It* 515). To remember is “*stapling past to present so the strip of experience forms some half-assed kind of wheel*” (*It* 669). Edgar’s journey to remember (after being literally dismembered in the accident) takes him to the world of his splendid paintings, particularly the *Girl and Ship* series. The paintings storyboard his life with his daughter at some fragile moments of her life, such as when she was a little

girl and she broke her arm (*Duma Key* 485). Elizabeth is right after all when she sees his paintings for the first time and says: “Art is memory, Edgar” (492).

Things and memories are entangled in Edgar’s paintings. The *Girl and Ship* paintings, for instance, all show a ship with a pile of random objects on its deck: a mirror, a child’s rocking horse, a steamer trunk, a pile of shoes, a young girl’s bicycle (*Duma Key* 496). The objects are mostly memory objects, anchors that keep one floating safely in the ocean of memories. Elizabeth calls the objects “souvenirs” (496), the carriers of memories. Souvenirs, as Susan Pearce explains, “hang before the eyes of the imagination, continuously representing ourselves to ourselves, and telling the stories of our lives” (qtd. in Kavanagh 100). A similar way of seeing the relation between objects and memories is perhaps the ancient practice of *loci* with objects arranged in a spatial relation used as mnemonic devices. Two examples where King pictures memories as objects stored and compartmentalized in our minds are his *Dreamcatcher* (2001) and *Doctor Sleep* (2013). From this point of view, objects work as prompts to stimulate and facilitate one’s access to memories. Objects as anchors and reservoirs of memories have stories to tell but, as Balkun suggests, in a static way. Put together as parts of a collection or in an exhibition, they become part of a narrative flowing in time (Balkun 29).

In any act of collecting, there is a tendency (intentional or not) to storytelling, and every collection potentially consists of multiple narratives based on the number of objects and their arrangements. This sense of narrating through putting objects in a certain order is epitomized in museums, where the viewers receive the historical narrative by moving from one framed object to the next and by strolling through the

galleries. Objects are given an extra ability to tell stories by the collector or curator (by placing things in a certain order), or by the viewers (by connecting the dots selectively and in the order they desire): “A collection is an act of interpretation since countless arrangements of a given set of objects are possible, and each can result in a potentially different narrative” (Balkun 30-31). The temporal and spatial arrangement and order of objects in different types of collecting forms a narrative that is beyond their individual histories and the collector’s memories of their acquisition.

Edgar’s ex-wife correctly suggests what he is trying to do in his paintings: “putting different things together so people will look at them in new ways” (*Duma Key* 133). This is in essence the purpose behind any form of collecting. In museum studies, for instance, the word *exhibit* is preferred to *display* to define the arrangement of the artifacts in the special temporal and spatial context of a museum. An exhibition implies that “the purpose is primarily to present an object or message in a meaningful context” not simply putting some things “on view without reference to any interpretation or context” (Matthews 3). When put together, objects in a collection reach for each other and build a meaningful texture. Edgar’s paintings exhibited in the art gallery “looked oddly like stills culled from a strip of movie film. Each image was a little more in focus, but always essentially the same” (*Duma Key* 494). His paintings are telling a story, but from a certain point he is not the narrator anymore and is carried away by the tale. Paintings, which were first thought of as attempts to curb the memories and mental images, transform into a passage through which Perse returns to *Duma Key*. Perse, the evil force that feeds on lost memories like a vampire, leaks through the pores of Edgar’s mind and other-worldly visions and premonitions start haunting him.

Edgar is well aware that he is being deceived by malicious planted memories and is being pushed to complete the series of ominous paintings, but as if experiencing sleep paralysis, he needs to struggle to fully awaken himself. He is doomed to serially produce new paintings until Perse's story is complete and she is conjured up. He acts like a collector constantly striving to fill the gaps in his collection and finding the missing pieces while the idea of completing series is horrifying to him and resembles death. The macabre nature of Edgar's collection of paintings suggests a kind of oxymoronic "destructive construction," similar to the one discussed in the previous chapter. In a span of a few months, Edgar paints over thirty paintings "like a man working on an assembly line," as Mary Ire, the art critic, says (*Duma Key* 415). Paintings keep piling up and Elizabeth advises Edgar to sell as many of his paintings as he can: "*Do not let it accumulate. [...] Letting artistic work accumulate here is like letting too much electricity accumulate in a battery. If you do that, the battery may explode*" (230). She asks him to "send [the paintings] to the four winds" (461), hoping to stop Perse by breaking the series. Edgar knows that the *Girl and Ship* series is going to cost him his life, but he insists on completing it. He cannot help being consumed by the series. The caverns of the mind and the sea of memories are fathomless and the deeper he goes, the more he loses touch with reality.

## Time-Space Oddity

The fragmentary but spatially united narratives of individual objects bundled up in any collection have one common characteristic: the reduced or minimal setting. The condensation that characterizes collections convolutes the usual perceptions of time

and space and these two entities get tangled. For King, who is the master of small-town horror, the choice of an island as the setting for his *Duma Key* is nothing unusual and follows his usual metaphorical condensation of the world. He is fond of setting small tables for his horror feasts; the minimalistic village or town, a single family in a deserted place, and a tiny slice of an individual's life are common and familiar devices in King's fiction. Even in novels like *The Stand*, where he creates a full-fledged world of his own and tries to imitate grand examples like *Lord of the Rings*, he finally returns to his small scale depictions by replacing the armies of good and evil preparing for Armageddon for almost half of the novel with a handful of delegates from each side, and resolving the battle by a single blast of a bomb. Duma Key, the island after which the novel is named, provides the narrator with some advantages over King's usual small town for the setting.

Firstly, the nature of the villainous creature in the novel is defined by the spatial setting. In her *Cabinets of Wonder*, Christine Davenne mentions that the sea had a special significance in the Renaissance and most of the curiosities and hard-to-imagine creatures were believed to come from the sea: "while ancient and Christian omens appeared in the sky, Renaissance monsters tended to live in the sea" (142). Perse comes from the ocean since it stands for all monsters born of wild imagination. The depth, vastness and turmoil of the ocean sounds like the most appropriate origin for the extraordinary. Besides, Edgar finds out that Perse is fluid and lives in salt water. He realizes that the only way they can control Perse is having her contained and drowning her in a landlocked body of water. After a long period of wandering in oceans, Perse had reached the island through Libbit's imagination but had been contained and trapped in

the freshwater of a well by Libbit till she was summoned again by Edgar's imaginative power. Embodied as a china doll with a red cloak, Perse is finally contained again by Edgar and his friends and is drowned in a freshwater lake. Trapping Perse in a container and drowning her in the serenity of a well or lake can be taken as an attempt to contain wild imagination.

Secondly, the eponymous island finds an interesting dimension when one thinks of the water-land opposition in the novel. Paul Smethurst in his *Postmodern Chronotope* writes about the water-land relation in contemporary fiction and suggests that in the water-land chronotope, both water and land signify space and time: "[Water] is time when flowing and returning but space when lying across the landscape. ... [Land] is space when cultivated and built upon, but time when siltation (the interaction of water and land) shifts its matter, unmarking it and making it again in some other place" (161-162). This derangement of concepts of time and space summoned in the image of the island and the fluid Perse are paralleled with the special abilities that the island gives to some selected people. Duma Key is a timeless place that enables some to cross the boundaries of time and space. Through his painting, Edgar sees flashes of the past events and is able to have glimpses into the future; he can know things that he has no way of knowing. The lines and colors talk to him, and his paintings have the power to change the future. Elizabeth had similar experiences when she was a child and started drawing after her accident. They both started artistic creation to remember their past and help their memories return, but they found the ability to influence future events through their power to surpass time and space limits.



The practice of painting itself is both timed and timeless in the sense that the combination of lines and colors ends up in a moment that is neither past nor present. Edgar continues adding installments to the *Girl and Ship* series, with more details appearing in every new painting. Each painting is complete by itself but incomplete in relation to the other items in the series. The girl on the rowboat transforms from Reba, Edgar's anger-management doll, to Ilse, his daughter, and the name of the evil entity is revealed little by little as the ship of death moves further into the frame. His paintings seem to be bound by the still-life frames but are always accompanied by the before and after snippets of the narrative they offer, and follow a different time logic than the conventional one outside the story board. This gives Edgar the ability to time travel through creating serial paintings.

Similar to Edgar's paintings, Libbit's drawings were in series, and she had phases of consecutive drawings of the same topic with minute differences that gradually replaced reality with a world purely created out of her imagination (548). She started drawing when she could not recall the names of many things after her accident. She felt empowered when she, first, communicated her thoughts with her drawings, and then, created things that never existed before. It was only a childish game at first before she realized the horrifying power of her drawings to bend reality and manipulate its elements. The time-space relations on the island and in the reality forged by Libbit is like the temporal network in heterotopic places: present is only the connecting point for past and future fortified by "spatial separation" (Smethurst 110). The island and the paintings are similar in the sense that in both of them past, present and future are interconnected and contained in a single space.

What is special about the island is that it allows the drawings and paintings, which are the playground of the narrator and the artist characters of the novel (also standing for King the writer), to develop a texture inside and in-between them to make it possible to go beyond the time-space boundaries and manipulate reality. The italicized sections of the novel titled “How to Draw a Picture,” which explain how Libbit started drawing to overcome amnesia, are embedded throughout Edgar’s story of the same nature and function as sign posts. They are meant to work as “backstory” in the form of “meditations on the act of creating art” (Perry 135), but look cryptic at the beginning and make more sense as the narrative goes further. They need to be paired with Edgar’s present account of his physical and mental conflicts as well as the remedial role of painting in order to be meaningful. They are not flashbacks in the traditional sense; the past is inconspicuously present in every moment, like an undercurrent in an ocean.

The third way the setting is significant in *Duma Key* is the minor theme of treasure hunting in the characters’ journey to find their selves. After their traumatic accidents, Edgar and Elizabeth try to find their ways towards the forgotten language and memories locked away in the depths through drawing and painting. They have lost connection with both inner and outer worlds. They only intend to reconnect to the real world through shapes and colors, but they inadvertently affect the reality through their artistic endeavors. As Andrew Cooper mentions in *Gothic Realities*, “the artistic imagination often provides models that the real world later adopts” (3). They add certain things to reality or omit others from it during the process of translating the world into the closest equivalent to their forgotten language.

Despite being very young at the time, Libbit can feel the power her drawings exert on her surroundings and resists Perse's temptations to draw a storm that will swallow the island. However, she surrenders when she is told about the treasures. Her father is a skin diver, and Noveen, the doll animated by Perse, tells Libbit that "[t]here are secret things. Buried treasures a big storm will uncover" (*Duma Key* 266). Libbit shows her Daddy where the treasure is under the condition that she can keep the china dolls found under water. Libbit's drawings had opened a new dimension to reality and she always suspects that the treasure dolls were responsible for the misfortunes that shadow her life thereafter. Hoping for the healing powers of art, Edgar also dives into the ocean to hunt for the lost treasures and meanwhile the undercurrents try to swallow him and his dependants. These images of a small island and the turbulent ocean that is home to wrecks and treasures serve their purposes very well in King's tale of recollection and remembrance.

All these characteristics of the setting in *Duma Key* resemble the heterotopic nature of collections in which the hegemony of conventional time and space is non-present. Collecting is a time-bound activity but is embodied and exhibited in spatial terms. The temporal aspects of a collection (time of production of the items, or their acquisition) are often marred by its spatial arrangement, while the space itself is contorted in terms of distance and proportion to the outside world.

## **Dreamscape and Surrealist Paintings**

The collapsed sense of time and space in *Duma Key* is more significant when examined in accordance with the disfiguration of spatial dimensions as well as the

intermingling of past, present and future in surrealistic paintings. The narrator emphasizes the resemblance between Edgar's paintings and those of Salvador Dali. His therapist, Dr. Kamen, describes the painting of which Edgar has sent him a photo as being "like an undiscovered Dali" (*Duma Key* 78). Although everybody calls his paintings masterpieces, Edgar believes his paintings are nothing more than ordinary objects dressed up "with a little surrealism" (96). On his work table, Edgar has a collection of found objects he has gathered on his daily walks on the beach: "a feather, a water-smoothed stone, a disposable lighter" and many more (162). In one of his series of paintings called "sunset-composites," Edgar merely adds random objects to the horizon: "To one I'd added a nautilus shell, to one a compact disk [...], to the third a dead seagull I'd found on the beach" (205). These ordinary objects, when put in the composition of his paintings with the ocean or sunset in the background, find a magic aura and turn into things of aesthetic value or even magic charms.

Surrealistic paintings in *Duma Key* apparently have a supernatural and marvelous nature. Edgar is able to kill Candy Brown, the hated child murderer, by manipulating his image in one of his paintings and omitting his mouth and nose (309). Candy is found suffocated in the jail the next morning. Edgar does something similar to heal Wireman, his friend, by painting his brain without the slug buried there since he attempted suicide. He knew that his paintings "come from a place beyond talent. The feeling those Duma pictures conveyed was horror. [...] Horror waiting to happen" (321-22). Using the dark magic of the paintings, in fact, gives permission to ghosts to enter his world. As soon as Edgar finishes *Wireman Looks West* to heal his friend, Elizabeth's

drowned twin sisters come back from the world of the dead. That is the price he has to pay for messing with time and reality (354).

