

# Randall Flagg: Stephen King's Devil or Trickster?

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## 1. Introduction

The character of Randall Flagg proves that not only does Stephen King blend genres while compiling story lines but also as regards individual characters. A generic hybrid, Flagg is a composite of many traits, primarily the Dark Man and the Trickster. Below I analyze Flagg in the works he recurs in the order of publication in order to reveal the essential paradox of both this complex character and King's works in general: despite seemingly supernatural characters, events, or story lines, the bedrock of King's credibility lies in his intense realism. In the final analysis, as readers we are forced to face our own flawed humanity in the amorality of Randall Flagg, who appears to be a recurring incarnation possessed by an outside force. In other words, rather than metaphysical concepts, King views both good and evil as very real forces, which, in turn, challenge us to fight for the values we respect. Hence, Flagg embodies much of King's genre-blending and genre-shifting, on the one hand, and reflects the tension between the supernatural and the realistic, on the other – two of the most typical characteristics in his writing.

A recurring character in King, Randall Flagg made his first appearance in *People, Places, and Things*, a collection of eighteen one-page science-fiction and horror short stories in typescript written by the teenage Stephen King and his childhood friend Chris Chesley in the late 1950s (Stephen J. Spignesi, *The Lost Work of Stephen King*, Secaucus: Birch Lane Press, 1999:5; hereafter cited as Spignesi, *Lost*). The collection includes the short story "The Stranger" which reintroduces Kelso Black

of "The Hotel at the End of the Road" (also included in *People, Places, and Things*), a petty criminal who makes a pact with a stranger. Having shot a guard during a robbery, Black celebrates his victory by drinking cheap whisky. He is, however, visited by a stranger "who wore a black coat and [had] a hat pulled over his eyes" ("The Stranger" as quoted in Spignesi, *Lost* 9) and who reminds him of the implicit pact the two of them had made when Kelso killed the guard. The stranger has now come for Kelso Black who is horrified. The stranger laughs in an evil way, and in a moment the room is empty, though the smell of brimstone remains. Stephen J. Spignesi argues that in "The Stranger" King for the first time employs the Dark Man – a personification of evil – who would later become Randall Flagg (and other "R.F." manifestations) (Spignesi, *Lost* 9-10). However, the figure is not named Randall Flagg until *The Stand* (1978). In *The Eyes of the Dragon* (1978) Flagg recurs as a plotting magician and an evil advisor. *The Dark Tower* series (1982-) presents him as an old acquaintance from *The Stand*. Furthermore, Flagg is indirectly referred to in a number of other works, such as *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999), in which the mysterious leader of the group of war protesters, called Raymond Fiegler, is able to make himself *dim*, that is, almost invisible, like Flagg in *The Eyes of the Dragon*.

King could hardly have chosen the character's name by accident. "Flagg," on the one hand, refers to the verb *flag*, that is, 'to give a sign' in the sense of taking a stand. On the other, it can also indicate the unfortunate outcome of the pursuit, that is, 'to wither,' 'to weaken.' In King, good lasts (King in Underwood & Miller, *Feast of Fear: Conversations with Stephen King*, New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992 1989: 65; hereafter cited as Underwood & Miller, *Feast*), whereas Randall always ends up "flagging." The name "Randall" may allude to such well-known ballads as "Oh, Where have You Been, Lord Randall, My Son." Finally, Flagstaff Mountain with its Sunrise Amphitheater rises above the town of Boulder, where the Free-Zone people reside in *The Stand* (Stephen King, *The Stand*, New York: NEL, 1990 1978: 1049, 1131).

