
**Stylistics**

**MA in Language and Linguistics**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this essay I am going to conduct a stylistic analysis on an extract from the novella *The Gunslinger* by Stephen King. This is the first of seven books in a series known as *The Dark Tower*, all of which focus on the main protagonist of the Gunslinger. The extract I have chosen is taken from the beginning of the first chapter, and provides an introduction to the main characters and the textual world. Consequently, it can be argued that *The Gunslinger* acts as King’s ‘hook’ for *The Dark Tower* series in its entirety, and so performing an analysis on The Gunslinger’s first chapter would seem apt as it is arguable that the success of the entire series relies on the success of this extract in drawing the reader in.

I shall begin by outlining my interpretation of the extract and the effect I believe King aimed it to have on the reader. Next, I will outline the difference between *Archetypes* and *cognitive stereotypes* as this can be seen as bearing heavily on my analysis. Subsequently, as suggested by Short (1996, p.357) I will begin my analysis by focusing on what bears most directly on my interpretation of the text: characterisation. I will then explore other areas which can be seen as supporting my interpretation (Speech and Thought presentation and possible worlds). These categories shall all be interlaced with elements of Deviation, Parallelism and Foregrounding as whilst they support my interpretation, they work will in conjunction with the above theories. Finally, I will summarise my findings and address possible criticisms of my analysis and suggest possible alternatives.

1.1 MY INTERPRETATION

From the outset I felt as though King wanted me to base my interpretation of his characters (namely the eponymous Gunslinger) on my own prior knowledge. This was largely due to the way that King had referred the characters in the text without proper names (i.e. the
Gunslinger and the Man in Black). This choice led me to attach my prior knowledge of what I believe a gunslinger is from other fiction and knowledge of history. This knowledge was based on cognitive stereotypes and archetypal character traits within fiction.

It is possible that King (2003, p.69) made the above choices as he was unsure what direction the series was going to take. The ambiguity he shows in describing the internal thoughts of the Gunslinger meant that I had to infer or attach my own ideas to his motivations. Whilst physical descriptions are present, they seemed only to reinforce my own schemata relating to gunslingers.

Consequently, this stylistic analysis aims to explore the way in which The Gunslinger can draw on prior knowledge to aid in characterisation - specifically with reference to Archetypes or Cognitive stereotypes.

1.2 Archetypes and Cognitive Stereotypes

Before I begin the analysis proper, I believe I should make clear the distinction between Archetypes and Cognitive Stereotypes. This is because one stems largely from literary theory in the way I have chosen to use it here, whilst the other stems from schema theory. However, both rely on forms of schemata – just from different areas. Due to their reliance on schemata, it should be noted that different individuals have access to different schemata. De Beaugrande (1987, p.59) states that a way of accounting for this is the principle of alternativity, in which the most powerful and overarching schemata are accounted for. However, it should still be noted the possible schema I have selected here are inferred from my own interpretation of the text and not all readers will necessarily come to the same conclusions.
In describing them, both terms are similar: Northrop Frye (1951, p.98) refers to archetypes as a type of ‘literary anthropology… informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folk tale’, whilst Anderson et al. (1990, p.192) refers to cognitive stereotypes as ‘highly organized social categories that have the properties of schemata’. The difference between the two concepts comes in the form of their epistemological basis. Whilst Archetypes (in the above sense) are arguably attached much more to literature and its surrounding ‘canon’, cognitive stereotypes can be said to form based on a range of factors from the wider spectrum of culture and society – Culpepper (2001, p.79) makes a point of referring to stereotypes as social schemata based on ‘abstract generalisations about groups of people’.

Whilst I will make use of the term Cognitive stereotype I believe that the term archetype is much more appropriate. This is due to the way in which it focuses on our knowledge being informed by previous literary and fictional categories and my interpretation of cowboys is based more on their fictional construction. As Ramirez-Berg (2002, p.14) states, their ‘stereotype fails to convey… a number of crucial facts about them’. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that social stereotypes related to cowboys and gunslingers are not necessarily ‘true’, but rather an over-generalisation.