Edgar uses found objects as subjects of his paintings, but the constant back and forth movement from real to non-real when paintings are described emphasizes their fantastic nature. There is a sort of hesitation and an epistemological doubt in the relationship between real and unreal in the paintings. The constructed realities in the paintings and the reality the characters live are confused to the point that it would be difficult or even impossible to draw a line between them. Libbit's surrealist sketches started only when she found her audience (mostly her family) bored with her realistic drawings despite her being very talented; "first the birds flying upside-down, then the animals walking on water, then the Smiling Horses" showed in her artwork (192). Due to her drawings, the real world is gradually replaced by the nightmarish forged copy in which marvelous creatures roam and new dimensions appear. The simulation that is supposed to be a mimesis in simple drawings becomes a distorted reality in surrealist paintings. The reality in Libbit's drawings (and later in Edgar's paintings) is both real and unreal; it is neither original nor copy.

Edgar and Elizabeth's artistic creations function as entrances to other worlds, but the world they know as real is at the same time invaded by intruders from those alternate realities. Paintings as fairytale doors to other worlds first appeared in King's *Rose Madder* (1995), in which Rose Daniel finds a painting in a pawnshop that is the entrance to a parallel world full of oddities. In art collecting history, paintings were indispensable parts of all major *Wunderkammern* and *Kunstammern* since collectors believed that painters and paintings "allowed them to confirm their possession of all

that was beautiful and desirable in the world” (Krips 109). There was such an opinion or aspiration that these collections worked as microcosmic models of the outside world and the owner had the ability to “grasp and control the larger world through some sort of occult power” (Kaufmann 145). In *Duma Key*, the paintings (and Elizabeth’s china figure collection, to a lesser degree) open doors to other worlds and give the painter (and the collector) the ability to control them with their creativity and imagination. Toying with reality by arranging and rearranging things (in paintings and collections) finds a new dimension when it comes to surrealistic paintings and collections of curiosities. The *artificialia* and *naturalia* juxtaposed in a *Wunderkammer* imitate the outside world as much as the molten and deranged things in a surrealistic painting reflect reality.

One more way surrealistic paintings are significant in *Duma Key* is how both Edgar and Elizabeth create their works of art and manipulate reality in their collections of paintings and drawings in a trance-like state. As in a dream, they do not remember how they create what they create. Their dreams and nightmares flow into their everyday lives, contrary to the belief that our dreams are made of our daily activities. Dreams and visions have always played a significant role in literature and art in general, but Surrealism attempted to “resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality” (Jiménez 20). In the Surrealist revolution, dream and imagination are “the means of expression of the *marvelous*” in a way inseparable from reality (Jiménez 20). Surrealism was about liberating the psyche and portraying images of the unconscious, a similar mechanism to dreaming. To Edgar and Elizabeth, who were mentally impaired

after the accidents, this unlocking of mental images was supposed to be the right path to recovery.

When Edgar sees Elizabeth's drawings and how they are essentially similar to his paintings, he realizes that they both have been "trying to re-invent the ordinary, make it new by turning it into a dream" (*Duma Key* 547). Edgar moved to Duma Key to remember and repair the past by enjoying his present, and suddenly he is caught in a maelstrom of past, present and future. Because of the paintings, he can see apparitions and ghosts of the dead people as well as premonitions (like his visions of his friend's suicide) (163). Edgar's life is but a dream in which time and everything else is ambiguous and distorted. The paintings, according to Edgar's friend, remind one of the life inside the head of a mentally ill person (482). Similar to what we observed in *It*, the healing or redemptive power of these monstrous paintings is in the sequence of forgetting–remembering–forgetting; looking at the paintings is "like looking into a hall of mirrors" (438). They are more than reflections of reality and bleed into it by superimposing alternate realities over one another.

## Dance of Untruth

The dreamscape that King has painted in *Duma Key* leads us to the significance of phantoms and present absences in both horror and collecting but we need to have a minor divergence and discuss the general real/unreal dance in his fiction first, for the sake of clarity. This novel is one of King's less appreciated novels because it is an unconventional horror fiction that metafictionally addresses the process and purpose of his writing at large. Perse is only a dummy of a monster that matters less than the

protagonist's ordeal of creating alternate realities. *Duma Key* can be taken as one of King's fictional counterparts to his *Danse Macabre*, in which he provides his readers with an account of his career as a horror/fantasy writer and what he thinks of horror and terror and their functions in literature and cinema. The "How To" sections in *Duma Key* are merely signals to the reader that the whole book can also be taken as a manual, a roadmap to King's world.

In an interview with *Paris Review*, King states that his horror is mainly based on "an intrusion of the extraordinary into ordinary life and how we deal with it". The horror appears when demarcations between the real world and the dreamscape are blurred due to an unexpected event, and non-reality (or a superimposed reality) bleeds into the assumed fixed order of the real world. This usually happens "through the presence of an interloper who stirs up the fixity of the frame and forces the night-dream out into a day-light interaction with this 'rational' world" (Armitt 53). In *Regulators*, for instance, the violent massacre starts after a mentally challenged child is possessed by a demonic power coming back to life after a long hibernation. A quiet neighborhood suddenly changes into a nightmarish battleground between ordinary people and action figures and toy cars from *Motokops 2200* show. Everything starts in an autistic boy's mind and a parallel reality comes to life. Poplar Street, where the boy lives, "seems to be twisting out of perspective in some way [...], angles changing, corners bulging, colors blurring. It's as if reality is on the verge of liquefying ..." (*Regulators* 190).

Similarly, Perse leaps into reality through Edgar and little Elizabeth's imagination. She metaphorically leaks out through the cracks in the old barrel drowned in a dark and deep well. This bleeding and the collision of two worlds of real and non-



real as presented in what Edgar and Libbit do in *Duma Key* is similar to what King the writer does in his fantastic fiction, that is, forging realities. The authenticity and originality of these crafted realities—in the light of our discussion of fake/authentic duality in *Needful Things*—is joined here with King’s interest in metafictional commentaries on horror/fantasy writing as a profession to give us a larger picture of what *Duma Key* is about. In *Cultures of Forgery*, a distinction is made between fiction and lying: writing fiction is “making things up” and lying is “making things up that are known or thought by the speaker to be untrue” (Pearsall 4). In fiction, there is always a sense of truth and the reality forged has its roots in the world we live in. Horror fiction, specifically, “seeks the face of reality by striking through the pasteboard masks of appearance” (Winter 21). King’s horror fiction, accordingly, goes under the skin of reality to face the monster(s) lurking beneath.

It is generally believed that reading horror, as one form of escapist literature, is a means of temporarily escaping from everyday life into the world of fiction with the relieving assurance that one is safely distant from what is going on in the fictional world. From this point of view, the pleasure the readers feel is the sole purpose of such an occupation and the main goal of the entire entertainment industry behind it. In King’s 2013 novel *Joyland*, which is set in an amusement park, there are only two groups of people: carnies, who work for the carnival or the amusement park, and rubes, who are almost everybody else, the others, the outsiders. King in his fiction looks like a popular carny who sets up a freak show with each and every book he publishes and has been running the carnival for a long time. As a big cog in the amusement industry, Stephen King’s stance on this matter is important.

Reading and watching horror is like riding a roller coaster where the reader experiences some adrenaline-fueled excitement with the assurance that they will be safe all the time, and if the excitement is too much, they can simply close the book or leave the movie theater. This might be true to some extent, but the pleasures of horror do not stop here for King. He believes in other functions of horror fiction than mere pleasure. In his *Danse Macabre*, he repeatedly emphasizes the subtexts in the horror movies, novels and even comics he counts as the better examples of this genre. King states that “we make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones” (*Danse Macabre* 13), and explains further that horror is used to destroy itself (14). Bernard Gallagher in his “Reading Between the Lines: Stephen King and Allegory” explains how King’s handling of different levels of meaning in horror fiction is similar to what Freud says about how dreams have “a superficial level of meaning which will disguise or hide a deeper and more disturbing level of meaning” (39). Gallagher concludes with the simple notion that “the work of horror provides a vehicle for the metaphoric expression of terror at some everyday event which normally masks its horribleness behind a mundane face” (40). A work of horror is the naked version of the everyday horrors and it is often more real than the reality unmasked in the supposedly fabricated fiction. The similarity between the experience of reading horror and dreaming mechanism becomes more tangible when we consider Surrealists’ belief that “dreams were real or more real than ordinary waking reality” (Armstrong 92). When Edgar sees *Persephone* in daylight reality, it is just a deserted ship and not as horrifying as the one in his paintings. Edgar knows that the ship is alive and menacing like the one in the paintings, and the one he sees in

reality is “the mask it wears in the daytime” (*Duma Key* 698). King’s horror is, likewise, not a fabrication but an act of unmasking.

King’s fiction is known to be influenced (both in form and content) by the 1950s and 60s horror movies mostly adapted from contemporary novels or classic tales of horror, and his works are considered copies of copies as mimetic representations. It is interesting to see the relationship between reality and his fiction (that is many times further from reality), and how that matters. Umberto Eco in “Travels in Hyperreality” writes about places like Disneyland, Wax museums and Las Vegas, all sharing the characteristic that they are icons in entertainment and amusement industry, and how they reveal some truth about the cultural atmosphere of America. He explains that these places and the artifacts in them are copies of the originals for those who are not able to enjoy the originals for some reason. What is special about these artifacts is that they are copies but improved ones, with a refined picture of the reality they are representing. As a result, the produced hyperreality looks even more real than the real thing. In the process, the simulacra replaces the real (assuming there is such a thing) so perfectly, that it is almost impossible to identify the original. These multiple realities and the puzzlement one experiences between the real and the fabricated is the horrifying element in King’s fiction. How the audience can know what they are reading is not a distorted image of reality but the reality itself is the main question in his horror.

Žižek’s idea of ideological fantasy can be used here to explicate this distinction. Ideology is usually defined as the fact that people do certain things and believe in things that they are not aware of. They do not know what they are doing and why they are doing them. Žižek explains that “[t]hey know very well how things really are, but still

they are doing it as if they did not know" (*Sublime Object of Ideology* 30). There is the double illusion: the second one overlooking the first "illusion which is structuring our real" (30). To Žižek, then, "the function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel" (45). A similar mechanism exists in King's horror and its relation to reality. His horror fiction is not a fabrication to magnify the dark spots in reality, but a true picture of the "real kernel" of horror that is masked by the "fantasy-construction" we know and cherish as reality.

Žižek, in his argument, borrows one of Freud's case reports from *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which a father mourning his son falls asleep and dreams that his dead son is there in the room telling him "Father, can't you see that I'm burning?" The father is finally wakened up from the dream by the smell of a burning shroud, the shroud his dead son's body is wrapped in for burial. Žižek argues that there are different ways to interpret this dream, but the one he prefers is that "the father woke up so that he could resume consciousness in the mourning room in order to avoid the even more traumatic experience of the fantasy in which he is unable to console his helpless son" (Taylor 77). Dreams are temporary escapes from the fantasy-framework that makes our social reality, a peak behind the curtains to see the inner workings.

King's fiction may seem to most of his readers a fantastic image of reality that only reveals some of the dark truths we are blind to, but this image is the reality itself that has been masked. After reading his fiction, the readers might think that it was just a story even though there were some horrifying truths in it. However, as Žižek says about dreaming, "in our everyday, waking reality we are *nothing but a consciousness of this*

*dream*" (*Sublime Object of Ideology* 48). The reality we live in is in fact the illusion that is protecting us from the horror kernel. The horrifying thing about consuming horror literature is actually becoming aware of this dance of truth and untruth. Acknowledging "truthiness" or "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true" (Armstrong 34) is what horror literature that is committed to something beyond mere pleasure aims at. This is where authenticity loses its value and the fake and fiction pick up.

The fantastic paintings in *Duma Key* reveal so much about Edgar's life and his relationship with his family and friends that he feels like a clairvoyant psychic. In spite of the bizarre and nightmarish nature of the images, he finds more truth in them than the bland and mundane reality in which he used to live before the accident. Perse, the fictional creature that feeds on the main characters' imagination, acts like the water nymphs, the inspiring muses who are known as the source of the knowledge embedded and embodied in art. The paintings resemble a magical looking glass that takes the characters to a wonderland where the hesitation between real and unreal helps the audience scrutinize truthiness.

Elizabeth starts doing her bizarre drawings, experimenting with reality and opening doors to horror only after her family gets bored with her talented but realistic drawings (589). Her only concern is to wow them and see the amazement and wonder in their eyes. That is exactly what King has been doing with his macabre materials; he adds wonder to make them palatable. He is branded as an entertainer before anything else. The bitter truth of truthiness is wrapped in his amusing fiction and offered inside the glossy book covers. He also uses humor to sugar-coat the bitter reality in his fiction.