Randall Flagg shares a number of demonic traits. A killer, a maker of ultimate mischief, a liar, and a tempter, he sows the seed of evil in many ways. Aptly, Stanley Wiater, Christopher Golden, and Hank Wagner in *The Stephen King Universe* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 2001: 84) note that, like all evil beings, Flagg regards himself as omnipotent and

can therefore be tricked. Flagg is not, however, as they suggest, either the Devil or a demon. Referring to King's college poem, "The Dark Man" (*Ubris*, Fall 1969), Douglas E. Winter considers Flagg "neither Satan nor his demonic spawn" (Douglas E. Winter, *The Art of Darkness*, New York: Signet, 1986 1984: 67). In an interview with Charles L. Grant, King affirms that "the Dark Man isn't the Devil" (Underwood & Miller, *Feast* 21). In another interview with Winter he clarifies this statement by regarding Flagg as similar to Colin Wilson's Outsider – not very bright, full of rage, and real (Winter 67). In yet another interview with Richard Wolinsky and Lawrence Davidson, King views Flagg as everything evil since Hitler: a composite of Charlie Starkweather, Charles Manson, Charles Whitman, the Texas tower killer, and Richard Speck (Underwood & Miller, *Feast* 29). A truly Gothic villain, Flagg is a master of disguise with a collection of masks, but with no identity. Influenced by Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, King, however, seems to take a reluctantly protective or benevolent attitude towards this "last magician of rational thought" (King, *The Stand* 916). Just as evil is represented in Campbell (Joseph Campbell, *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, London: Fontana Press, 1993 1949: 294), King's antagonist works in continuous opposition to the Creator, mistaking shadow for substance. Cast in the role of either the clown or the Devil, Flagg imitates creation and seems to have his place in the cosmogonic cycle. By mockery and by taking delight in creating havoc and chaos, he activates good in order to create new order. This continuous dialogue or, rather, battle maintains the dynamics of mankind's existence.

## 2. Flagg as the Dark Man

I begin the discussion of Randall Flagg's dual nature by considering his demonic traits and from there go on to analyze his Trickster characteristics. Since King regards himself as a Jungian freethinker and has been influenced by Carl G. Jung's sense of myth and symbol (King in Magistrale, *Stephen King: The Second Decade, Danse Macabre to The Dark Half*, New York: Twayne, 1992: 2), I turn to Jung for the archetype of the Dark Man. The term is mine, and this side of Flagg's personality consists



of the Devil and the malicious side of the spiritual factor, that is, the figure of the Wise Old Man. In *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 1991 1959: 214-5), Jung argues that the figure of the Wise Old Man symbolizes the spiritual factor – presumably both poles of good and evil. From this angle, for instance, the manifestation of Dick Hallorann as Danny Torrance's father substitute in *The Shining* (1977) represents the benevolent side of what could also become Randall Flagg. To be more precise, Jung emphasizes that these figures frequently show all the signs of duplicity, if not malice (Jung 215). In fairy tales the old man appears when the hero finds himself in a desperate situation in which a miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune (Jung 217-8). But just as all archetypes have a positive side, they also have one that is at least in part negative. Hence, the figure has an ambiguous elfin character – Merlin, for instance, appears good incarnate in some of his forms and in others an aspect of evil. Like the negative aspect of the Wise Old Man in Jung, King in *The Eyes of the Dragon* seems to view Flagg as the wicked magician who, from sheer egoism and pleasure, does evil for evil's sake (Jung 226-7). In brief, the Dark Man in King represents unpredictability, deceit, evil, cruelty, and malice.

Like Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer, Flagg as "The Walkin Dude" possesses supernatural powers and appears at moments of utter despair to make his devilish offer. A seeker of souls – like Melmoth, Leland Gaunt (*Needful Things*, 1991), who literally gathers souls in his bag, and Andre Linoge (*Storm of the Century*, 1999), who comes for a protégé – Flagg repeatedly demands oaths of allegiance from his victims, often in the form of the sentence "My life for you"/"My soul for you" (King, *The Stand* 457, 718; King, *The Eyes of the Dragon*, New York: Signet, 1988 1987: 37; King, *The Waste Lands*, New York: Plume, 1992 1991: 388-9). A tragic character, the wanderer figure has been cursed to wander eternally on earth, unless he passes the burden to an even worse sinner. However, neither The Walkin Dude nor King's other demonic villains suffer from a guilty conscience – a crucial difference from the classic wanderer figure, the Wandering Jew, but a clear resemblance to the equally classical Trickster figure. Composite characters, the vampire, Kurt Barlow (*Salem's Lot*, 1975), the demon, Andre Linoge (*Storm of the Century*), the hooded occult character, Walter (*The Gunslinger*, 1982), and Randall Flagg bear an obvious family resemblance.

