The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah Study Guide

The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah by Stephen King

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Introduction

Published on June 8, 2004, *Song of Susannah* is not the type of stand-alone horror novel that made Stephen King one of the world's bestselling authors. Instead, it is the sixth book of a seven-volume series titled "The Dark Tower." The series was completed over the course of more than thirty years; King wrote the first sentence of what would become the series' first volume, *The Gunslinger*, in 1972, and the final volume, itself titled *The Dark Tower*, was published on September 21, 2004. The series has its share of what readers have come to expect from King: page-turning suspense, horrifying evil in the form of both humans and monsters, gore, and often unpleasant fates for both good characters and bad.

But there are many other elements mixed in, including a J. R. R. Tolkien-style fantasy realm called Mid-World, where King presents large-scale battles, sorcery, and strange creatures like Oy, a kind of talking dog called a billy-bumbler. Also influential are 1960s spaghetti westerns starring Clint Eastwood, on whose "man with no name" King drew for the series' gunslinger hero, Roland Deschain. There are borrowings from science fiction, including robots and a thematic concern with the dehumanizing effects of modern technology. And there is realistic drama: one main character, Brooklyn-born Eddie Dean, must overcome heroin addiction.

All these styles and genres merge into an epic quest, pitting Roland against evil forces that would topple the Dark Tower and destroy the universe.

Author Biography

Probably the best-known, bestselling, and most prolific writer of his time, Stephen King was born to working-class parents in Portland, Maine, on September 21, 1947. When King was two, his father, a vacuum salesman, left the house for a pack of cigarettes and never returned, abandoning his wife and two sons. King's mother, Ruth, worked long hours at low-paying jobs to support her family. She also managed to introduce her sons to reading, giving King his first taste of horror fiction, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, at age seven. Later, King discovered other books, including horror stories by H. P. Lovecraft and original short stories his father had written and left behind in his aunt's attic.

In elementary school, King was already writing his own stories and selling them to his schoolmates during recess. In high school, he often gathered friends at his home and entertained them by reading his work. King studied English at the University of Maine at Orono and wrote a regular column called "King's Garbage Truck" for the school newspaper, in which he reviewed movies, music, and books. He also composed a sci-fi novel, *The Long Walk*, which he would publish under the pseudonym Richard Bachman ten years later. In 1971, King married Tabitha Spruce, whom he had met at the University of Maine. The couple soon had children, and the family lived in a modest trailer in Hermon, Maine. Most of their meager income came from King's earnings as a high school English teacher, but he also sold some short stories to men's magazines. In 1973, he sold the novel *Carrie* to Doubleday. The novel tells the story of a vengeful high school reject with telekinetic power.

Although his original advance for the book was only $2,500, the paperback rights to *Carrie* sold to Signet for an astounding $400,000. An unprecedented run of bestselling novels and short story collections followed, including *"Salem's Lot* (1975), *The Shining* (1977), *Cujo* (1981), *The Tommyknockers* (1987), *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999), and *From a Buick 8* (2002). Many of King's works have been adapted into high-profile movies and television miniseries.

Once a heavy drinker and smoker, King swore off drugs and alcohol in the late 1980s. In 1999, a van struck and critically injured King while he was walking near his home. After his recovery, he resumed work on an ambitious fantasy series that many readers regard as his greatest accomplishment. Started in 1972 but not published until 1982, the first volume, *The Gunslinger*, introduced readers to the world of the Dark Tower. King wrote the next four volumes of the series over a period of twenty-one years, between numerous other novels and writing projects. The final two volumes, *Song of Susannah* and *The Dark Tower*, were published within months of each other in 2004.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1: Beamquake