Finally, I should state that I believe the Gunslinger to embody the role of the archetypal anti-hero, whilst the man in black embodies the archetypal villain. The role of the anti-hero can be constructed through character traits relating to rebellion or the reduction of typically regarded heroic attributes, and the character of the cowboy has been seen as typical of this type of hero (Simmons, 2008, p.IX-X).
2.0 CHARACTERISATION

I will begin my analysis by addressing the main points relating to my understanding of the Gunslinger’s and the Man in Black’s characterisation.

To begin, it can be said that we are made aware that the Gunslinger and the Man in Black are the main characters through the use of grammatical parallelism in the opening line:

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

This can be seen as being connoted through the repetition of the definite article ‘the’, the naming practises employed with regards to the ‘man in black’ and the ‘Gunslinger’, and the verbs ‘fled’ and ‘followed’. Additionally, it can be said that ‘fled’ and ‘followed’ utilise phonological parallelism in order to indicate that the characters actions are related to one another – in addition to the causal conjunction ‘and’.

The naming choices King uses for the characters can be seen as the most obvious indicator of their identity – both their proper names are replaced with descriptive names. Whilst Kasof (1993, p.140) argues that proper names can be seen as indictors of ‘age, intellectual competence, race, ethnicity, social class and other attributes’, I would argue that the use of descriptive names such as ‘the Gunslinger’ or ‘the Man in Black’ have a similar effect – as will be expanded upon. Indeed, my interpretation of both characters heavily relies on how they were referred to.

Consequently, I would argue that both are characterized in a manner akin to what Forster (1987, p.73) refers to as a ‘flat characters’, whereby they are ‘constructed around a single idea or quality’. However, this description can be criticised as the characters are not based entirely around one concept. Especially regarding the Gunslinger, I have drawn upon schemata relating to both cultural depictions of cowboys (cognitive stereotypes) and previous literary acquaintance with the character type (archetypes) and wider genre. As a
result, it may be more apt to describe their characters as largely category-based (Culpepper, 2002, p.266), in the sense that the reader begins with a Schematic understanding of their literary basis (archetypes) and cultural/ social cues (cognitive stereotypes) for their characterisation (as a cowboy or villain), and then possibly works down from this to further develop their understanding.

2.1 THE GUNSLINGER
For the Gunslinger, I drew upon my knowledge of gunslingers of the Wild West, which I immediately related to cowboys and outlaws. This was substantiated by the novella being set in a desert (potentially a typical setting for such a character), which can be seen as belonging to part of what Culpepper (2001, p.77) refers to as a ‘network’ of schemata associated with the concept of ‘gunslinger’. Moreover, this ‘network’ can be seen as contributing to the cognitive stereotype I have of what cowboys are.

Within the extract there are several examples of description available which can also be seen as being part of a ‘network’ of schemata attached to the cognitive stereotype of a ‘gunslinger’. For instance, the description of the Gunslinger’s attire is what we might expect a gunslinger to wear:

His clothes were the no-color of rain or dust. His shirt was open at the throat, with a rawhide thong dangling loosely in hand-punched eyelets. His pants were seam-stretched dungarees. (22-23)

I would argue that the use of the adjectives ‘open’, and ‘seam-stretched’ and the adverb ‘loosely’ can be seen as drawing connotations of ‘aloofness’ – characteristics which may be attached to a cowboy. Moreover, the use of ‘no-colour’ can be seen as a form of lexical deviation mirroring the lifelessness of the desert or again the ‘aloofness’ of the Gunslinger.
However, whilst I have expressed how the Gunslinger can be seen as relying on schemata regarding gunslingers or cowboys, I have not stated how he is characterised as an archetypal anti-hero. If I approach the Gunslinger from the perspective of Simmons (2008, p.IX-X), in that the anti-hero embodies the reduction of typically regarded heroic traits, then the most striking feature of the Gunslinger related to this is the presence of his weapons:

Below the waterbag were his guns, finely weighted to his hand. The two belts crisscrossed above his crotch. The holsters were oiled too deeply for even this Philistine sun to crack. The stocks of the guns were sandalwood, yellow and finely grained. The holsters were tied down with raw hide cord, and they swung heavily against his hips. The brass casings of the cartridges looped into the gun belts twinkled and flashed and heliographed in the sun. The leather made subtle creaking noises. The guns themselves made no noise. They had spilled blood. There was no need to make noise in the sterility of the desert. (15-21)