Also, just as Randall Flagg pursues the virginal Nadine Cross, Melmoth, too, consummates his demon-marriage to Isidora. Isidora's marriage with Melmoth shifts her to the world of shadows: "All was mist and darkness with her" (Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 1820): 394). She becomes pregnant with Melmoth's child, just as Nadine Cross bears Flagg's child. Nadine, too, feels "a blackness creeping over her vision" when Flagg falls on her (King, *The Stand* 1074). The sexual union seems to go on endlessly, because Flagg is tireless. Dead cold and older than earth itself, Flagg fills Nadine "with his nightspawn, screaming laughter" (King, *The Stand* 1214-5). In brief, the devilish Melmoth embodies the soul-seeking and lustful part of Randall Flagg's personality.

### 3. Flagg as a Trickster

The notion of *Trickster* was first used by David G. Brinton in the nineteenth century to depict a mythical character who recurs in the oral tales of the peoples of Native America. Brinton's term has no equivalent in any native language, and therefore the Trickster is called Coyote, Rabbit/Hare, Spider, Raven, Jay/Wolverine, or Gluskabe in different parts of the country. Most of these are names for animals, because in the earliest times, there is no need to distinguish between beings in animal or human form. Excessive, gluttonous, obscene, incestuous, and wandering, the Trickster is usually male, but he is able to change sex when needed (Nina Baym et al., "Native American Trickster Tales." In *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999 1979: 55). Destructive, amoral, selfish, and foolish, the figure threatens established order everywhere, but, as Nina Baym points out, it is also a cultural hero and transformer whose actions, in time of myth, afforded the world with an order which humans would historically come to know (Baym 55; Vine Deloria Jr., *Spirit and Reason*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1999: 24). Arthur Cotterell points out that the difference between a folk tale and a myth lies in an emphasis on the supernatural, which also reflects a preoccupation with existential problems, as opposed to a mere interest in narrative. For example, Coyote, the Trick-



ster-god of North American Indian mythology, finds his counterpart in his European cousin of medieval folklore, Reynard the Fox (Arthur Cotterell, *A Dictionary of World Mythology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 1979: 2). A violator of cultural norms, the Trickster has also entered popular culture through such figures as Wile E. Coyote, Batman's Joker, and Randall Flagg.

Non-Native writers have been criticized for simplifying the Trickster, since they often regard the figure as the Devil. For instance, Jung refers to the demonic features exhibited by Yahweh in the Old Testament and finds in them reminders of the unpredictable behavior of the Trickster (Jung 256). The Jungian approach to the Trickster based on Paul Radin's study of the Winnebago Trickster myths, *The Trickster* (1956), has rightly been criticized by Vine Deloria, a Native American writer, and Barbara Babcock, a scholar of American literature. Deloria considers it a classic example of white psycho/ anthropologizing of Native peoples (Deloria 17-31), and Babcock criticizes Jung for viewing the Trickster as the symbol of an undifferentiated psychic state in the process of differentiation (Barbara Babcock, "'A Tolerated Margin of Mess': The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered." In Wigel, Andrew (ed.), *Critical Essays on Native American Literature*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985: 165-6). By means of Babcock's list of typical Trickster characteristics, however, I wish to show how these contradictory elements have been combined in the figure of Flagg. If he lacks positive features, he may be a rather simplistic and two-dimensional Trickster. Babcock's list includes 16 points, which I have summarized. In most cases Tricksters (Babcock 162-3)

- (1) exhibit an independence from temporal and spatial boundaries.  
Flagg can seemingly appear in different places at the same time: "He *materialized* like a ghost" (King, *The Stand* 1143; italics original). Flagg is a shape-shifter who is able to send forth his Eye. He goes under different names in different places and times.
- (2) tend to inhabit places situated between the social cosmos and the other world or chaos.  
Roland the Gunslinger, Flagg's mythical antithesis and antagonist, sees Flagg "near the end, as chaos and the final crash approached the land," that is, near the destruction of the kingdom of Roland's father (Stephen King, *The Drawing of the Three*, New York: Plume, 1989 1987: 362).
- (3) are often involved in scatological/coprophagous episodes of a creative, destructive, or amusing kind.  
Although an obscene figure, this feature cannot directly be applied to Flagg.