Song of Susannah picks up where the previous volume of "The Dark Tower" series, *Wolves of the Calla*, left off. The hero Roland Deschain and his followers—Eddie Dean, twelve-year-old Jake Chambers, and Catholic priest Donald Frank ("Pere") Callahan—are in the fantasy realm called Mid-World. They have just saved a town (or "calla") from an army of robot wolves. But they remain in a state of anxiety because one of their number, Eddie Dean's wife Susannah Dean, is pregnant in supernatural fashion with what they believe to be a cannibalistic monster and is no longer in Mid-World. She has gone through a magic portal, and entered New York City in the year 1999. The group confers with the Manni, town elders who possess magical powers, about the possibility of opening a portal to the other world; then Jake and Father Callahan could follow Susannah and try to stop her from bearing the child. Roland and Eddie would also cross over from Mid-World, but would enter at Maine in the year 1977. Their task would be to purchase a vacant lot in Manhattan owned by a book dealer named Calvin Tower before it is secured by their enemies. On this lot grows a rose essential to the preservation of the Dark Tower, which is the ultimate goal of Roland's quest.

The sinister-sounding Dark Tower is not evil, but rather serves as a linchpin for the entire universe, including Mid-World, In-World (where Roland originates), and all other worlds. If the Dark Tower falls, there will be nothing left but Discordia, or chaos. The Dark Tower will fall if the six beams that support it are broken. Beings called "breakers" are attempting to do just that, and after Roland gets the Manni to agree to help them cross over from Mid-World, one of the beams that supports the Dark Tower is broken. Mid-World is shaken; buildings collapse. The success of Roland's quest, already urgent, becomes absolutely crucial.

This chapter, and each one that follows, ends with a pair of rhyming, sing-song four-line verses, the first called a "stave" and the second a "response."

Stanza 2: the Persistence of Magic

Roland, Eddie Dean, Jake with his pet billy-bumbler Oy, and Father Callahan meet up with Henchick, head of the Manni, and forty men. The Manni will accompany them to the magic portal called the Unfound Door that lies in the Cave of Voices. Before they depart, Callahan wonders about his existence; he has discovered a book called *'Salem's Lot*, by a man named Stephen King. This novel describes Callahan's life back in a small town in Maine fighting vampires.

On their way to the portal, Roland and company pass the place where they defeated the robot wolves. The wolves' bodies, they discover, have been removed from the battlefield by the townsfolk and piled up in preparation for an enormous funeral pyre. They also

pass Susannah's empty wheelchair. (Susannah lost her legs in an earlier volume, when pushed in front of a subway by a villain named Jack Mort.)

The group climbs a path and arrives at the Cave of the Voices. They wonder whether enough magic remains in Mid-World to open the portal, and Henchick reassures them. An elaborate ritual ensues, with Jake swinging a magic "plumb-bob." The portal opens, and Jake and Callahan are whisked into New York City, 1999.

Stanza 3: Trudy and Mia

The chapter begins with Susannah's entry from Mid-World into New York in 1999, as witnessed by a passerby, Trudy Damascus, on June 19, between 1:18 and 1:19 in the afternoon. In that moment, Trudy turns from hardheaded skeptic absorbed in her work as an accountant into someone who, as she walks along Second Avenue, personally sees a woman appear out of thin air.

The woman she sees is African American; at first she has no legs, but then she grows legs which are, surprisingly, those of a white person. The white legs are a symptom of her being possessed by a (white) demoness named Mia. She carries a bowling bag. She has no shoes. She demands Trudy give her the shoes she carries and threatens her, telling her not to report to the police what she witnessed.

Still, Trudy reports what she saw to a disbelieving police officer, then returns to work. Later, she revisits the spot where Susannah appeared and hears a mysterious humming sound. This takes place near the vacant lot where the red rose grows—the rose that Roland must help to preserve. The lot is next to a skyscraper, 2 Hammarskjöld Plaza, which is also one form the Dark Tower takes in this world.

Stanza 4: Susannah's Dogan

Susannah recalls her recent past, the fight with the robot wolves, and Mia dragging her through the portal from Mid-World into New York. She now sits on a park bench talking with Mia, who is pregnant and shares her body. They both experience labor pains. Susannah looks at a newspaper and discovers the year: 1999. She recalls her distant past, in the 1960s, when she took part in the civil rights movement, and realizes many people she knew then are now likely dead.