His use of humor is clearly visible in the anticlimactic resolution of most of his novels: the monster in *It* is defeated in the linguistic contest, involving telling jokes and riddles while it has its tongue stuck out; the weapon Alan uses against Leland Gaunt is “a fake can of Tastee-Munch Mixed Nuts with a green snake inside—crepe-paper wrapped around a spring” (*Needful Things* 684); Perse is finally contained in freshwater inside a flashlight; the world is saved with a bacon sandwich in *Dreamcatcher*; Tak, the monster in *The Regulators*, is exorcised by putting Ex-Lax in the haunted boy’s chocolate milk; and the list goes on.

Entertaining on the surface, Edgar and Elizabeth’s little game of toying with reality in order to see through the haze and remember the forgotten past brings about some disillusionment as well. Like most of his other novels, there is a reflection on the author’s career of horror writing in *Duma Key*. The horrorscape created through the real/unreal dance and the therapeutic effect of painting the apparitions suggested in the novel now yields to a more specific analogy between the experience of present absences in horror genre and collecting that will be discussed in the following section.

## Phantom Things

Edgar always feels his amputated arm is still there, and the phantom limb finds significance as the medium for his newly discovered talent in painting. He uses his missing arm to create his extraordinary paintings, and feels whole again only when he paints. He uses his ability in “painting information,” that is, finding out about people and their secrets by touching the objects that belonged to them with his phantom hand and then painting the images that rush into his mind afterwards (*Duma Key* 137). His

phantom arm makes him able to “snoop” and “see into the unknown” (139, 145). He knows he is not the first person who can “see with What’s Missing” (131). This seems intriguing at first, but he soon realizes that the phantom limb acts as a compass pointing toward morbid experiences. He can see things, dead people, or those who are going to die soon. Edgar gets his arm back figuratively while he is re-membering his own and Libbit’s life stories, and that same hand brings Perse back to the surface.

Edgar and Elizabeth try to remember to be whole again, but they inadvertently invite Perse and other ghosts into their worlds possibly because they are hyperremembering. They are so obsessed with recollecting the lost things that they start conjuring the absences. In their artistic endeavors as primitive artists, they experience a kind of “creative schizophrenia” and Perse attaches to them like a cancerous lump. They are both the artist and the art work. Interestingly, Clotilde Landais in *Stephen King as a Postmodern Author* calls this kind of relationship “creative vampirism” (23). Edgar sees apparitions and the undead leaking into the real world from his imagination, and compares Perse to a vampire feeding on the imaginative power of Libbit, himself, and probably other artists who lived on the island. Perse is another *trompe l’oeil* monster King has created out of thin air, “in the same way a child can create a monstrous rabbit on a movie screen just by wiggling his fingers” (King, “On Becoming a Brand Name” 29). The name is from Greek mythology’s Persephone, who was both the queen of the underworld and the goddess of fertility of vegetation. She stands for life-in-death and death-in-life; “a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness,” an expression Rosemary Jackson uses to describe “the

fantastic” (20). She is an impossible creature born of imagination and vulnerable to imagination only.

The emphasis on the presence of the absent in Edgar’s phantom arm that he uses to paint and in the nature of the imaginary monster sounds familiar in horror stories, but it is given new dimensions by the main characters’ search for lost memories, their efforts to recover from diminished language abilities, and their attempts to rename and redefine the world around them which is a kind of recreating the world. Due to the accident, Edgar cannot place words correctly and confuses some words with others in speech and in writing. Although nonsense words appear in his writing, the reader’s brain does the magic and some “unreadable” sentences make perfect sense. Pam writes to Edgar after reading his email that “... you are doing in yr writing what you used to do in yr speaking: ‘bequest’ for ‘request,’ ‘laugh like a look’ for ‘laugh like a loon” (*Duma Key* 134). His psychologist and Wireman are also able to understand his distorted language with the extraordinary power of their brains to fill the gaps. Edgar realizes later that Libbit had been suffering from similar amnesia before she started to draw in order to regain linguistic abilities and recollect memories. The brain’s ability to comprehend these words comes from the semantic and syntactic association of the letters and words in a string. In a meaningful system, the absent is as present as the present.

Collecting memory objects in an ensemble of paintings in order to rebuild identities is intensified in *Duma Key* by the serial nature of Edgar’s paintings (and Libbit’s drawings, although less emphasized in the novel). The anticipation created by this seriality adds weight to the importance of the absences and phantom things in the



narrative. Objects are impregnated with meaning and significance as soon as they are introduced into a collection; the fact that they are stripped of their usual functions and become part of a different system of meaning, a world of a different nature and order, makes them special and powerful. This is not limited only to the objects that build a collection, but is also true of the non-present items legitimately falling under the category of a collection; the specters of the missing items are always present in a collection and are usually assigned a higher level of importance and significance. Since the absent members of a collection are usually the rarest and the most desired ones, these absent items have even more presence than the present ones. They are the subject of the collector's constant search for new additions and a major reason a collection and a collector feel alive. There are often spaces left for the non-present objects, waiting for the time they are obtained. Those items are present in their absence, and collectors usually mention them more frequently than the items they already have in their possession.

In his analysis of the concept of absence in collecting and museology, Donald Preziosi argues that “[m]useum objects are literally both ‘there’ and ‘not-there,’ present and absent” (Macdonald 54). He explains that objects are physically there and part of the exhibition, but they are all abstracted from the “original” situation and the present context is “fraudulent” and fabricated (54). This similarly applies to the objects which are assumed present in the context while they are absent; the phantom objects which are cropped out of the frame and are only imagined. Absent objects gain weight as they are associated with the present ones, and the narrative of the whole collection is built. Of the importance of absence in collecting, Baudrillard believes that the difference

between collecting and merely accumulating objects and one of the reasons for superiority of the former to the latter is the idea of incompleteness, “the fact that it *lacks* something” (“The System of Collecting” 23).

Absences and lacking things play a significant role in the progress of the narrative in *Duma Key*. Edgar and Elizabeth have lost their memories and part of their language abilities. They regain their identities by painting and drawing their memories back: “Memory is identity. It’s you” (*Duma Key* 566). Elaborating on Walter Benjamin’s account of collecting, Naomi Schor emphasizes that collecting is “bound up with the act of remembrance” (254). For Benjamin, collecting is “a form of psychotherapy, a healing anamnesis, a means of re-membering his fragmented past” (Schor 253). Edgar and Elizabeth may not be real collectors but their artistic creations act like a memory lane. Edgar finds some random no-name objects and adds them to his paintings. The found objects are assigned identity by being collected and being named later. Pictures become part of his collection only when they are named: “Artists have to name their pictures” (*Duma Key* 117). To him, creation is completed with naming. Similarly, in any form of collecting, cataloging and placing objects in their *right* places is when the act is complete. Gaps are filled in his collection as well as his mind as Edgar re-members himself and Libbit’s story with Perse, but there is a down side to this rehabilitation. He cannot stop completing the series because he believes he has been granted a second chance to live only to finish the task. He acts like collectors constantly striving to find the missing pieces while the idea of completing series is horrifying to them and resembles death. He is aware that the completion of *Girl and Ship* series would mean the dominance of Perse and the ultimate death of himself and anyone else associated with

him, but the ellipses and the absences attract him to the point that he is almost lost in them.

## Conclusion

*Duma Key*, with surrealistic paintings and dreams as the two pillars of the narrative, is another Freak Alley in King's oeuvre. The pieces of memories put together in these two narrational experiences work like pieces of a collection with its beginning and ending uncertain. This disjointed temporality is no doubt the most suitable container for gothic literature, in general, and horror fiction, in our case. Intensifying this jumble of past/present/future in *Duma Key* is the spatial peculiarity of the island itself, which stands for nowhere and everywhere. As Sears mentions, "In Gothic writing, place is usually imbued with the extra dimension of the temporal. It is simultaneously residue and repository, record and repetition of past moments" (168). The choice of an island as the setting for this novel, as opposed to King's usual small town, where the ocean stands for the wilderness of imagination is highly effective and has created the apt context for a tale of remembering.

The journey to the deserted house on the other side of the island, with all the perils faced on the way, is an analogy of moving through memories to get to the disturbing core and re-member the dismembered self. After their accidents and the following traumatic experiences, Edgar and Libbit try to get out of the shadow by remembering through art and artistic creation. One of the major themes King has written about is the therapeutic nature of art and imaginative activities. He notes in *On Writing* that he has written many times about "the healing power of the human

imagination" (208). In *Duma Key*, the figure of the painter replaces the usual writer figure in King's fiction as the source of creation and the setting for conflicts, internal and external. As observed before, King's heroes capable of fighting demons are only children and those adults who have not lost their connection with childhood and still remember how to use the power of belief.

Similar to King's many other novels, where the emphasis is on children's power of imagination or certain adults who find their way back to their childhood mentality and (re)gain access to the power of believing, in *Duma Key*, Edgar gradually connects to little Elizabeth's reservoir of imaginative frenzy by searching in her past. Libbit's memories and observations in the form of drawings become the source of power to Edgar, whose adult vision is not broad enough to understand Perse, the unwelcome usurper of their creative powers. He realizes that the monster is feeding on their imagination, ironically the only weapon they have to fight the parasite. Like the Losers in *It*, they need to use imagination against itself to put the monster back to sleep. Edgar and his friends sharpen colored pencils, like wooden sticks for vampire killers, to arm themselves against Perse which was born from the exact same pencils. Edgar, the disabled grown-up, finds a shortcut to childhood imagination by connecting to little Elizabeth's memories and looking through her eyes at *Duma Key* after Perse appears. Imagination is the remedy, but memory objects anchor them in their journey and save their identities and wholeness from being consumed.

Putting Perse back to sleep, Edgar's phantom arm begins itching again and he feels the power back, flowing "first into me and then through me" (769). He goes back to his canvas to start yet another painting. This last painting depicts the big storm

embracing the island, the storm Libbit had refused to create. It is ambiguous why he takes such an action: Is he hoping that the storm will not drown the island and will surface more treasures? Or, he is just trying to erase the whole gateway and save the future from Perse's threat? Whatever the destination, Edgar's (and King's) journey into the land of "untruth" is the allegorical story of unmasking "reality" as the main goal of horror writing. When the sand figure of Edgar's late daughter comes closer to say goodbye to the world of living and hello to that of the living dead, the illusion collapses: "It was like bringing a painting close to your eyes and watching as the scene [...] collapses into nothing but strokes of color, most with the marks of the brush still embedded in them" (*Duma Key* 759). Disillusionment is, after all, the right term to describe King's dance of illusions in *Duma Key* and his other works of fiction.

## Chapter 4: Who's Afraid of Seriality? – *Misery*

### Introduction

Stephen King's *Misery* (1987) relates the story of a popular romance writer, Paul Sheldon, who has become a celebrity, thanks to his popular series of books featuring Misery Chastain. He is not, however, satisfied with his writing practice in spite of the fame and fortune the *Misery* books have brought him. He begins to hate his famous character and decides to abandon her and turn his talent to writing a more serious novel, *Fast Cars*, to attract literary circles as well as the general public. Paul has shown his dissatisfaction with *Misery* before by privately publishing a booklet for a dozen close acquaintances on her intimate relationship with a dog (*Misery* 35). He is so revolted by the bestselling—but low quality—romances of Misery Chastain that he feels relieved when she dies unexpectedly in what he thinks is his last novel of the kind and puts an end to the series. He later realizes that *Misery* will never die and she is coming back again to haunt him. He is doomed to continue the *Misery* series because there is still demand for it and the fans are not done with it yet.

The novel opens with Paul's departure from the romance genre by completing his literary novel, but it is only the beginning of his bizarre *romance* with his Number One Fan. With the first draft of his *Fast Cars* finished, he excitedly decides to drive from

Colorado to Los Angeles, but he is caught in a snowstorm in the mountains and crashes his car. The psychopathic Annie Wilkes, who is madly in love with the Misery books, saves him from the car wreck and takes him to her secluded abode. The juxtaposition of Paul, the serial writer, and Annie, later discovered to be a serial killer, will be the point of departure for this chapter's discussion of repetition and seriality in the context of collecting. References to *One Thousand and One Nights* and John Fowles's *The Collector* in *Misery* support the idea of the significance of series in the troubled relationship between popular writers and their readers, particularly the cult of the followers.

Annie is an avid reader of the Misery Chastain series, but she detests *Fast Cars* when she reads the manuscript. She becomes so angry about the violence and profanity in *Fast Cars* that she makes Paul burn the only manuscript of his new novel, which was supposed to be a turning point to his career and his debut novel as a more serious writer. She becomes even more furious when she receives her reserved copy of his last published book of the series and finds out that he has killed her favorite character, Misery. The dangerously disturbed Annie forces Paul, who is badly injured in the car accident and has become dependent on the painkillers she gives him, to write one more Misery novel. It does not take Paul long to understand that Annie is fully capable of killing him if he disobeys her in any way. His only chance of staying alive is keeping Annie engaged and satisfied with this new narrative. Like Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*, he has to keep on writing and needs to satisfy the voracious *constant reader* in order to stay alive (66). He is almost certain that he will die as soon as his tale is told (Hanson 149).