- (4) may partake of the attributes of Trickster-Transformer-Culture Hero.  
This cannot be applied to Flagg, who is an anti-hero aiming at chaos and destruction.
- (5) often exhibit some mental and/or physical abnormality (especially sexual).  
Flagg is repeatedly considered insane.
- (6) have an enormous libido without procreative outcome.  
Flagg is very virile, but he has no progeny.
- (7) have an ability to disperse and disguise themselves and a tendency to be ambiguous and single/multiple.  
This is true of Flagg. See, for instance, his several disguises in *The Eyes of the Dragon* (Stephen King, *The Eyes of the Dragon*, New York: Signet, 1988 1987: hereafter cited as King, *Dragon* 60-2).
- (8) frequently have a two-fold physical nature, are of uncertain sexual status, and are associated with mirrors.  
Clearly male, Flagg does not exhibit any androgynous features. However, "[h]is mind was very complex, like a hall of mirrors with everything reflected twice at different sizes" (King, *Dragon* 132).
- (9) follow the "principle of motley" in dress.  
This can be applied to Flagg. See, for instance, *The Eyes of the Dragon* (King, *Dragon* 60-2).
- (10) are frequently indeterminant (in physical stature) and may be portrayed as both young and old.  
One of Flagg's nicknames, "The Ageless Stranger," refers to this trait.
- (11) exhibit an human/animal dualism and may appear as a human with animal characteristics and vice versa.  
This is true of Flagg. For example in *The Stand*, he takes the form of a coyote, a crow, and a weasel.
- (12) are amoral, asocial, aggressive, vindictive, vain, and defiant of authority.  
Flagg appears to have all these traits.
- (13) find their most abiding form of relationship with the feminine in amother/grandmother form.  
King has not provided Flagg with any family ties.
- (14) tend to be situated between life and death/good and evil.  
Flagg favors death over life and evil over good. King, however, depicts him as a joker and establishes a curious love/hate relationship between Roland and Randall. Incapable of positive emotions, Flagg develops some reluctant liking towards The Trashcan Man, a rejected outsider, in *The Stand* and towards Prince Thomas in *The Eyes of the Dragon*.
- (15) are frequently ascribed to roles (other than tricky behavior) with a certain freedom from social codes.  
Flagg has neither profession nor family ties.
- (16) tend to express a breakdown of the distinction between reality and reflection.  
This can be applied to Flagg. For example in *The Stand*, several characters sense his presence and see him in their dreams, but are unable to verify whether these encounters have been real or reflections.

In brief, Flagg can be placed in points 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, and 16; points 8 and 14 seem ambiguous; and points 3, 4, 13, and 14 cannot

be applied to Flagg. Hence, although Flagg cannot be considered a Trickster through and through, he turns out to be far from a two-dimensional and simplistic non-Native Trickster. It should also be noted that the Trickster characteristics constitute merely one side of Flagg's multi-dimensional personality. In what follows I wish to show in practice how Flagg embodies the traits of the Dark Man and the Trickster with the additional connotations of these figures.

#### 4. Examples of Flagg as the Dark Man and the Trickster

##### *The Stand*

Flagg makes his first appearance in *The Stand* as he is striding south on US 51, heading for Nevada. Wearing sharp-toed cowboy boots, he is depicted as "a tall man of no age in faded, pegged jeans and a denim jacket" (King, *The Stand* 226). Flagg leads a number of separate lives. He is known as, for instance, Richard Fry, Robert Franq, and Ramsay Forrest. In all of these roles he has eagerly participated in several killings, rapes, and setting towns on fire, feeding on human weakness, greed, and hate. Nosing out these questionable human characteristics, they would appear to be Flagg's essence. Obviously, King has also applied to Flagg Jung's conception of the Trickster as a reflection of a psyche that has hardly left the animal level. In this view the disposition to mock and the otherness of the Trickster is derived from its origin in a primordial stage of consciousness which existed before the birth of myth and which corresponds to the id-motivated self-gratification. Both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, the Trickster is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other (Jung 260-3). Flagg, too, does not know exactly where he comes from (King, *The Stand* 230) nor who he is (King, *The Stand* 1008, 1420). In many respects Flagg is more stupid than animals and gets into one ridiculous scrape after another. However, unlike the original Trickster who commits evil from sheer unrelatedness (Jung 264), the Dark Man archetype in the character of Flagg is genuinely evil.