Firstly, guns can be seen as holding both negative and positive semantic connotations – especially in relation to the ‘cowboy’ character. For instance, guns can be used to kill (negative) but can also be used to defend (positive). Whilst these connotations can be seen as subjective and dependant on the reader, the fact that the Man in Black is positioned as ‘fleeing’ in line 1 can be seen as implying that the Gunslinger is hunting him. As the Man in Black is the villain (as will be expanded upon later) the act of hunting him down in order to (potentially) kill him can be seen as typical of an anti-hero. This is because heroes tend to be seen as in favour of ‘life-affirming humanist ideologies’ (Simmons, 2008, p.38). This could be substantiated by prior knowledge of the genre and character roles- which due to space I cannot detail here.
The reason for this being such an important point is due to the level of detail King has decided to attach to his description of the Gunslinger’s weapons compared to the description of his physical appearance, and that the description of his weapons precedes the description of his physical appearance. As Van Peer (1989, p.9) states, the linguistic organization of a text can influence the type of ‘picture’ a reader will develop of a character. In this sense, it can be argued that the Gunslinger’s weapons are being positioned as more intrinsic to his being than his actual appearance. As a result, I would argue that – based on Fiske and Neuberg’s (1990) continuum model of impression formation – such an emphasis on the gunslinger’s weapons may be seen as embodying stage two, in that their inclusion and description acts to confirm the gunslinger’s initial categorization as the archetypal anti-hero cowboy as originally implicated through being named ‘the gunslinger’.

2.2 The Man in Black
Comparatively, the Man in Black is not characterised in much detail during the extract, yet the linguistic choices King attaches to him can be seen as connoting that he is a supernatural and/or evil entity. For instance, the use of the term ‘black’ in his name can be seen as drawing upon a cultural evaluation relating the colour black to bad or evil. However, this does not entirely contribute to the impression of something more sinister being involved in our conception of the Man in Black.

[The Gunslinger] saw the kicked remains of a tiny campfire on the lee side, the side which the sun would quit earliest. Small signs like this, once more affirming the man in black’s essential humanity, never failed to please him. (26-28)

At first, the above example seems to express that the Man in Black is human. However, King’s decision to characterise the signs of this as being ‘small’ - in addition to the semantic
connotations of the adjective ‘essential’ meaning his humanity is only part of him (OED, 2014a) - can be seen as indicating that the Man in Black is not entirely human.

The concept that the Man in Black does not comply with what can be seen as schematic of humans can also be seen later in the extract:

The gunslinger had followed the man in black across the desert for two months now, across the endless, screamingly monotonous purgatorial wastes, and had yet to find spoor other than the hygienic sterile ideographs of the man in black’s camp fires. He had not found a can, a bottle, or a waterbag (the gunslinger had left four of those behind, like dead snake-skins). (36-40).

This above extract can be seen as deviating from our normal schematic understanding of humans in that it implies the Man in Black does not require the same sustenance as normal human beings. Whilst it is possible to infer that the Man in Black is trying to hide from the Gunslinger, we find out later in the novella that the Man in Black is actually baiting him forward. Moreover, it can be seen as not making sense for the Man in Black to leave behind his Campfires, yet hide his other waste. Consequently, the Man in Black can be seen as having supernatural attributes. This, and the fact that the protagonist is chasing him, can be seen as contributing to his characterisation as the villain.

3.0 SPEECH AND THOUGHT REPRESENTATION

3.1 THOUGHT REPRESENTATION

There are three main examples of thought representation within the extract. The Man in Black will be omitted here as there are no representations related to him. Two of the representations can be seen as examples of the narrator’s representation of thought acts (NRTA), whilst one can be seen as an example of the narrator’s representation of thought (NRT) (Short, 1996, p.311). As a result of their infrequency, they can be seen as posing a
deviation from the rest of the extract, which may lead to them being foregrounded and so made more salient (Short, 1996 p.311). Consequently, they can be seen as providing a more personal relationship between the reader and the Gunslinger, which may allow for the reader to deviate from the archetypal or cognitive stereotypes they normally associate with cowboys.