Paul brings Annie's beloved *Misery* back to life and starts the new novel not so enthusiastically at first, but Annie does not allow him to cheat. Not only does she want the new novel to be exceptionally good, but also she wants it to be a special edition for her only, the one and only copy of the last *Misery* novel. Gradually, Paul gets more determined to survive and publish *Misery's Return* because he believes it is going to be the best in the series. Paul eventually kills Annie, and their final encounter is described in words and images suggestive of Annie being raped. He takes revenge since he believes rape and mutilation were what Annie, his Number One Fan, did to him after she found him unconscious in the wreckage of his car. The tortures Paul Sheldon endures in the novel—having his foot and a thumb amputated—figuratively demonstrate how the author sometimes has to be “cut to fit fan expectations” (Badley 57). The analogy between Paul and the old typewriter losing parts in the process of creating the new novel suggests how the audience imposes its desires upon celebrity authors and turns them into machines serially producing on-demand products.

In this psychological horror novel, as King mentions in an interview with *Book-of-the-Month Club* in 1987, the author contemplates what he is doing as a professional writer and a popular storyteller “in the act of creating make-believe”: “why I was doing it and why I was successful at it; whether or not I was hurting other people by doing it and whether or not I was hurting myself” (Beahm, *America's Best-Loved Boogeyman* 119). This chapter's discussion is an illustration of King's observation that writing can be oppressive as well as obsessive for a bestselling author because of how seriality works and what it is capable of doing to both writers and readers. In an interview, he says about writing: “Sometimes it seems to me I could save my life by stopping. Because



I'm really compulsive about it" (Underwood and Miller, *Kingdom of Fear* 71). He has also described himself as the prisoner of the picture his fans created of him as a genre writer in his first decade of career. In another interview, he admits that it is not easy to "back out of it" and write differently (Underwood and Miller, *Feast of Fear* 51).

*Misery*, for instance, was King's response to his fans' strong negative reaction to his attempt to distance himself from horror fiction in *The Eyes of the Dragon* (Rogak 152). It signaled the beginning of a new subject matter in King's fiction, namely "domestic and gender issues" (Magistrale, *Hollywood's Stephen King* 62). This self-reflexive novel featuring a writer as a protagonist is also significant because it was King's first attempt to trade off sheer popularity for being accepted in literary circles and acclaimed by scholars. Magistrale illustrates this crucial change in King's career by citing some quantitative evidence that shows *Misery* is the beginning of a decline in his popularity:

The ten novels that were published during the decade from *The Shining* (1977) to *Misery* (1988) remained on the *Times* Bestseller List an average of 31.4 weeks. [...] *It*, 35 weeks; *Misery*, 30 weeks. In contrast, none of his books published in the decade after *Misery* remained on the list longer than 23 weeks, and most were on it for a much shorter period .... (America's Storyteller 17)

Similar to King's later works, *The Dark Half* and "Secret Window, Secret Garden," writing is portrayed as a compulsion in *Misery*, but unlike the other two, this novel locates the origin of the compulsion in external forces present in the book market

dominated by publishers and fans (Grace 62-63). Novels like *Misery*, in Gary Hoppenstand's opinion, "reveal [King's] love/hate attitudes regarding his success as a best-selling author, on the one hand, and with his artistic failure at being typecast as a brand-name gore master on the other" (Davis 166). *Misery* is King's commentary on how the author feels about being confined to the limitations that genre writing and celebrity status have imposed upon him. King has gained the status of a brand name in popular culture and the entertainment industry; however, the wealth and fame this status has brought him has its dark side too. Kathleen Lant elaborates on Beahm's assertion that King "is a victim of his own celebrity status" and stresses the fact that "he is so heavily in demand that he finds himself threatened physically by the affection of his fans" ("Rape of Constant Reader" 160). King has repeatedly expressed his view of "the genre writer (and himself) as a whore, and brand name fiction writing as a state of whoredom" (Hoppenstand and Browne 14). Annie, the fan, believes calling writing a business is like calling the author "a whore" (*Misery* 72), but when Paul, the celebrity author, refrains from producing more *Misery* books only hoping he can free himself from "whoring" his talent, she forces him to do so.

Although King has been criticized for his lengthy books and how he badly needs an editor, he has still maintained his status as a popular and in-demand author. There are still a huge number of followers and readers who agree with Whoopi Goldberg when she says: "I wait for each new King novel as an alcoholic waits for that next drink. I am addicted" (Herron, *Reign of Fear* 9). For the majority of these readers, the main motivation is adding a new title to their ever-growing list of King books they have read and possessed. In a sense, this is what happens to all celebrity and serial writers. There

appears a group of book buyers who are more collectors than readers. John Elsner and Richard Cardinal in their *Cultures of Collecting* assert that:

Research has shown that customers who invest in publishers' 'collections' [...] get so carried away that they continue to acquire titles which hold no interest for them. A book's distinctive position within the series is sufficient to create a formal interest where no intrinsic interest exists. (23)

As a prolific writer, King has constantly been offering joy to both casual readers and serious collectors of limited or first editions of his books. With the high recurrence of characters and themes in King's fiction and the tight intertextual relation between his works—published in series (*The Dark Tower* series), as a serial novel (*The Green Mile*), in a trilogy (*The Bill Hodges* Trilogy), or simply featuring different horror motifs under the Stephen King brand name—and other works in the same genre, seriality plays a significant role in his career.

Seriality might be regarded as a blessing for a genre writer, but our discussion of *Misery* will focus on how it can be a curse as well. Umberto Eco in his *Limits of Interpretation* discusses seriality as “another term for repetitive art” (84), a common practice in contemporary cultural production. Repeatability, as Stephen Hock explains, is “the principle that governs the creation and distribution of art” in the postmodern era (v). He continues that “books by brand-name authors” are prominent examples of this repeatability phenomenon, since they often “promise to follow firmly in the footsteps of those authors' earlier work” (v). One other form of seriality, probably not as explicit as

sequels/prequels in publishing industry, for instance, is the intertextuality between newer cultural products in dialogue with older and more classical texts (Eco 87). In a genre like horror, both these forms of repeatability are visibly important and find more significance when it comes to a brand-name author like King.

Stephen King is not a conventional serial writer, but the wide semantic range of the word seriality makes it possible to discuss him in that context. Shane Denson correctly observes that cultural studies has been “less interested in the *seriality of popular forms* than in the *popularity of serial forms*” (qtd. in Reimer et al. 5; emphasis in the original). For a popular author who has been providing for his audience constantly and regularly for decades, the concept of seriality may be taken for granted. However, the confrontation of a serial writer and a serial killer in *Misery* highlights seriality as a significant critical concept. The Misery Chastain series and Paul Sheldon’s ordeal in *Misery* provide an allegory for what popular authors can go through because of market demand for series and the publishers’ marketing strategies based on seriality. The fact that Paul’s works (and the author himself) are collected by a serial killer—similar to Miranda Grey being confined by a butterfly collector in John Fowles’s *The Collector*—will help us delve into the symbolic resonances of seriality and the morbidity sometimes associated with some collecting behaviors.

The importance of series in collecting goes to the satisfaction the collector feels in hunting missing items to complete a set. In Baudrillard’s opinion, “without seriality no such play would be conceivable” (*System of Objects* 100). Of the affinity between collecting and series or seriality, he highlights the fact that one single object can never make a collection and “invariably there will be a whole succession of objects” related in

one way or the other to be properly called a collection. The successive act of adding specific items to a series in order to complete a set can be “both satisfying and frustrating” and the sense of accomplishment in the completion of a series always generates ambiguous feelings, as Baudrillard explains (“The System of Collecting” 8). Completing a series is satisfactory but horrifying at the same time; it signals the end of collecting and the collector both. Baudrillard repeatedly emphasizes seriality as “the crucial motivating factor of the true collector,” and believes that a collector “values objects only in that they can be inscribed into a series” (Schor 257-8). One can purchase a whole collection of things, but that does not necessarily make one a collector. The collection, as Susan Stewart writes, “must be acquired in a serial manner. This seriality provides a means for defining or classifying the collection and the collector’s life history” (166).

The possible impacts of collecting culture and the inherent seriality on the life of *Misery*’s bestselling author(s) (Paul Sheldon and Stephen King) will be examined within the triangle of writer-reader-publisher. The serial nature of producing new reads by authors like King and the unabating desire of fan-readers to consume every title by their favorite author(s) is orchestrated and channeled by marketing strategies in the publishing industry. The seemingly vast array of choices in the book industry makes it impossible to collect and consume everything, and that is when series come to help. In their introduction to *The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, Potvin and Myzelev note that “[a] collector, faced with a plethora of objects on the open market, must make hard and sometimes fast choices” (4). A similar statement applies to book readers facing the hard choice among numerous titles hitting the market in various formats. Genres have

been helping readers in this state of turmoil and the more recent practice of serial publishing has been trying to facilitate the decision making even further. Collecting sets and completing series is a way of channeling the purchasing habit of the book consumers: one decision is often made for several purchases. That is how seriality has become the key word in contemporary cultural production and consumption.

The Constant Readers' collecting desires and the publishers' concern for collectability is not limited to King's novels and short stories; even books written by others about Stephen King are highly sought after and their first or rare editions are often reported missing from public libraries to be later traded in auctions and end up in personal collections (Beahm, *Stephen King from A to Z* 227). King not only revived the horror genre but also brought many changes to the publishing industry. One example, as Beahm mentions in *The Stephen King Companion*, is his success in selling hardcovers as well as paperbacks in unprecedented quantities. Ralph Vicinanza, King's former literary agent, is quoted therein saying that hardcover publishing historically "catered to the intelligentsia, but Stephen changed all that" (82). It is interesting to know that, contrary to historical practice, many of the purchased hardcovers are meant to join collections and not to be read; when they are offered for sale in auctions, hardcovers are usually in pristine condition and the original wrapping is intact.

Increasing demand for King collectibles proves that it is not his mastery in storytelling only that sells millions of copies; the "Stephen King" brand name printed or embossed on book covers (and memorabilia) also functions in a systematic manner to attract readers/collectors. Proof is the fact that Bachman books never sold well before King took ownership of the name, but suddenly joined the bestseller lists after Bachman

was announced dead from "cancer of the pseudonym". Richard Bachman was born only because the publishers did not want to saturate the market for King, but the brand got so well established that his most obscure short stories and even the unfinished works are now marketable. Before the identity of the author was revealed, Bachman books were thought of as poor imitations of Stephen King, the same King who himself was called a hack writer and an unoriginal one by many critics. Originality and authenticity have been serious issues with quick production and consumption of collage-like serial products in a period when mass production of cultural products is the norm. With the spread of kitsch culture, the publishing industry is also into seriality and *kitschification*.

This chapter will examine the peculiar nature of book series and these new trends in the publishing industry in a close reading of *Misery* as a novel that addresses collecting in more ways than briefly mentioning Fowles's *The Collector* or borrowing its framework only. Paul and Annie are in a complicated position because they are both collectors and collectibles at the same time: the writer is collected by his fans and the fans are profiled by the writer, the serial killer collects victims and is collected by being profiled by law enforcement. The two characters also both experience being the subject and object of other acts: they both read and write (Paul, the writer, reads Annie's behavior and Annie, the reader, writes the lives of her victims in her scrapbook), they both kill and revive (Annie, the serial killer, saves Paul's life and Paul gives life and death to his characters), they both love and hate (Paul feels threatened by his fans' demands and how they impose their desires upon him while Annie imprisons and tortures her beloved celebrity author). This liminal state of the characters, prevalence of a split personality in serial killers and even the format of the book (two-in-one)

strongly suggest the idea of the double in *Misery*. Annie can be the embodiment and externalization of Paul's (and King's) internal conflicts in his writing career. The bestselling author is torn between his own ambitions to reach to new audiences and try new terrains, on one hand, and the expectations of millions of fan readers, on the other. In an age of kitschification of fiction in which a writer is only a machine serially producing works of popular literature for mass diffusion, the writer-collector has to keep acquiring new additions to offer to the reader-collector, and put off death for both of them by the repetitive and infinite act of completing series.

## **Paul, the Writer Meets Annie, the Reader**

*Misery* is the beginning of a series of novels and novellas focusing on the subject of the conflicts between writers, readers and publishers in the book market, as well as writers' relationship with their creative selves. In "The Writer Defines Himself," an interview conducted and published by Magistrale, King explains this recurrent theme as an "effort on my part to understand what I am doing, what it means, what it is doing to me, what it is doing for me. Some of it has been out of an effort to try and understand the ramifications of being a so-called famous person, or celebrity" (*Second Decade* 11). These consequences and what professional writing means to King are best presented in Paul Sheldon's nightmarish encounter with Annie, his number one fan and the representative of a bestseller's readership.

Paul Sheldon is a novelist who writes two kinds of novels, "good ones and best-sellers" (*Misery* 7), and this conflict is the very first thing we learn about him in *Misery*. He is fed up with writing pot boilers but the fact is that the *Misery* series has been "his



main source of income over the last eight years” (12). Now that he has put all his courage and determination together to bid farewell to Misery Chastain and focus on good writing, he finds himself a prisoner of his fan who advises him to “stick to” the Misery stories and forget about writing differently (23). Annie tells Paul that she has read all his novels at least a few times, and she only wished “he would write them faster” (9). He knows that “he [is] in a hell of a jam” as soon as he sees Annie and learns about her obsession with his works: “Like an idol, she gave only one thing: a feeling of unease deepening steadily toward terror. Like an idol, she took everything else” (8). Paul is not in a position to disagree since he owes Annie his life; she and other fans have been his source of inspiration and now she has literally forced her breath into him and brought him back to life. In addition, he confesses “I sort of depend on you” (23). He obviously means he needs Annie for the painkillers and taking care of him, but he also needs her like any other writer depending on their readers to survive.