The superinfluenza, Captain Trips, which kills 99.4 percent of the population on earth in *The Stand*, expresses itself and sometimes even per-



sonifies itself in the character of Randall Flagg. Joseph Reino considers Flagg King's version of a pestilent Big Brother who resembles both the flu and the Antichrist (Joseph Reino, *Stephen King: The First Decade, Carrie to Pet Sematary*, Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne, 1988: 57). The sociologist/martyr Glen Bateman suggests different names for him (Beelzebub, Nyarlathotep, Ahaz, Astaroth, R'yelah, Seti, and Anubis), but emphasizes that all of them center on a single notion: Flagg's real name is the biblical Legion, the same demon Jesus turned into a herd of pigs in the New Testament, and in the final analysis he is "an apostate of hell" (King, *The Stand* 1310). King depicts both Flagg and Captain Trips as shape-shifters, and the physician George Richardson's description of the disease could similarly be applied to Flagg's shape- and name-shifting behavior. Resulting in inevitable death, Richardson tells us, the influenza changes every time one's body adopts a defense posture, shifting form until the body is used up (King, *The Stand* 1399-400). However, although some of the characters in *The Stand* believe that Flagg has started the plague himself (King, *The Stand* 1172), that he is Satan/the Antichrist whose coming was foretold in Revelation (King, *The Stand* 1108), he is in fact as real as the superflu and the atomic bombs that await in their leadlined closets (King, *The Stand* 1201). Like Jean Baudrillard in *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (London and New York: Verso, 1999 1990: 81), King believes that evil is both real and omnipresent.

As regards supernatural powers, ability to levitate, and divine characteristics, Flagg, indeed, resembles the Antichrist (Reino 59) and obviously regards himself as such, because he uses crucifixion as a punishment among his people. In an attempt to push his troubles aside, Flagg levitates, his chanting suggesting a parody of the Hebrew cabala and divine creation. The Hebrew cabala represents creation in a series of the emanations out of the "I AM" of the Creator, and it is precisely these words that Flagg keeps repeating when levitating (King, *The Stand* 1247; Campbell 271). In Flagg's pseudo-religious parody of Christ, both Lloyd Henreid, a petty criminal, and The Trashcan Man, a social outcast, hand over their lives and souls to Flagg, who in return sets them to perform various tasks. Henreid becomes his bloodhound, whereas The Trashcan Man is sent out to set fire to things. Significantly, Flagg, a curious savior-figure, appears in dreams and expects to encounter The Trashcan Man in

Las Vegas, a city representing the very base of evil (King, *The Stand* 718-9).

Just as Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, Flagg is able to send forth his Eye. Reino traces this ability back to the cosmology of Heliopolis in ancient Egypt (ca. 2780 B.C.), where the single-armed deity, Atum, had the ability to send forth his single eye called "Wedjet." The eye represents the Egyptian Mother Goddess in her destructive aspect and is associated with terror and slaughter in ancient Egyptian coffin texts. Its "search-and-seizure behavior" seems a fitting companion for Flagg who uses it in a number of functions (Reino 59-60). Mother Abigail is able to sense the search (King, *The Stand* 622), whereas Harold Lauder who has recently crossed over to the side of evil, feels that the Eye is calling him: "The Eye beckoned him. To the west, where the shadows were even now gathering, in their twilight dance of death" (King, *The Stand* 708). Flagg is now about to send his Eye to discover the secrets of Glen Bateman, Ralph Brentner, Stu Redman, and Larry Underwood. The Eye becomes separated from Flagg with a tug and flies like a hawk in the night sky. Joining with the night, he becomes the eye of the crow, wolf, weasel, cat, scorpion, and spider: "a deadly poison arrow slipping endlessly through the desert air" (King, *The Stand* 1271). Reminiscent of Bram Stoker's vampire in *Dracula* (1879) and Count Barlow in *Salem's Lot*, Flagg also commands weasels to frighten Mother Abigail, the embodiment of good in *The Stand*, and wolves to attack Charles Stakweather "the Kid." In his animal form, Flagg also fits Gary Snyder's characterization of Coyote: "always traveling, always lustful" (Gary Snyder, "The Incredible Survival of Coyote." In *The Old Ways: Six Essays*, San Francisco: City Light Books, 1975: 88). "[A?] night-prowler and killer" as well as "a great survivor" (Mark Shackleton, "Native Myth Meets Western Culture: The Plays of Tomson Highway." In Kaplan, Jeffrey, Mark Shackleton & Maarika Toivonen (eds.), *Migration, Preservation, and Change*, Helsinki: renvall Institute Publications 10, 1999: 54-5), Flagg is compared to a coyote (King, *The Stand* 341), which appears among the animals he can command and take the shape of. In other words, in the character of Randall Flagg animal characteristics are combined with the features of the Dark Man and the Trickster.