The two examples of NRTA in the extract are shown below, which I have interpreted as thought acts due to example 2 describing a smile appearing on the Gunslinger’s face:

1. In a vague way, **all this pleased him.** It was romantic. (13-14)

2. Small signs like this, once more affirming the man in black’s essential humanity, **never failed to please him.** His lips stretched in the pitted, flaked remains of his face. (27-28)

Whilst the example of NRT is:

1. He ate **thoughtfully.** (36)

Whilst it can be argued that the first two of the above examples allow us brief glimpses into the mind of the Gunslinger through the use of *verba sentienti*, or words of feeling (Fowler, 1996, p.171), this is done through simple lexical choices (i.e. ‘pleased’/‘please’). Additionally, in both examples the Gunslinger is grammatically passivized. These factors may combine to aid in characterising the Gunslinger as aloof through what can be seen as a lack of *illocutionary force* behind the thought act ‘pleased’ as a linguistic choice, compared to words from within the same semantic field with more force such as ‘contented’ or ‘satisfied’ (Culpepper, *et al.*, 2002, p.134). This concept relies on mapping the concepts of speech act...
theory to thought acts, which I have done under the assumption that the effects associated with NRTA are ‘roughly the same as for speech presentation’ (Short, 1996, p.311).

In addition to this, the use of NRT can be seen as similar to its speech representation counterpart in its minimalistic representation and that it merely tells us that thought has occurred, but does not detail what that thought is (Short, 1996, p.293). The above points can be seen as working in conjunction with his physical description as outlined in section 2.1 in order to potentially reinforce his characterisation as ‘aloof’ and ‘bereft of personality and emotion’, which can be seen as an attribute of the archetypal anti-hero (Simmons, 2008, p.40) as well as a cognitive stereotype of cowboys.

3.2 SPEECH REPRESENTATION

In addition to representations of the Gunslinger’s thoughts, we are also presented with a brief look at other inhabitants within the textual world through what can be seen as indirect speech (IS):

> Border dwellers had told him that devils lived even in the flames. They burned it but would not look into the light. They said the devils hypnotized, beckoned, would eventually draw the one who looked into the fires. (30-32)

The above example allows for the narrator to summarize what the border dwellers had said, rather than state the words they uttered explicitly (Leech & Short, 2007, p.259-260). This technique allows for the reader to know that other inhabitants exist within the textual world despite the fact that it has ‘emptied’ (7), and allows for these inhabitants to be characterized quickly. However, this characterization can be seen as indicative of a type of superstitious tribal culture (through the use of the noun ‘devil’ and it being associated with beliefs) and one that may be deemed by the reader as suggesting the presence of a deteriorating culture (especially due to the statement that the world had ‘emptied’).
It is possible to interpret the above example as being related to us by the narrator through the thoughts of the Gunslinger in a state of remembering—this is supported by the fact that he later remains upwind of his own fire. Consequently, it is possible to argue that this is an example of an indirect speech act (Culpepper, et al., 2002, p.136), to which I interpreted the reporting verbs ‘told’ and ‘said’ as undermining the illocutionary force of what the Border Dwellers said. Whilst their main message is undoubtedly kept by the gunslinger (in that he should not inhale the devil-grass), I interpreted the above speech as implying that the gunslinger believed the superstitious story in a much more metaphorical as opposed to literal sense (a further rationale for this can be seen in section 4.2). Consequently, the Gunslinger can be seen as alone in a world alien to him and with a different culture, which in turn can be seen as indicative of an anti-hero.

4.0 POSSIBLE WORLDS
As already stated, my understanding of the Gunslinger’s characterisation is partially built on the setting being a desert. However, not all aspects within the textual world are compatible with the actual world, and so my interpretation of the Gunslinger must adapt. Conversely, this discrepancy can be seen as allowing the Man in Black’s supernatural characteristics a sense of fidelity in the textual world.

Whilst it can be argued that King has shifted our frame of reference towards ‘a system centred on an alternative possible world’ (Ryan, 1991, p.21), the textual world can also be seen as parasitical in nature, in that certain aspects still rely on our knowledge of the actual world (Semino, 2005, p.2). For instance, this can be seen in section 2.1 through the possible adoption of cognitive stereotypes in relation to the Gunslinger.

This section will utilise Ryan’s (1991) topology of ‘accessibility’ or ‘(im)possibility’ in order to detail the way in which the textual world deviates from the actual world — this has been
referred to as the most comprehensive typology to date (Semino, 2005, p.4). In addition to the ‘main’ textual world, I shall also explore the presence of what can be termed sub-worlds which are embodied by knowledge worlds, obligation worlds, wish worlds and fantasy worlds present within the mind of the characters. I shall utilise the concept of sub-worlds in order to explain what I believe the motivations of the main characters to be. It should be noted that possible world worlds largely relies on semantics. For the purposes of this analysis I aim to account for the ‘intuitions of ordinary readers’ (Semino, 2005, p.2), yet it should be noted that certain concepts found here may differ from reader to reader.