Paul thinks Annie and other readers like her are ignorant and “too set” to understand or care about his serious works:

was she so different in her evaluation of his work from the hundreds of thousands of other people across the country—ninety percent of them women—who could barely wait for each new five-hundred page episode in the turbulent life of the foundling who had risen to marry a peer of the realm? No, not at all. They wanted Misery, Misery, Misery. (27)

She does not even know the “trick[s] of the trade” and is not interested in how a novel comes to life, Paul believes (62). She is, however, “the perfect audience, a woman who loved stories without having the slightest interest in the mechanics of making them. She was the embodiment of that Victorian archetype, Constant Reader” (63). She cannot think or does not want to accept that the whole publishing industry is a business like others and run by the law of supply and demand. “I hate it,” she says, “when you pervert the talent God gave you by calling it a business. I *hate* that” (72). As a steadfast reader, she must know better than anyone else that this business is flourishing because there is demand from fans like herself. The pressure bestselling authors receive from the market demand is grotesquely illustrated in the opening pages of *Misery* where Annie forces her tongue into Paul’s mouth to help him breathe and figuratively rapes the writer figure.

King has used the writer/artist character in different capacities in his works, but the three prominent ones (two novels and one novella) are *Misery*, *The Dark Half*, and “Secret Window, Secret Garden,” which are all metafictional and autobiographical, in a sense. Apart from the concept of the double and split personality resulting from schizophrenic creativity, which will be addressed later in this chapter, what is common between all these is that their main characters deal with the hardships and ordeals of being a writer and a bestselling one. “Secret Window, ...” is about authorship and intellectual property issues: writers’ constant fear of being accused of plagiarism and their endless effort to distinguish between what exactly they have borrowed from other texts and what their own imaginations have created. *The Dark Half* is about the author-protagonist Thad Beaumont’s pen name coming to life and primarily deals with how

writers who write under a pseudonym have to deal with multiple personalities. *Misery* is about the relationship between the writer and the readers and how bestseller authors are influenced by fandom culture. There is no doubt that the vast majority of writers are influenced by their readers, but King has often complained about “the cult of the celebrity” and has expressed the bitter feeling that his creativity has been threatened by “their demands and their devotion” (Lant 160-161). Lant offers a list of unreasonable requests imposed by the fans that King has complained about in different occasions: “requests for information, for resurrection of favorite characters, for books on cherished subjects, for King’s fulfillment of the fantasies he has stimulated in his fans” (161).

The malign relation between bestseller writers and their fans becomes more problematic when the writers are caught in the conflict between what they really love to produce and what their fans demand. In Paul’s case, “the increasing dismissal of his work in the critical press as that of a ‘popular writer’ (which was, as he understood it, one step—a small one—above that of a ‘hack’) had hurt him quite badly” (*Misery* 286). Tormented and enslaved by the writing “business,” Paul attempts to put an end to his bestselling series and write more serious books. Similarly, King’s primary intention in writing, as he announces in his National Book Foundation award speech, was building a bridge between “the popular and the literary” (qtd. in Palko 35). However, his popularity and his association with the horror genre have caused him “the dismissal or outright contempt of those literary critics who shun genre writing or equate market success with artistic failure” (Simpson 38). The dire condition that Paul experiences in

confinement and in the unpleasant company of his Number One Fan demonstrates how King thinks he has been harmed by popularity and his celebrity status.

Stephen King, as mentioned earlier, had to publish some of his works under the name Richard Bachman mostly because of his publisher's strategies to keep titles on the bestselling lists for a longer time. Thad Beaumont in *The Dark Half*, on the other hand, explains that the idea of writing under a pseudonym occurred to him only because he wanted to "write any damn thing I pleased without *The New York Times Book Review* looking over my shoulder the whole time I wrote it. [...] I could write a Western, a science fiction story. Or I could write a crime novel" (23). The difference between Thad and Paul is that Paul is a popular novelist who wishes to be a recognized literary author, while Thad is already an acclaimed author in scholarly communities who wants to be a bestseller to satisfy his desire for both fame and fortune.

The internal-external conflict of being pulled towards two poles is not the only one King and his author characters have to face in their careers. *Misery* has a list of other hardships of professional writing. The horror of the blank page is a feeling one can never get rid of: "Now there was all this white space below *CHAPTER 1*, looking like a snow bank into which he could fall and die, smothered in frost" (*Misery* 115). A writer's deadline for books written on contract is another fear that Paul was experiencing in a totally new context now (120). There is also the nightmare of the "autographing session" for bestselling authors (306). All these major and minor terrifying experiences that a bestseller writer would face in the cut-throat publishing business become relevant to our collecting topic when Paul Sheldon (and Stephen King) is regarded as a prisoner of seriality. King's complex relation to collecting comes to a

climax in this final chapter when he pictures himself as a victim of the peculiar pathologies of collecting in his career. The horror of the encounter between a writer and his number one fan escalates with the choice of a serial killer as the serial writer's fan.

## Serial Writer as Collector

*Misery* is one of the many texts in which King has written himself as a character and has tried to provide an image of his fiction writing career as “problematic, if not monstrous” (Grace 62). Like in my previous chapters, one can trace King's engagement with ideas of collecting in this novel both inside his fictional world and outside in his writing career. What distinguishes *Misery* from the other works examined in this study is how its protagonist (a true image of the author) is portrayed as afflicted by the pathological side of writing/collecting and captivated by seriality. The bestseller's obsession with writing is aggravated when he realizes he is a Scheherazade whose life depends on how far he can go with the series. Seriality has a peculiar nature here because it is both life-saving and life-threatening. The serial killer/reader in *Misery*, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is the embodiment of the malignant nature of seriality.

Stephen King is not a conventional serial writer but he has experimented with serial publishing methods, both in print and electronic formats. In 1996, in an act reminiscent of “the nineteenth-century tradition of the serial narrative” (Magistrale, *America's Storyteller* 21), he decided to release his *The Green Miles* in six monthly installments. The practice sounded strange to the contemporary readers and risky to the publisher but King was trying to follow the way popular authors like Dickens were

published in their own age. *The Plant* (2000)—originally published in installments in limited quantity to send as Christmas gifts to his friends only—was King’s experiment with installment publishing online. His *The Dark Tower* series of eight books is probably the most conventional, but the nature of the series shows why King can be regarded as a serial writer. The locations, characters and events in *The Dark Tower* mostly come from King’s other novels and short stories. What he has done in *The Dark Tower* is a further stage in King’s usual appropriation of tested and established horror themes and tropes into his well-known American small-town horror stories.

The seemingly endless list of multiple seasons of TV series, sequels to movies, or versions of computer games providing the audience with the satisfaction of regular consumption of whatever they desire shows how repetition and seriality have recently been the ruling strategy. The book industry has obviously not been exempted from the current repeatability trend and like other cultural products which are treated as commodities (both in production and consumption) books are produced, marketed and consumed in serial forms. What helps the continuation in repeatable and serial cultural products is the little variations the artist brings to an established and already tested combination of elements—plot devices, characters, etc. Umberto Eco in *Limits of Interpretation* emphasizes the importance of “variability” in serial forms and the fact that “one can make variations to infinity” (96). Little variations, as one of the essential characteristics of genre fiction and formula writing, enable writers to revitalize the classics and/or produce series. These variations might add some sense of novelty and innovation to a work and might be mistaken for their success, but repetition is still the key term.

Generally, collecting in its traditional sense refers to “the completion of a series” (Knox 287). However, the real satisfaction is not in the completion but the repetition inherent to collecting activities. Repeated acquisition of new items to fill the gaps and to expand a collection is the key to the desired accomplishment. In his psychological explanation, Werner Muensterberger finds the repetition “mandatory” because it serves “as a vehicle to cope with inner uncertainty, a way of dealing with the dread of renewed anxiety, with confusing problems of need and longing” (11). A collector is always concerned with the rest of the set, the things which are absent in the collection, but the thought of the completion of the set and putting an end to it is dreadful. The satisfaction of adding one more object to the collection is always accompanied by the frustration of needing other objects to complete the set and the anticipation that the completion of the set would be the end of the collection and the collector.

Regarding the often missing item that completes a collection, Baudrillard points out that the item is valuable not only because it is rare but also because it is the representative of the whole collection. The “missing final object” adds so much to the collection due to its absence that one might wonder “*whether collections are ever meant to be completed*” (*System of Objects* 98-99). Completion of a collection is like the end of the collector, too; there will be no collector without collecting. The “psychic investment” (in Susan Stewart’s terms) that a collector makes because of the seriality in collecting is not possible if there are no missing pieces in the collection. Mary Desjardins, in the article “Film Collectibles and Fan Investments,” expands on this idea and draws the conclusion that “[a]dding a rare object to a collection is a serial process moving toward completion of the collection. Yet, in a dynamic akin to the logic of fetishism, since

completion would mean a kind of death, indefinite seriality is the modus operandi here” (37-38).

Like a collector who starts a collection as a way of gaining immortality and living on in the collection, writers keep writing to satisfy their desire to live on in their writing. The writer becomes part of the world he has created and constantly feels the compulsion to expand on it and make it anew in an attempt to ascertain s/he is alive:

The terror of ending and specifically of the ending of writerly productivity is [...] an externalization of the writer’s fear of death, of the closure of all narrative with the death of the author. It is balanced by the writer’s desire constantly to begin, to generate new narratives or to restart or continue existing ones as repeated confirmations of life and the creative drive. (Sears 106-107)

King has proved to be one of the most successful authors in this regard because he is a prolific one whose publications have rarely missed bestseller lists ever since his career started as a professional writer. Don Herron calls King “the first *living* horror writer consistently to place one novel after another on the bestseller lists” (“Horror Springs” 75; emphasis in the original). The fact that he has maintained his status as a writer whose books sell in millions of copies for such a long time is partly due to his consistency in publishing and with no long intervals between novels. Continuation of characters and places and the closeness of themes in his books have kept the readers coming back for more in all the decades he has published. He has been so successful providing for his readers that his fans sometimes were not able to keep up with the



speed he was producing new titles. In 1980, for instance, “King became the first American author to have three works simultaneously on the bestseller lists” (Schuman 107).

The writer’s feeling of being bound by writing serially does not feel so menacing and suffocating until the reader/collector comes into the picture. The dreadful thing about writing in *Misery* is the question of to whom the book belongs, the writer or the readers (Beahm’s *Boogeyman* 88). Annie is the embodiment of Paul’s fan readers (Constant Readers to King) who read him regularly and are bound by his spell of words, readers who are “the permanent resident of his multiverse” (Strengell, *Monsters* 6). Annie restlessly waits for the next Paul Sheldon book to hit the market and is ready to react harshly if the new book is not giving her the expected satisfaction; she is the representative of the writer’s fans and followers who “suck out Paul’s inspiration and creativity” like a “psychic vampire” on a regular basis (Magistrale, *Second Decade* 127). She depends on serial reading as much as the writer depends on writing.

Although Annie is presented as a reader who is naïve to the business side of writing and publishing industry, she is quite aware of how “chapter plays” work and is in love with them. She enjoyed the movie serials when she was a child because “what [she] really looked forward to was the next installment of the chapter-play” (*Misery* 107). She loved the cliff-hangers and enjoyed the suspense they created in the audience. Writers, she believes, are allowed to keep the audience waiting impatiently for the next episode in the series to see how the heroes escape whatever jam they are into and how the story unfolds. She, nonetheless, detests the way Paul uses *deus ex machina* techniques to bring *Misery* back to life in his first attempt to restart the series as her

prisoner, because she believes the writer is a god responsible for giving life to their characters and taking it back but not allowed to have miracles. Paul Sheldon is also aware of the power of “*the gotta*,” when the reader is “dying to find out what happened next” and how things would turn out (242). He knows what comes next is what is keeping him alive and safe from Annie’s rage. The popular writer is expected to provide the readers with the pleasure of a closure from time to time, but in order to stay alive he needs to avoid the upsetting state of completion by adding more and more titles to a series.

## **Serial Killer as Collector**

The Number One Fan of Paul Sheldon’s romances is not the typical meek housewife but a violent serial-killer nurse with a large stash of painkillers. To an unhappy bestselling writer who feels victimized by the fan expectations and confined in seriality, this is probably the best picture the narrator could have provided of a zealous fan. The analogy between a serial killer and a fan stalking his/her favorite author(s) and repetitively acquiring and consuming their latest publications and keeping their books like trophies on shelves to indulge in them over and over again later makes an interesting case in the context of collecting culture.