King regards Flagg as horrific, because he is real. Throughout *The Stand* King refers to the real-life incidents Flagg has experienced and



caused. Regardless of his obscure origin, Flagg has obviously grown as a character in King's imagination since *The Stand*. Shortly after the A-bomb explosion which destroys Flagg's base in Las Vegas we meet a man called Russell Faraday on a bone-white beach. Flagg/Faraday soon adjusts to his new existence, beginning to preach his gospel to the natives: "I've come to teach you how to be civilized!" (King, *The Stand* 1421). And as King never tires of underscoring, the rest is history.

### *The Eyes of the Dragon*

*The Eyes of the Dragon* (1987) focuses on yet another of Flagg's characteristics: Flagg as the Wizard/Shaman/Medicine Man. Jung links the character of the Shaman and the Medicine Man with the Trickster, because he, too, plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim to the vengeance of those whom he has insulted (King, *Dragon* 256). From Flagg's angle, this is precisely what the novel is about. In the land of Delain we encounter a king's magician, an evil enchanter, capable of casting spells, versed in the ways of poisons, and proficient in the art of making oneself *dim*, that is, almost invisible (<http://malakoff.com/sking.htm>). In order to bring about the death of his opponent, the virtuous female character, Queen Sasha, Flagg blackmails her midwife, Anna Crookbrows, to cut one of the Queen's blood vessels during the birth of her younger son, Thomas. When Sasha dies, the indolent and somewhat slow-witted King Roland remains at Flagg's mercy who poisons him, making it appear as the deed of Peter, Roland's elder son. When Peter escapes from prison, and the two brothers unite their forces against Flagg, the magician vanishes much in the same way as in *The Stand*: Flagg is suddenly gone, while his clothes hold his shape for a moment before they crumble.

The opening page of *The Eyes of the Dragon* reveals Flagg as a plotter who wants to make sure that Roland's younger son, Thomas, will be crowned King (King, *Dragon* 7). While contemplating the murder of Sasha, the spontaneous and impulsive man of action has learned to plot, swearing in his heart that he will kill the Queen (King, *Dragon* 31). Resembling Lloyd Henreid and The Trashcan Man, Anna Crookbrows



promises Flagg anything in exchange for healing her son (King, *Dragon* 37). Reminiscent of his former incarnation and Jack Torrance of *The Shining*, Flagg hammers on the door of Peter's prison cell in insane rage (King, *Dragon* 351). Peter, however, has long before discovered that Flagg the monster is loose in Delain again (King, *Dragon* 235). Flagg is even called by the same name as in *The Stand*: sometimes Flagg the Hooded, sometimes the dark man. Reminiscent of *The Lord of the Rings* where Bilbo Baggins is called "well-preserved" when the Master Ring stretches his life beyond its allotted span (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, London, Sydney, Wellington: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989 1954-5: 33), the people of Delain call Flagg "well preserved" (King, *Dragon* 60). In the days of Roland's grandfather he had appeared to be about forty. Now in the closing years of Roland's reign, he appears to be only ten years older (King, *Dragon* 60). Furthermore, Flagg in *The Eyes of the Dragon* also shifts identities and aliases. A regular guest in Delain, he is always accompanied by misery and death. Despite a different name, a different face, and a different bag of tricks, he always appears hooded and almost faceless; never as the King, "but always as the whisperer in the shadows, the man who pour[s] poison into the porches of the King's ears" (King, *Dragon* 62; please, note the reference to *Hamlet*).