4.1 PHYSICAL INCOMPATIBILITY
To begin, the textual world differentiates itself from our own through the below proposition:

The desert was the apotheosis of all deserts, huge, standing to the sky for what might have been parsecs in all directions. (2-3)

The literal meaning of the noun ‘parsecs’ is as a unit of measurement equal to 3.25 light years (OED, 2014b). Whilst it is possible to infer that the use of the hedging device ‘might’ implies that this is being used metaphorically to draw connotations of a vast distance, later in the series we come to discover that this is not the case. Impossibly large distances are possible within this textual world. However, it must be admitted that King’s hedging device can be seen as making this uncertain at this point in series and if the reader is reading the text in a parasitical manner, then they will likely assume this to be metaphorical and that the textual world is physically compatible with the real world – thereby further allowing them to associate the textual world as one of cowboy.

4.2 TAXONOMIC (IN)COMPATIBILITY
The textual world can be seen as taxonomically incompatible with our own in a number of ways. For instance:
An occasional tombstone sign pointed the way, for once the drifted track that cut its way through the thick crust of alkali had been a highway and coaches had followed it. The world had moved on since then. The world had emptied. (7)

The use of the past tense ‘had’ in conjunction with ‘highway and coaches’ can be seen as implying that the textual world is no longer as inhabited as it once was and that civilisation has regressed. This may also be indicated by reference to ‘Border dwellers’ (30) as indicated in section 3.0. Moreover, this is supported by the statement that ‘the world had emptied’. In conjunction with this, the use of grammatical parallelism between the final two sentences through the repetition of the definite article ‘the’, the noun ‘world’ and the verb ‘had’, can be seen as working cohesively in order to foreground and reinforce that the current state of the textual world is different from that of the past and so possibly the actual world – which could imply a chronological incompatibility.

In conjunction with the setting of a desert this activated my schemata of the Wild West, in which small outcroppings of people and towns existed between vast stretches of desert. This then came to reinforce the idea of lawlessness within the fictional world, which is also present within my schemata of the Wild West and strengthened my conception of the Gunslinger as an archetypal anti-hero – as this would be the type of textual world I would imagine his type of character to inhabit.

Another Taxonomic incompatibility can be seen in through the types of flora present. This is largely connoted in this extract through the mention of the ‘devil-grass which brought sweet dreams, nightmares, death’. However, it may be that devil-grass is analogous to species of plant in the actual world such Marijuana, which has been interpreted as having similar effects by some tribal societies in the actual world (Needham & Lu, 1974, p.150). Relating
this to section 3.2, this possible analogue can be seen as reinforcing the Gunslinger’s disbelief of what the Border Dwellers said.

However, if what the Border Dwellers stated is interpreted as true, then it implies a physical incompatibility with our own world – whereby the supernatural does exist. This may lead to reinforcing the possibility that the Man in Black has supernatural attributes.

Nevertheless, there are indications of taxonomic compatibilities between the textual world and the actual world. For instance, the clothes the gunslinger wears can be seen as compatible with those of the actual world. We are told he is wearing ‘dungarees’ and a ‘shirt… open at the throat’ (22-23). It is possible that King has made this decision so as to allow for the reader to build a physical image of the gunslinger in their mind with more ease than would be capable with clothes that only existed within a textual world.

However, their description is not in-depth and as Semino (2005, p.5) points out, textual worlds can be ‘incomplete’, leading to the reader having to draw on their own schemata in order to ‘fill in the blanks’ not stipulated by the text. I would state that the schemata that is draw on in relation to these clothes is likely influenced by the ‘network’ of associated schemata attached to the cognitive stereotypes of a cowboy or Gunslinger, likely consolidating the character of the gunslinger.