A serial killer is made by the repetition of the act of acquiring victims and possessing them figuratively and sometimes even literally through keeping body parts or their belongings as trophies. Serial killing and serial killers have undoubtedly existed for a long time, but the popular picture presented in media and used in fictional works is an almost new concept. As Sara Knox discusses, the “forensic and media construction”

of serial killing has created a special picture of the serial killer: “The person of the killer himself becomes a sort of discursive object in a collection—a collection that is something in excess of a catalogue, and not much less than a pantheon, of killers” (294). This idea of the collector being collected will be the common point between the two main characters in *Misery*.

In addition to direct references to John Fowles’s *The Collector*, there are easily recognizable similarities in plot and characterization between Fowles’s well-known novel and King’s *Misery*. A quotation from *The Collector* opens one of the chapters of *Misery*, and Paul Sheldon somewhere wonders if Annie “had John Fowles’s first novel on her shelves” (163). *The Collector* is the story of a psychopath—and a serial-killer-to-be—who kidnaps and imprisons Miranda Grey, an art student, to make her love him and make her his own. There are parallels between Frederick Clegg’s hobby of collecting butterflies and his attempts to possess the beauty of the girl he thinks he is in love with. The choice of a serial killer as one of the main characters in *Misery* is certainly not King’s only experience with serial killing in his fiction. King’s serial killers (such as *It’s* Pennywise or *Black House’s* The Fisherman) mostly have supernatural origins and are pictured as other-worldly. The nearest example of a conventional serial killer in his fiction is probably Bob in “A Good Marriage,” a novella published in *Full Dark, No Stars* (2010). Bob is a numismatist who starts a mail-order business in collectible American coins, baseball trading cards, and old movie memorabilia with his wife who also knows about coin collecting. He is later revealed to be “a fetishistic sadistic murderer and sex predator,” killing at least eleven women (*Full Dark* 307). Interestingly, his death arrives

the same day he finds the missing piece of his coin collection by sheer accident. He expires as soon as the collection is complete.

Annie is another conventional serial killer in King's fiction that has been portrayed more implicitly. Paul understands from her scrapbook that her world is full of "poor poor things" who deserve being murdered and added to her collection of obituaries. He looks for motivations behind the murders but finds nothing except Annie's whimsical killing desire. She used to be an attractive girl when she was younger and she was successful in her career as a nurse. She was not victim to any sort of abuse and was not raised in a problematic family. Although Annie is not a supernatural killer, King makes no attempts "to rationalize [her] sociopathology. [...] She has always been a monster, a thing beyond rational explanation or moral boundaries" (Pharr 25). In spite of her obsession with Paul Sheldon, Annie is not even like Morris Bellamy in King's *Finders Keepers* (2015) who murders several times because of his dangerous obsession with America's iconic author John Rothstein. Morris kills to own a bunch of notebooks containing some unpublished work by his favorite author. Unlike Morris's killing spree, Annie's murders do not start with Paul Sheldon but end with him. She writes her victims off one by one because she finds them wretchedly monotonous. She is stopped only when she meets her favorite writer who is full of stories and is able to keep her amused in an ongoing manner. To Annie, her other victims were only pitiable creatures that had only one story to tell, and that was the story of their wretched lives. Paul Sheldon, however, is full of stories, and that makes him elusive enough not to be pinned down easily like a dead butterfly in the serial killer's collection. She knows well that she cannot kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Annie is the representative avid reader, but she herself is a writer in a sense. Dominick Grace in “Writers and Metafiction ...” suggests that she is presented as a writer and novelist “rewriting the world to her own muse,” bringing examples such as the scene where Annie recounts the details of the local cop’s visit to her abode and how she cunningly weaves a plot to mislead the detectives and buy herself some time (68). However, as Grace briefly mentions, her masterpiece and the one she is pleased with when she finds out Paul has read it is her scrapbook or Book of Dead. The most prominent and memorable instance of a scrapbook featured in King’s fiction is the scrapbook Jack Torrance finds in Overlook and from which he learns about the horrifying past of the hotel:

Between its covers Torrance finds a mélange of newspapers, letters, photographs, diary entries, and seemingly random notations that chronicle events from the hotel’s sordid past. It is as if the Overlook is revealing its most intimate relationships to Torrance, filling the darkest chambers of the writer’s mind with details of its darkest moments in history while he sits alone in a dark corner of its basement. (Magistrale, *America’s Storyteller* 108)

Magistrale has written several pages on the significance of the chapter “Scrapbook” in *The Shining*, but Annie’s scrapbook has not been discussed much in spite of its importance in her characterization.

Annie’s scrapbook, which she calls her “Memory Lane,” is the story of her life and the murders she has committed. Apparently, it is as compelling as a well-written novel

to Paul: "He bent over the book again. In a weird way it was just too good to put down. It was like a novel so disgusting you just have to finish it" (*Misery* 194). King is perfectly aware of the narrative power of scrapbooks and from his childhood experience of keeping one about Charles Starkweather, he knows how to redefine newspaper cuttings, pictures and similar objects in order to make them part of a collection. Like in any other collections, the structure of a scrapbook formed by the accumulation and arrangement of objects plucked out of their original context and given a new function has the essential development for a narrative. In serial killer scrapbooks, the seriality inherent to the atrocities of the killer affords the collection a seamless sequential movement and builds the thrill of anticipating more and more. This compelling narrative is formed by the deadening function of collecting in terms of making objects useless through introducing them into a new system of order. The function is present in both acts of killing serially and putting together a scrapbook of a serial killer's media coverage. Annie's Book of the Dead with the news pieces and obituaries of her victims is the autobiography she has unintentionally written. The ultimate piece in her collection is no one but herself: the little scraps tell the stories of her victims and reveal their identities, and the accumulation of the scraps in her book reveals the killer's identity.

The idea of the collector being collected mostly resonates with Baudrillard's statement that "a given collection is made up of a succession of terms, but the final term must always be the person of the collector," and how items in a collection are given identity by the collector and vice versa ("System of Collecting" 12). However, when Knox in "The Serial Killer as Collector" discusses how a serial killer is "collected," she is referring to profiling techniques used by detectives and forensics professionals to track

down serial killers. Even before Paul finds Annie's scrapbook, he uses similar techniques and starts reading her habits and behavior in order to avoid her wrath and to predict what she will do next; he "becomes a skilled reader quickly: he has to in order to stay alive" (Berkenkamp 205). Paul puts all the fragments of information he finds in his observations of Annie's words about her past and present together to weave a narrative and make a clear picture of his prison guard. He gathers bits and pieces everywhere to complete the puzzle, like a detective on the profiling board so well known in serial killer narratives.

Forensic science techniques are commonly used in criminal investigations, but what distinguishes the serial killer cases is the importance of patterns and series. The fragmentary scrapbook is only a larger piece in the puzzle that comes later to add more details to the deductions Paul has already made. Paul Sheldon, as a bestseller author and a major contributor in the publishing industry, must have a good understanding of profiling: he needs to make predictions and read clues of the potential readers' reading habits and their needs and desires in order to attract more readers or keep the present ones satisfied. These deductions and intuitions usually lead to patterns that repeatedly appear in an author's body of works. On the other hand, readers decide on the author they intend to invest in by finding patterns in the choice of genre, themes, characters, style, and so forth. Reading cues and making moves according to the traced patterns is how this mutual relationship between readership and authorship works. The profiling at work here is only one point where the serial writer and serial killer meet.

Strong affiliations between serial killing and collecting (i.e. the killer as a collector and/or a collectible) has proved King's choice of John Fowles's novel as the

framework for his confessional work on the harrowing experiences of a bestselling author to be an exemplary move. The complicated position of a writer being collected by his fans and the fans being profiled by the writer becomes even more meaningful when mixed with the idea of the double. When Annie comes back to life in the closing section of the novel and keeps haunting Paul, one may wonder whether she might have never existed in the first place and has merely been the creation of acute pain and delirium. The double is the state of with-in that finds shape with-out. Paul and Annie are both the subject and object of multiple acts: they both write/read, kill/revive, and collect/be collected at different stages of the narrative.

Paul Sheldon's encounter and conflict with Annie Wilkes is an externalization of his—and King's—love/hate relationship with genre writing and his readership. The fight between the two sides is well noticed in the popular image of the human/monster hybridity of a serial killer, a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type of struggle and conflict. The serial killer is a good example of split personality and of living two different lives. They require an unsuspecting character, if not a likeable one, to be able to hide behind and commit the ominous crimes without being suspected. The embodiment of an author's fans and readership in a *doppelgänger* figure is a different way of representing the author's identity split. This split has found realization in other King's works such as *The Dark Half* and "Secret Window, Secret Garden," as mentioned before.

In *The Dark Half*, Thad Beaumont's unborn twin brother who thrives inside his body in fragments is born as George Stark and becomes his pen name under which he publishes successful crime novels. George Stark, who functions as the imposter author, is evidently receiving more recognition and appraisal than Thad, the real author. *The*



*Dark Half* was written in response to King's experience with his own pseudonym, Richard Bachman. With a slight twist, King's pseudonym was a cover to protect his reputation as a bestselling author and to not disappoint his readers with his less successful writings. Bachman books were not typical horror novels and they were not comparable in quality because they mostly belonged to King's early attempts at professional writing. Rumors about the real identity of Richard Bachman became stronger only when *Thinner*, a relatively newer novel, was published in 1984 and readers noticed too many similarities with King. Even before King publically admitted it, some collector catalogues noted that he was Bachman (Collings, *Stephen King as Richard Bachman* 1). King's brand name was so popular by the time Bachman's real identity was revealed that even those not-really-good books were sold out instantly and were queued for re-runs.

There are differences between Bachman's story and the pseudonym-*doppelgänger* in *The Dark Half*, but this work demonstrates how King had to use a pseudonym "to publish stuff when I didn't want to be Stephen King" (qtd. in Winter, *Faces of Fear* 238). King has experienced the double life of publishing under a pen name and that is not to mention the doubleness every writer experiences:

He is two men—he has ALWAYS been two men. That's what any man or woman who makes believe for a living must be. The one who exists in the normal world ... and the one who creates worlds. They are two. Always at least two.

(*The Dark Half* 375)

*Misery* goes further beyond the *doppelgänger* pen name and the self-splitting feeling inherent to professional writing: it deals with the encounter between Paul and the embodiment of his internal conflicts regarding the professional choices he needs to make. Annie has lived a double life of a nurse/mercy killer, but that is only a superficial take on the double and split personality in *Misery*. The novel is more a representation of the conflict between the two sides of the writer character: the constructive and the destructive one. Paul's relationship with his double gets even more complicated when we think of Paul as the one who killed Misery Chastain and Annie as the resurrector, the one who insists on keeping the character alive and giving her one more chance to perform. There are points in *Misery* that the writer and the killer are not distinguishable anymore and they are both portrayed as tormented by and trapped in seriality.

## **Kitschification of Fiction**

Paul Sheldon, as discussed before, is imprisoned by a genre and series and is chained to his chair and desk for as long as he is in demand. He even loses a few body parts in the painful process of morphing into the storytelling machine that is desired by the goddess of readership. This horrid state of being bound is what King has shared with his readers in *Misery*. In the early years of his career, King was warned that he would be typed as a horror writer, but he did not see anything wrong with that. Bill Thompson, who was his editor at the time, warned him that the labeling would be “a significant long-term detriment in terms of public perception” (Beahm, *Boogeyman* 36), but King preferred to be a horror writer than one who writes “obscure books for bright academics” (*Different Seasons*’ “Afterword” 501). Not long after, King came to a point

where he “could [even] publish his laundry list if he wanted to” but he was not happy that his fiction “was not taken seriously outside the fan field” and was treated like “second-class citizens at the publishing house” (Beahm, *Boogeyman* 49). In his first years, King was naturally writing to satisfy the publishing houses’ demands and cater to the time’s craving for horror and fantasy. By the time he decided to write what he preferred to instead of what was demanded by his body of fans, he had turned into a brand name “like Vaseline or Coca Cola” (Fiedler 55). King was aghast to find himself a “Bestsellasaurus Rex—a big, stumbling book-beast that is loved when it shits money and hated when it tramples houses” (qtd. in Beahm, *Boogeyman* 85).

King has repeatedly admitted his obsession with writing and how compulsively he has to work a certain number of hours every day, but this is not all. There are obviously other forces at work in the marketplace exerted by the publishers and agents. In *Misery*, Annie is the embodiment of part of this demand, generally acknowledged as fan expectations. The ultimate state of enslavement of the celebrity writer by fans’ needs and desires is perfectly presented in the complicated relationship between Paul and Annie. Paul has the feeling that Annie is the goddess he has to serve, one with the power to decide about his fate. Annie is, after all, the one who gives life to Paul by literally rescuing him from the car wreck and by figuratively *inspiring* him for his next novel. Annie, on the other hand, admires Paul as a celebrity writer to the point of worship. She thinks of Paul as a god who gives life to characters and takes it back whenever they are done serving their roles. In addition, the celebrity is elevated to the position of an idol in fandom culture and the fans prove their passion through rituals of possession and consumption. The fluctuation in the two sides of this equation

demonstrates how the law of supply and demand rules the publishing business and where the publishers come into play.