Like all evil creatures, Flagg wants power in order to do mischief. As in *The Stand*, he is referred to both as the devil (King, *Dragon* 61) and a sickness, a fever looking for a cool brow to heat up" (King, *Dragon* 62). Deceptively ordinary in appearance, all of King's Flagg incarnations know how to become *dim* (for instance, King, *The Stand* 226, 1175; King, *Dragon* 77). In King, evil has no face and remains therefore hidden, which is precisely what Flagg aims at: in his vocabulary *dim* is a synonym for 'ghostly,' 'transparent,' and 'unobtrusive' (King, *Dragon* 77). Dimness pleases such villains as Flagg, but it does not save him from his own warped mind. Regarding everyone with suspicion, he believes that everyone has hidden reasons for their actions (King, *Dragon* 132). Like his Gothic predecessors, Flagg is full of *hubris* (pride and defiance), and although he sees much, he is strangely blind as regards variation, imagination, and love (King, *Dragon* 167). Finally, then, fate leads to his ruin when Thomas accidentally sees Flagg serve the poisoned drink to the King (King, *Dragon* 75). Underestimating him, just as The Walkin Dude underestimated The Trashcan Man in *The Stand*, Flagg brings

about his own destruction. Clearly, the magician Flagg is either a demon or possessed by one. While pursuing Peter on the streets of Delain, he reveals his demonic face, and the townspeople fork their first and last fingers at him to ward off evil (King, *Dragon* 365).

### ***The Dark Tower series***

Finally, I wish briefly to focus on the relationship between the hero and the anti-hero of *The Dark Tower* series (1982-), that is, Roland the Gunslinger and Randall Flagg. The paths of Roland and Flagg cross in *The Drawing of the Three* (1987), and Flagg is only mentioned in passing. Paying a visit to Katz's Drug Store in New York, Roland notes that among the magicians he had known in his time there was a demon, "a creature that pretended to be a man and called itself Flagg" (King, *The Drawing of the Three* 361-2). King indicates that Flagg is involved with the destruction of Roland's world.

Randall Flagg is encountered again toward the end of *The Waste Lands* (1991), when he, like Melmoth, appears at the moment of loss to make his devilish offer to Andrew Quick a.k.a. The Tick-Tock Man in the city of Lud. Recalling his memories of Lloyd Henreid and The Trashcan Man from *The Stand*, Flagg recruits Quick for his plan to prevent Roland from reaching the Dark Tower, the nexus of Roland's universe: "Say, 'My life for you,' Andrew – can you say that?" (Stephen King, *The Waste Lands*, New York: Plume, 1992 1991: 389). The fact that Flagg uses The Tick-Tock Man's given name, Andrew, which even he himself has forgotten and which alludes to one of Christ's disciples indicates that the demonic Flagg is once again acquiring disciples in order to alter the balance of the universe. The creature, who is able to read his mind and who has a penetrating, hissing voice, does not seem human to Andrew (King, *The Waste Lands* 387). The cowboy boots reveal an old acquaintance, and while introducing himself, Flagg comes up with a long list of names, beginning with a Trickster poem about shifting identities, names, and aliases (King, *The Waste Lands* 387). Not surprisingly, he wishes to be called Richard Fannin (King, *The Waste Lands* 388). A Faustian pact in modern terms, Flagg holds out a hand whose palm is utterly devoid of lines: "What do

you say, pard? Shake the hand that shook the world" (King, *The Waste Lands* 388).

Near the end of *Wizard and Glass* (1997) the hero and the anti-hero finally meet each other in an emerald palace reminiscent of that in *The Wizard of Oz*. Although Flagg is casually clothed, Jake Chambers, Roland's companion, notes that he is not a man but a wizard with a crystal ball in his bag (Stephen King, *Wizard and Glass*, New York: Signet, 1998 1997: 671). At this point, Roland recognizes his age-old antagonist, Marten Broadcloak, who brought about the destruction of his father's kingdom and seduced his mother (King, *Wizard and Glass* 672). Although both parties fire at each other, it seems predestined that the bullets miss their targets. Introducing himself as Flagg, the antagonist recalls his encounters with Roland as those with an old acquaintance. Having warned Roland to enter the Tower, Flagg vanishes, leaving Roland and his companions a last-warning message decorated with two smile-faces and a thundercloud (689). The next installment of *The Dark Tower* series is scheduled for the fall of 2002, and perhaps the final encounter will take place then.