4.3 LINGUISTIC INCOMPATIBILITY
As a final point regarding Ryan’s taxonomy, the extract does make reference to an example of linguistic incompatibility through the word ‘khef’ - which can also be seen as lexical deviation and so foregrounded. This word is from a language native to the textual world called ‘high speech’ and means ‘the water of life’. At this point in the novella we are not introduced to the exact definition of the term, but rather left to infer its meaning ourselves. It
is possible that ‘khef’ may be interpreted as meaning a hierarchy of monks or a level of training as it is associated with a ranking system through stating that the gunslinger ‘had reached the fifth level’. In a way, this contributes to the characterization of the gunslinger as a potential *round character* and potentially provides indications as to a deeper background than is originally introduced in this extract. However, this remains only an indication of a deeper characterization at this point, and the gunslingers origins remain ambiguous.

### 4.4 Sub-Worlds

The sub-words present within *The Gunslinger* are what allow for the forward momentum of the plot. As Ryan (1991, p.120) states, in a text where all characters’ sub-worlds correspond to one another there is no need for change, a text requires conflict for a change of state to occur. The driving force of the narrative in *The Gunslinger* can largely be seen through the wish worlds of both the Man in Black and The Gunslinger, as embodied in the example below:

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

The Gunslinger’s wish world can be seen as embodied by a desire to catch the Man in Black (potentially inferred from the use of ‘followed’ and the fact the man in black is *fleeing*). This may actually be an Obligation world, in which he has been instructed to do this. However, at this point in the narrative we are not given enough information to ascertain this and so I have defined it as a wish world.

Contrary to this is the Man in Black’s potential wish world: to escape the Gunslinger. What should be noted at this point is that the word ‘fled’ in relation to the Man in Black may draw semantic connotations of sympathy for him, as a person usually flees from danger. As this is the first line of the novella, the reader may interpret the Gunslinger as the Villain. However,
as the point-of-view focuses solely on the Gunslinger in the rest of this extract, and the novella’s title is *The Gunslinger*, this is unlikely.

Nevertheless, the wish worlds of both characters are in conflict and can be seen as embodying the typical role of a hero and a villain within typical ‘western’ fictional narratives. This is additionally supported by the presence of ‘border dwellers’, to which the use of the noun ‘border’ would necessitate an actual border on which they inhabit. This can be seen as embodying a knowledge/belief world in the mind of the Gunslinger.

5.0 SUMMARY AND FINAL REMARKS
This paper has indicated that both the characters of the Man in Black and the Gunslinger potentially rely on the reader’s prior knowledge of archetypes or cognitive stereotypes. Largely, this appears to be based in the naming strategy King has utilised in making a linguistic choice to omit proper names. This can be seen as characterising the characters as category-based (Culpepper, 2002, p.266).

However, there are further indications of his characters relying on prior knowledge and schematic notions. For instance, the use of speech and thought representation can be seen as supporting this type of characterisation through the use of both simple lexical choices and the use of specific reporting verbs, which in turn can be seen as characterising the Gunslinger as ‘bereft of personality and emotion’ (Simmons, 2008, p.40).

In addition to this, the use of possible worlds theory can be seen as supporting the Gunslinger’s characterisation as a cowboy due to its potential parasitical nature (Semino, 2005, p.2). This is due to aspects within the textual world potentially holding a resonance with typical settings for characters such as ‘cowboys’ (i.e. the desert). In addition to this, the conflict seen in the wish worlds of the Gunslinger and the Man in Black can be seen as
conforming to typical narrative strategies employed in order to act as a catalyst for the plot to begin (Ryan, 1991, p.120).

However, aspects have been shown that deviate from what can be seen as typical aspects of the ‘western cowboy’ or ‘gunslinger’. For instance, the physical incompatibility suggested by the use of ‘parsecs’ (in section 4.1) suggests that the textual world deviates from ours, which may influence the ability for reader’s to attach their schematic understanding of the Wild West to that of the textual world. Further to this, the taxonomic incompatibility seen through the inclusion of ‘devil-grass’ can be interpreted as hinting at a supernatural dimension to the textual world, thereby also showing a physical incompatibility with our world.

Finally, the presence of linguistic incompatibility through the use of ‘khef’ can be seen as indicating the presence of a language native to the textual world. This hints towards a larger background to the Gunslinger, which although not detailed in the extract, could potential add another dimension to his characterisation.