In the publishing industry, trends in mass production and consumption of reading materials are not solely determined by originality and literary qualities. Reading was liberated from being the pastime of elites and higher classes when the printing press was invented, but mass production of books was not enough to include readers who lacked certain literary taste or skills. Certain techniques of mass culture had to come to make cultural products available to the large population who were excluded by unaffordable high art in general. In one of its latest developments, kitsch products were introduced in diverse media and were made available to the public in places such as department stores. Continuation of these products was guaranteed by marketing strategies such as providing the consumers with items regularly updated by little variations. In the publishing industry, while the practice of putting out follow-up stories to top-selling titles has been common from the birth of the novel, it has been only recently that sequels and trilogies are systematically considered from early stages, thereby even affecting the conventions of opening and closing narratives.

Kitsch might not be the common word to describe a work of literature, but there are certain similarities between the *bricabracomania* in kitsch culture and mechanical reproduction of works of popular literature for mass diffusion. In *Kitsch and Culture*, Sarah Goodwin defines kitsch as “mass-produced art-for-profit that exploits the public’s weakness for grand ideas at small prices” (10). King wanted “to be a supermarket name, a name that is recognizable by a large percentage of the American reading public,” he wrote in a 1966 letter to Bill Thompson, his editor at Doubleday (Beahm, *Stephen King*

*Story* 180). He has been tiptoeing the fine line between originality and borrowing from myth, fairy-tales, folk tales, classic fantasy writers and the film adaptations. It is an overstatement that King revitalized the horror genre single-handedly, as some avid fans might believe, but it is easy to observe that he turned that into a profitable business. In an interview by Jo Fletcher, King admits that he has made horror and terror his business because he knows well that fear is “a marketable obsession” (vii). His debut novel was timed well with the already developed public taste for the genre. King, after all, had the privilege of being raised when the reruns of 1930s horror film classics were popular, and he was very well aware of the American nostalgia for horror monsters. He knew he had a largely unified audience and manipulated that potential only in a different medium. His long-lasting status as a brand name author and his practice of appropriating horror characters and themes on a literary assembly line for decades prove he has achieved that goal of becoming a household name among readers.

King’s million-copy sellers have also had a flourishing side business of limited and first editions for zealous readers who happen to be serious collectors too. These collectors soon realized the value of King hardcovers and memorabilia, and soaring catalogue prices for such items prove that their investment is already returning significantly high profit. Being aware of the high demand for King collectibles, the author and his publishing team have granted smaller publishing companies the opportunity to produce “limited, deluxe editions” in very small quantities and at much higher prices than the ordinary hardcovers and paperbacks to cater for more serious collectors (Schweitzer 163). As an example, *Insomnia* was printed (the gift edition in 3750 copies at \$75 and the signed edition in 1250 copies at \$175) by Mark Ziesing, a

small press in California (Beahm, *Companion* 32). Collecting King has become a profitable business, and the price for some rare items has escalated beyond expectations. This is mostly because there appear to be more and more “fanatical completists who must have a first edition in super-fine condition” (Schweitzer 164).

Annie insisting on being the sole possessor of the only copy of the sequel to the *Misery* novels can be regarded as a caricature of these completist collectors. The idea of owning the extremely rare copies of a bestselling author’s works is so intriguing that it can make a collector do anything and pay any prices. Annie who used to travel to the grocery store to check on Paul Sheldon’s new books suddenly finds herself in a position where she can possess this gem of a rare copy. The practice of collecting limited editions, numbered limited editions, signed and numbered limited editions, or even galley proofs of a title is just a more exclusive form of collecting kitchified genre hardcovers and paperbacks. *Misery* is a story of the extremities, and it is quite plausible that a Number One Fan would want to acquire the unbound single manuscript of her favorite author’s latest novel.

This is certainly an extreme case but not more extreme than Paul sitting at his desk for hours every day to meet the deadline his fan has set while she provides him with provisions like a prison guard. This is the ultimate image of the mechanical reproduction of popular literature detailed with all sorts of miseries the author has to experience. References to Paul and his typewriter as prosthesis and recurrent accounts of the man and the machine both losing parts is just another grotesque image of this metamorphosis. The book industry, like other cultural artifacts, is now a ritualistic system with all sorts of cult collectors feeding on it. Ordinary players brag about the

stack of paperbacks piled up in their sitting rooms and the bigger players visit auctions for thousand-dollar rare hardcovers. What they are least concerned about (or, most pleased with) is the seriality game they are all playing.

## Conclusion

*Misery* is the story of a popular author enslaved by his readership and the genre he has been famous for. Paul Sheldon's main concern and the cause for all the miseries he goes through in the novel is his longing to find a way out of the confinement of the romance genre and the celebrity status that has followed it. The shift from a mere popular writer to an academically acclaimed one has been King's concern and challenge too, and has been suggested as one of the main reasons why King's books after *Misery* did not sell as much:

... this emphasis change helps to explain the minor erosion of King's established reputation as a mega-seller, since books that follow *Misery* generally remained on the *New York Times* Bestseller List only half as long as those published prior to it. (Carvajal qtd. in Magistrale, *Hollywood* 62)

The move towards more mature writing, however, did not break the spell that seriality got him under. The main idea in this chapter was to show how, like other bestselling authors, King has been simultaneously nourished and confined by genre and serial writing. In a foreword to *Fear Itself*, titled "On Becoming a Brand Name," King compares his situation to Charles Dickens as "the first brand name writer" to describe his position

and defend his reputation. What may interest us in this analogy is the way both these legends of the book industry owe their current statuses to serial publishing in its various forms and their comparably larger availability and accessibility to the public. However, seriality has also a darker side that is best described in *Misery* as a mother figure and a nurse who happens to be a serial killer in hiding.

King has been working with macabre ideas and has made collections of them to the point that he has become a collectible himself. He has amassed a solid body of fans during years of writing, and all these followers keep acquiring and consuming his works ritualistically. In an interview with *Fangoria* magazine, one of the popular fan magazines for horror and gore lovers, King says, "People don't read me because they want horror. They read me because they like Stephen King" (Beahm, "Celebrity Writer" 33). Part of this wide acceptance is because he is available and affordable in terms of accessible language. He is "the literary equivalent of a Big Mac and fries" (Underwood, "The Skull" 302). However, the fans' urge to possess every King-related product in different capacities (from trade paperbacks to limited editions and memorabilia) is a factor that cannot be ignored.

Despite the blurring of genre boundaries in contemporary literature, categorizing publications under different genres still exists and matters in the book industry. A horror fan obviously checks the Horror shelf in bookstores or items tagged with that keyword in libraries first, if not only. However, the emergence and flourishing of the new category "Bestseller" in the past decades has revolutionized the publishing industry in this regard. A new King novel is placed on a special rack in a recognizable spot in a bookstore or is strategically placed on the bestselling table among limited



numbers of other bestselling authors in the spotlight. Members of the bestseller category may belong to different genres or a combination of them, but what qualifies them to be on the list is the higher public demand for them. King owes a large part of his success to his constant presence on the bestseller lists. Like other celebrity authors, repeatability and small variations are the key ideas that help them keep this assembly machine running.

Paul is well aware that he will be the final item in Annie's collection of murder victims unless he keeps producing another book for the Misery series. He brings Misery Chastain back from death only to satisfy Annie's demand for one more book. Being the legendary storyteller and Scheherazade of the story, Paul temporarily resolves the life and death situation he is trapped in with seriality. He stays alive and the charm of the harem by telling more and more stories. The picture of seriality in *Misery*, having both favorable and unfavorable consequences, fits the concept of the double in the confrontation of a serial writer and a serial killer. There is such a harmony between the two characters that the idea of a *doppelgänger* in the novel sounds more and more plausible when the reader thinks of all the dualities we mentioned in our discussion of the double in this chapter. Paul is not a killer but pins characters down in his concordance (King always uses concordances to keep track of characters and events while writing his novels), similar to what Annie does to her victims in her scrapbook.

Paul finally creates his masterpiece of a novel when he meets the spectral fan figure, Annie. *Fast Cars*, the novel he was hoping to save him from writing popular novels, was burnt into ashes, but his new Misery Chastain book becomes a sensational hit in an ironic turn of events. In the full realization of the writing-reading circle, the

horrifying truth dawns on him that death is the only possibility to disavow his brand-name author status. He can always start a new series or sub-series, but that only postpones the death moment. The Number One Fan never dies and will keep haunting the writer because it is a monster born of seriality. Fandom culture hunts bestselling writers down one by one, sucks their ideas out, and exhibits them on shelves like serial-killer trophies and macabre collectibles.

## Conclusion

It has been a few decades since popular literature began to receive serious attention from literary critics and some novelty courses appeared in literary and cultural studies programs, but popular literature is still categorized as sub-literary. It is, however, not enough to keep looking for literary merit in the works of popular authors in order to justify and elevate them. What is essential is to stop reading them *in spite of their popularity* and make observations and evaluations within the frameworks of popular culture. In the case of Stephen King, we can either search for the few *shining* moments in his career and call his success only an evidence for the degenerating literary taste of the mass readers, or study his creations and the whole idea of the “King phenomenon” as a significant chunk of today’s mass culture.

The human-thing relationship was chosen as the pivotal idea in this study because of its definitive role in this culture and how it narrowed down the discussion in spite of its broadness. This project was interested in a specific form of that relation, that is, collecting, which is both ancient and modern, both limited and limitless, both timed and timeless, and both inclusive and exclusive. Collecting first sounded like a loose framework for a detailed study of Stephen King’s works, but numerous references to such behavior in his novels and short stories, either in characterization or in their

overall structure and writing style, encouraged an attempt to apply theories of collecting to King's career and find the possible influences of this dominant cultural phenomenon in modern America on him. In addition, the fact that King has created a cult of horror readers and his brand has turned into a popular collectible, not only in the US but also in all the other countries in which he has been translated and published, supported the decision.

A large number of King's novels and short story collections can be related to the culture of collecting, but only four of his major novels from three different decades of his career were selected for the purpose of this project. *It*, *Needful Things* and *Duma Key* were discussed in chronological order; however, *Misery* was examined out of that order and in the final chapter because it dealt with the fate of the collector as a collectible and the final piece in the collection. Brief references have been made to some of King's other works throughout the study to stress the point that finding traces of collecting culture is not limited to the selected four novels. King's magnum opus, the *Dark Tower* series featuring multiple genres, is for instance missing where seriality is discussed in the study, and is going to be the subject of a future project.

One of the reasons that Stephen King was chosen to be studied as a collector and a collectible was seeing his voluminous books as figures of containment and treasure chests full of monstrosities and found objects. Apart from the fact that both his fictional and non-fictional books are like a *who's who* of the horror genre, "His novels and short stories are filled with *things*, not just monsters and frights. One could create a pastiche of consumer culture from them: *Scooby Doo*, Virginia Slims, Jim Beam, Budweiser, *Perry Mason*, Lysol, Mickey Mouse, Rolex, Banana Republic, *One Life to Live*, Toyota, Baby

Ruth, Slurpies, Ryder Trucks, Duracell batteries” (LaBrie 54). This quality has made King’s books comparable to time capsules meant to be dug up by future generations to find catalogues of our cultural and consumer products. The mash-up of the fantasy/horror elements and ordinary stuff contained in his novels will certainly be of interest to future critics/archeologists. To the resulting monstrosity, it is reasonable to add that his works are also freaks in the sense that they cannot be compartmentalized in one single category; he has been labeled as a horror writer but most of his novels and short stories work in multiple categories (Patrouch 8-10).

The metaphor of a novel as a container full of curiosities received further expansion and was translated into various spatial forms to serve as one of the major tools in this project. The novel *It* was compared to a *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities to comment on how a parade of different horror icons in multiple episodes forms a seamless narrative of wonder. *Wunderkammern*, as one of the most noticeable forms of collecting and a landmark in the course of scientific reasoning, are characterized by oddities and incongruities linked by wonder to provide the audience with “continuous, compounding amazement” (Weschler qtd. in Hepburn 163). A similar disorganized and monstrous space was later discussed in the context of *Needful Things* as a hoarder’s den. In addition to the novel’s fragmentary narrative and demographic heap of multiple characters as a hoarded space, the small shop, *Needful Things*, was also looked at as a darkroom in which fantasies are developed and the shoppers are surrounded by phantasmagorias. The small town of Castle Rock in *Needful Things* that resembles Derry’s sewer system in *It* where the lost souls float around (and down) shifts to a small island in the next novel.

The image of an island as a contained space has a slightly different function in *Duma Key* and finds significance in relation to time. The static land gains a kind of dynamism as a result of its interactions with water. The novel's major themes of (re)memory and playing with time were discussed here in the context of a framed piece of land that works like a painting, a vessel that carries a piece of reality through time. With a bit of stretch, Annie's secluded abode in *Misery* also works as a container for Paul's internal and external conflicts in his career and the stage for the duel of the doubles. The physical format of the book—a book inside another with two different typesets—attracts the reader's attention to this function of the book as an embodied conflict zone.