## 5. Conclusion

Randall Flagg seems a composite of the Dark Man (the Devil and the dark side of the Wise Old Man) and the Trickster with its Wizard, Shaman, and Medicine Man connotations. The characteristics of the Dark Man allow King to present his mythical view of the primordial dichotomy between good and evil. Perhaps influenced by Jungian thinking, King tends to split the archetype of the Wise Old Man into benevolent father substitutes and malevolent incarnations of evil. Reminiscent of the Devil who mimicks divine creativity by his perverse works and laughingly ridicules human frailty, the grotesque but tempting Flagg also shares traits with the less threatening Trickster. Unlike Melmoth the Wanderer cursed to wander eternally on earth and to make his devilish offer, the Trickster suffers from no guilty conscience. A wandering, excessive, bawdy, gluttonous, and obscene figure, the latter is also regarded as a cultural hero, a violator of cultural norms, and even as a



god of North American mythology. By mockery and by taking delight in creating havoc and chaos, the Trickster activates the Creator to relistate order in cosmos. The Trickster-god provides a mythical counterpart to such folklore figures as Reynard the Fox and Brer Rabbit. As noted above, the Trickster has also come into popular culture through such figures as Wile E. Coyote and Batman's Joker. Obviously, the figure has survived and changed shape according to its Trickster nature, because it has provided both pleasure and instruction.

Aware of North American mythology, Campbell's presentation, and, presumably, Jung's interpretation of the Trickster, not to mention the pop-culture references, King has merged mythical, folk-tale and popular culture influences in Randall Flagg's character. Flagg is depicted as a mythical character as regards his preoccupation with existential problems in his role as the Medicine Man/Wizard in *The Dark Tower* series and *The Eyes of the Dragon* as well as in his resemblance of the Antichrist in *The Stand*. As a killing night-prowler, a great survivor, and a smiling joker, Flagg then shares traits with the mythical and the pop-culture Trickster. In this way, King does not only blend genres in his plots but also, and perhaps more importantly, in some of his most central characters.

Flagg is a grotesque character. Marina Warner defines the concept of *grotesque* as a style, a mood, or sensibility which finds expression in art and which beats a double pulse: *terribilit * as well as *capriccio* (Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling, and Making Mock*, London: Vintage, 2000: 246-7), thus combining terror and laughter – the latter as mockery instead of mirth. The grotesque also links Flagg with reality, and this very combination appears to be his most significant trait. In the conclusion of *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966: 179-89), Wolfgang Kayser distinguishes grotesque traits in art and literature, and Vernon Hyles has presumably applied them to King's fiction. Hyles views the grotesque as "new Gothicism" and, in summary, reaches three conclusions (Vernon Hyles, "Freaks: The Grotesque as Metaphor in the Works of Stephen King." In Hoppenstand, Gary & Ray B. Browne (eds.), *The Gothic World of Stephen King: Landscape of Nightmares*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987: 56-7). Since all of these conclusions can be applied to Flagg, they serve as a kind of summary of his character: (1) The grotesque is the expression of the alienated world,

that is, the familiar world is seen from a strange perspective which is experienced as either comic or terrifying, or both. Similarly, Flagg's ordinary face reveals an insane, mocking and dangerous monster. (2) Blending laughter and terror, the grotesque deals with the deep absurdities of existence. As King puts it, "Flagg is always there, in the human capacity to do evil" (Underwood & Miller, *Fear Itself: The Horror Fiction of Stephen King*, New York: NAL, 1985 1982: 115). (3) The grotesque is an attempt to take control over the demonic elements of the world. In the character of Randall Flagg, we as readers can externalize our fears, insecurities, and even our rage, hate, and frustration. His simultaneous failure and survival reestablish the laws of normality and teach us to cope with our own failures in life.

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