All of the above notions incompatible with concepts of the Wild West, can be seen as conforming to the genre of ‘fantasy’. An analysis aided by genre would help with an understanding of archetypes, in the sense of understanding literary ‘ritual’ (Frye, 1951, p.98) regarding certain character types in certain genres. However, the notion of genre has largely been omitted from this analysis as The Dark Tower series can be seen as containing elements from a multitude of genres from diverse media (e.g. Spaghetti westerns, fantasy, science-fiction). Whilst taxonomies have been proposed for literature (i.e. Fowler, 1982) it is potentially unfeasible to conduct a genre analysis on such a short extract, where influences from mass media genres such as the ‘spaghetti western’ have been seen as incompatible with established literary genres (Feuer, 1992, p.140).
Nevertheless, what can be seen as the main weakness in this analysis still remains in that it is my interpretation and different readers may interpret the extract in a different way. Whilst I have tried to offer possible alternatives to interpretations where I have seen them, and have aimed to conform to De Beaugrande’s (1987, p.59) principle of alternativity, it must be stated that I cannot know the minds of others, nor the schemata they may draw upon. However, as Short (1996, p.355) states, ‘analytical understanding is one of the things which makes human beings special’, and stylistic analysis is a way of understanding and responding to texts in a ‘deeper way’. Through this analysis I have found a new respect for the writing of Stephen King, and the way in which I have come to understand both the Gunslinger and the Man in Black.

REFERENCES


EXTRACT: FROM THE GUNSLINGER CHAPTER 1.

The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed. The desert was the apotheosis of all deserts, huge, standing to the sky for what might have been parsecs in all directions. White; blinding; waterless; without feature save for the faint, cloudy haze of the mountains which sketched themselves on the horizon and the devil-grass which brought sweet dreams, nightmares, death. An occasional tombstone sign pointed the way, for once the drifted track that cut its way through the thick crust of alkali had been a highway and coaches had followed it. The world had moved on since then. The world had emptied.

The gunslinger walked stolidly, not hurrying, not loafing. A hide waterbag was slung around his middle like a bloated sausage. It was almost full. He had progressed through the khef over many years, and had reached the fifth level. At the seventh or eighth, he would not have been thirsty; he could have watched own body dehydrate with clinical, detached attention, watering its crevices and dark inner hollows only when his logic told him it must be done. He was not seventh or eighth. He was fifth. So he was thirsty, although he had no particular urge to drink. In a vague way, all this pleased him. It was romantic.

Below the waterbag were his guns, finely weighted to his hand. The two belts crisscrossed above his crotch. The holsters were oiled too deeply for even this Philistine sun to crack. The stocks of the guns were sandalwood, yellow and finely grained. The holsters were tied down with raw hide cord, and they swung heavily against his hips. The brass casings of the cartridges looped into the gun belts twinkled and flashed and heliographed in the sun. The leather made subtle creaking noises. The guns themselves made no noise. They had spilled blood. There was no need to make noise in the sterility of the desert.

His clothes were the no-color of rain or dust. His shirt was open at the throat, with a rawhide thong dangling loosely in hand-punched eyelets. His pants were seam-stretched dungarees.

He breasted a gently rising dune (although there was no sand here; the desert was hardpan, and even the harsh winds that blew when dark came raised only an aggravating harsh dust like scouring powder) and saw the kicked remains of a tiny campfire on the lee side, the side which the sun would quit earliest. Small signs like this, once more affirming the man in black's essential humanity, never failed to please him. His lips stretched in the pitted, flaked remains of his face. He squatted.

He had burned the devil-grass, of course. It was the only thing out here that would burn. It burned with a greasy, flat light, and it burned slow. Border dwellers had told him that devils lived even in the flames. They burned it but would not look into the light. They said the devils hypnotized, beckoned,
would eventually draw the one who looked into the fires. And the next man foolish enough to look
into the fire might see you.

The burned grass was crisscrossed in the now-familiar ideographic pattern, and crumbled to gray
senselessness before the gunslinger’s prodding hand. There was nothing in the remains but a
charred scrap of bacon, which he ate thoughtfully. It had always been this way. The gunslinger had
followed the man in black across the desert for two months now, across the endless, screamingly
monotonous purgatorial wastes, and had yet to find spoor other than the hygienic sterile ideographs
of the man in black’s camp fires. He had not found a can, a bottle, or a waterbag (the gunslinger had
left four of those behind, like dead snake-skins).