Collecting is certainly not limited to a casual accumulation of oddities in a contained space as small as a box or cabinet, but the concept opened up discussions in three major modes of collecting—souvenir, fetishistic and systematic. This project's concern was not to pigeonhole different forms of collecting in King according to these three categories, but all of them were somehow covered throughout the study. Souvenir collecting, which is about selecting and arranging things to remember, was mostly recognizable in *Duma Key* and fetishistic collecting, which deals with dominant objects and an obsessive need on the part of the collector to gather them in order to patch up their selves, mainly applied to *Needful Things*. The novel *It* could be categorized under the third type of collecting, the systematic, that serves taxonomic purposes and has epistemological implications. The general rationale for collecting, that is, to complete a set, was more directly addressed in the chapter on *Misery* and seriality.

Discussions made in this study were diverse but all inside the framework of collecting culture. They can be summarized as follows:

**Order of things in nature and its epistemological implications** - The contrast

between childhood and adulthood that generally appears in King's fiction has been discussed from different points of view: the transition from one stage to the other in coming-of-age interpretations, the importance of imagination in children and its lack as a disability in adults, the perfect locus to nurture two parallel realities, and finally, one of the two groups assuming the role of 'the other'. What was emphasized in this project was the juxtaposition of these two phases in an epistemological perspective, that is, childhood standing for primitive thinking with its reliance on awe and wonder and adulthood for rational and scientific thinking. The liminality of Cabinets of Curiosities in both the selection of the exhibited objects and their arrangements (in relation to each other and to the outside world) provided the opportunity to discuss the tension and transition between these two epistemes. The move from one episteme to the other and back again in King's *It* explains why wonder and imaginative faculty are important in his fiction and how monstrosities help the readers see the world more fully and with less prejudice. The curiosities that King has collected in his fantastic cabinets might not be awe-inspiring to most literary critics, but have certainly aroused awe in the cult followers without worrying about making everything explainable.

**Narrativity inherent in every collection** - Bringing collecting and collector types into the process of character development is only one way writers can use the narrativity and story-telling function of collections in their fiction. Narrative qualities make a distinction between an accumulation of random objects and a proper collection. The collector functions as the narrator and makes the series of objects meaningful. He is the one who tells stories with his acquisition of things and their arrangements. Verbal units in a narrative are not much different from the material objects that construct a collection, and the comparison made in the chapter on *Needful Things* between extreme collecting and the jumbled narrative of the novel was an attempt to explore this potential in various forms of collecting as narrative models. It is also a characteristic of all collections to intermingle past, present and future, as well as the possibility to read a collection in multiple orders depending on the arrangement of the items and the way sets and subsets have been defined by the collector. Such a fluid treatment of time in narrating collections was called upon in the chapter on *Duma Key*. The dynamism of narrative was discussed from a different angle and in contrast to the supposed static form of a collection, particularly the *Wunderkammer* of King's *It*. The amorphous narrativity in collecting well suits the story of the shape-shifter entity in *It*, but finds an additional twist in the chapter on *Misery* in which one of the questions to be answered is: "Where a collection starts and where it ends?"



**Time-space interactions in the special environment of a collection** - The peculiar atmosphere of a collection with things originated from different times and places contained in a framed environment makes it a potent vehicle for discussions on time-space relations. Collecting is an activity that is possible and meaningful only in the passage of time. One object does not make a collection, but there is always a first item that the collection is built around with forward or backward movements depending on the position of the first object in the collection and the order in which the other members of a set are acquired. This continuous back and forth movement in time to build a temporally seamless narrative of collectibles—usually of disparate geographical origins—needs to be placed in a unified space to be properly called a collection. In a very simplified manner, a similar kind of compression of time and space that is implied in Foucault's heterotopia was applied to King's *It* and the sites of horror in it. Applying this heterotopic context to *Duma Key* sounded even more far-fetched because the island looks like a utopia for artists; however, the novel's major theme of recollecting through the medium of painting made the discussion of heterotopias plausible. The magic island is where broken people find the ability to re-member (past) as well as re-invent (future) the reality they have been barred from by their traumatic experiences. This time fusion with its healing effects becomes possible only through souvenir objects which are both found and created in the narrative.

**Identity formation in collecting** – Transitional objects well known in psychoanalysis are definitely not the only objects that help individuals in personality development and identity formation. Even ordinary household objects are constantly in interaction with humans and leave their marks on people around them as much as they develop a character of their own in their interactions with their owners and users. The bond made with the objects in everybody's immediate environment is, however, stronger when those objects are part of a collection even in its broad sense. Apart from the microcosmic view of the world provided by certain types of collections, one other function of collections is portraying the collector's self and helping form his/her identity. The undeniable relationship between identity and one's experiences and how those experiences are remembered is mostly discussed in souvenir collecting because such collectibles are considered to be the carriers of memories. However, the need and desire that live through fetishes or the attention and intention that are invested in serial collecting cannot be neglected in this identity formation process. Baudrillard could not have made it simpler when he states that "it is invariably *oneself* that one collects" (Elsner & Cardinal 12). How horror icons are accumulated in *It* to survey the cultural memory of a nation, how Gaunt's customers in *Needful Things* swap their souls for collectibles, how memories hibernate in forgotten objects inside attics and suddenly reappear like drowned treasures surfacing after storms in *Duma Key*, and how a collector is both the beginning and the end of a series of collectibles in *Misery* are all examples of the narcissistic act in which collectors collect and build themselves.

**Pathological and extreme forms of collecting** - Collecting things is generally accepted as a normal behavior in childhood and part of every child's development, but it is usually regarded as a deviation from the norm (mild or severe depending on the type of collecting and its intensity) when it is extended into adulthood. The pathological implications and interpretations of various types of collecting behaviors are, therefore, inevitable in any analyses but they were kept to a minimum in the present study. The absence of psychoanalysis might sound striking in parts of the discussion, but that path has been taken before by other texts on King. This study tried to focus on collecting as a meaningful system and follow a semiotic approach. King's practice of cataloging horror icons, motifs and clichés or his detailed observations of familiar names and brands in the American consumer culture, as a result, were not used as examples of his nerdish or anally-retentive personality. They were employed to illustrate how he "persuades his legions of fans because his monstrosities are presented as *information*," as Harold Bloom believes (*Bloom's Modern Critical Views* 208). His episodic and fragmentary texts with numerous characters and events that might look in need of substantive editing were not compared to a malignant hoarded space to comment on the author's character or even the literary value of the texts but to stress the narrative possibilities that such a style of writing provided him. And finally, the obsessive attachment one feels towards objects (especially in collections) and the danger of being drawn into compulsive repetition were not discussed in psychological terms only but were expanded upon to comment on the significance of repetition and obsession in a consumerist cultural milieu.

**Authenticity and originality** - King has widely been criticized for unoriginality and lack of creativity. In spite of the importance of originality in an age where the art of fakery has reached to an unprecedented level due to new technological advances, this study attempted to see King's works of literature in relation to the postmodern trend of continuously mass produced artifacts made possible by small alterations that keep repetitive art always marketable. His works of fiction, which are mostly pastiched developments on classical literature and well-established horror icons, must not be regarded with contempt because of their kitschiness but appreciated because they had a great share in reviving the horror genre and making it available to millions of readers. His originality is in the new arrangement he has given to what he has accumulated from the tradition and the nuances he has added in his creations. As a fantasy writer—also a recurrent character in his fiction—King's business is selling his multitude of fans 'illusions' not only to amuse them but also to share the wisdom (disillusionment with the real world in horror fiction, for example) in a more affordable and accessible manner. The emphasis on hyperreality in the study does not intend to undermine the social and political critique implied in King's fiction. The hesitation that readers experience between *real* and *unreal* in his fantastic world is mostly because of his detailed borrowings from both the readers' everyday life and their past experiences with fantasy films and fiction. King's popularity is a clear sign that appropriation is the new originality and repetitive multiplicity has replaced the old authentic singularity.

**Seriality in collecting and vulnerability of the collector to be collected** – Collecting

is not possible or meaningful without seriality; it is the urge to hunt for the next item and the feeling of being haunted by sets that defines a collector. The collector gets trapped in sets and subsets, and the only way out of the unquenchable thirst to complete sets in order to complete oneself is death of the collector. Similarly, contemporary serial art ensnares one and in spite of the feeling of moving from one work of art to the other (or from one book to a new one), the audience is imprisoned by inescapable repetitions. Both the serial writers and their constant readers are involved in this seriality game. The serial killer character in *Misery* was in a playful position with the novel's main idea that ending seriality means nothing but death: Scheherazade the storyteller has to come up with new variations of a tale in order to be spared by the collector/killer. In such a condition of mechanical reproduction and mass consumption of books, the irony in Annie's insistence to own the single copy of the last *Misery* novel is not hard to notice. In the world of collecting and among serious book collectors, such a unique manuscript is highly demanded and is considered a killer item. The ominous series of paintings in *Duma Key* which brought the death ship more and more into focus with every new installment was another example of the pseudo-constructive process of collecting that is completed only by the death of the collector.

Hyperreality and simulation were two important topics that ran in the background throughout this study. The idea of reading King as a collector, in fact, came from Eco's "Travels in Hyperreality" and what he observes in hyperrealistic collections and imitations of the past in America:

The ideology of this America wants to establish reassurance through Imitation. But profit defeats ideology, because the consumers want to be thrilled not only by the guarantee of the Good but also by the shudder of the Bad. And so at Disneyland, along with Mickey Mouse and the kindly Bears, there must also be, in tactile evidence, Metaphysical Evil (the Haunted Mansion) and Historical Evil (the Pirates), and in the waxwork museums, alongside the Venuses de Milo, we must find the graverobbers, Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man, Jack the Ripper, the Phantom of the Opera. Alongside the Good Whale there is the restless, plastic form of the Bad Shark. Both at the same level of credibility, both at the same level of fakery. (57-8)

In spite of the importance of hyperreality in this study, it was not highlighted very much in order not to steal the show from collecting and collections. Relevant ideas such as the tension between real and unreal (or belief and unbelief), authenticity, originality, seriality and the narratological characteristics of such reconstructions were all discussed within the framework of collecting culture.

The wide range of discussions covered in this study demonstrates how collecting can be a rich source of ideas to properly read Stephen King who has been regarded with

contempt and as “a sub-literary” writer (by critics such as Harold Bloom) because of his popularity and because he has continuously been producing new titles to meet the market demands. King is a collector who was raised in a collecting culture and has become a collectible himself. References to seriality and repetitive art meant for mass consumption are not to explain the absence of high literary standards in brand-name authors like King, but to portray the unavoidable recent trends in art creation and consumption. Harold Bloom, who has objected to the trend, is considered a mass producing brand name himself. His long series of collected essays on various literary figures are well known to students at different levels. These volumes contain selections of articles already published in literary publications (with a foreword by Bloom) usually compiled by his graduate assistants. Collecting and rearranging previously prepared materials in order to make them available and accessible to the public in an updated and homogenous format is similar to what King has been doing in fiction.

There are so many similarities between collage-making, as one of the prominent methods of artistic creation in the postmodern era, and collecting that such trends encourage the application of the collecting culture beyond simply finding evidence of the behavior in characters or following thematic lines in King’s fiction. Looking at the numerous intertextual and intratextual references in his works, or the catalogue format of some of his narratives as an exhibition of curios, or the overpopulated fragmentary atmosphere of some other narratives as a hoarded space were attempts to read his fiction as collages and collections. The collagist perspective obviously brings up the question of innovation and originality, and complicates the claims of authenticity. In the repetitive serial manner whereby cultural artifacts are currently produced, originality

and innovation have been reduced to the small touches of variation that distinguish one copy from another. From a collecting point of view, authenticity and the value ascribed to it has gone through a shift: in the past, the most valuable artifacts were the most perfect and flawless ones, but with mass production and its ability to disseminate tasteless perfection, the valuable items are the misfits and the faulty ones in a series. Monstrosity is precious in the mass market. Uniqueness does not mean singularity any more, but even that concept has been multiplied in the form of numbered limited editions of normally mass produced things.

The supposition that King's fiction is driven by a collecting culture (both on the side of the author and the readers) nourished by the consumer culture entailed seeing his works as kitsch, which was discussed only briefly in this study because of the mostly derogatory connotation of the term. However, the purpose of this project was never to disparage his achievements as one of the most widely read authors in the world or to comment on his talent, but to see his works in the context of popular culture that aspires to be as inclusive as possible rather than exclusive. One of the functions of horror literature is to relieve anxieties and fears, and King has proved that he knows how to do it well through acceptance and including people from all walks of life, things from the ordinary to the extraordinary, and arts from low to high into his fictional worlds.

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively wide range of ideas that made it impossible to have more detailed theoretical discussions. The holistic view on the vast concept of collecting in King's horror fiction was actually adopted at the cost of a narrower topic and more focused argument hoping that it will also be accessible to a



more general readership. Tracing a collecting mindset in Stephen King authorship and the cult he has created was only an attempt to use such mindset as a tool to read his fiction (and similar popular authors). The collecting culture that has been boosted by mass production and mass consumption goes beyond small exhibitions of knick knacks one may find in every household these days. Along with other related trends like collage, kitsch and pastiche, this culture has somehow rewired the brains of all who have been part of it. King has been created and nurtured in such a culture and he is a macabre collector as much as are the constant readers who do not miss a single King.

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