Susannah Dean is actually three people, including Mia. The other two, both African American, are Odetta Holmes, a civil rights activist, and Detta Walker, a former prostitute. When the latter speaks the voice is harsh, profane, slangy, and aggressive.

The labor pains intensify. Mia tells Susannah she needs to delay the birth. Susannah retreats to her Dogan, a kind of imagined mental space full of dials and monitors that allow her to observe herself on screen. Turning one of these dials allows her to put the baby inside her to sleep. She uses a microphone to send a message to her husband, Eddie Dean, telling him where she is.

Susannah returns from the Dogan. Mia insists on helping her find a private space and a telephone. Susannah agrees.

Stanza 5: the Turtle

Mia and Susannah discuss whether they should return to Mid-World for a palaver, or a chat, to exchange information. Then Susannah has a vision of Eddie Dean and Callahan from before the battle with the robot wolves. They have the bowling bag she now carries, and they discover something hidden in the lining—a small ivory statue of a turtle. Back in New York, she removes this same turtle from the lining of the bowling bag.

This magic turtle allows Susannah to hypnotize and control an expensively dressed man named Mathiessen van Wyck, assistant to the Swedish ambassador for the United Nations. Susannah takes his cash and orders him to reserve a room for her at the Plaza Park Hotel, then commands him to forget everything.

Susannah goes to the hotel, which she discovers has recently been bought by North Central Positronics, a corporation run by the evil forces who wish to topple the Dark Tower. At the hotel, she uses the turtle to hypnotize a desk clerk, takes the elevator to room 1919, and puts her bowling bag in the room's safe. While waiting for Mia to receive her phone call, they agree to have their palaver.

Stanza 6: the Castle Allure

For their palaver, Mia transports herself and Susannah Dean to what Mia tells her is Discordia or End-World. They are separate—Susannah legless in a cart, Mia a beautiful pregnant woman. In exchange for Susannah's promise of continued help, Mia reveals she is a demon, and her child, or chap, is Roland's; the child will be called Mordred, and will serve the Crimson King. The Crimson King is a kind of Satan, and will rule in the chaos that follows the toppling of the Dark Tower. Mia also explains that the Crimson King's power has increased because humans have replaced faith and magic with rationalism and machines, which will eventually run down.

Susannah tries to convince Mia that the beings who made her pregnant cannot be trusted, but their palaver is interrupted by the ringing of a telephone. Back in the hotel, Mia answers. It is an agent of the Crimson King named Richard P. Sayre. Sayre reassures Mia and tells her where she must go to have her baby: a Manhattan restaurant called the Dixie Pig. The name Dixie associates Sayre with the racists Susannah fought during the civil rights movement. Sayre also says that Roland and Eddie Dean will soon be dead.

Stanza 7: the Ambush

Back in Mid-World, Roland and Eddie Dean are left in the Cave of the Voices after Jake and Callahan go to New York. They travel through the portal to a Mobil station in East Stoneham, Maine, 1977, where an unidentified assailant shoots at them. It is obvious that someone knew they would show up there and waited for them; it is a group of armed men under the command of Jack Andolini, against whom they fought previously. A battle ensues.

Two female bystanders are killed, while a man near them escapes just in time. Eddie is shot in the leg. A tractor-trailer with a load of logs crashes, giving Roland and Eddie a chance to retreat behind a store near a kerosene pump. The man who ducked and survived, John Cullum, helps them fill a room with kerosene. They lure Andolini's men inside, light the kerosene, and escape in Cullum's boat. Eddie receives the message Susannah sent him in stanza 4.

Heading toward his boathouse, Cullum asks if Roland and Eddie are like these "walk-ins" who show up from another reality, mainly mutants who speak an unknown language. They admit they are, though Eddie is originally from Brooklyn. But Eddie also finds evidence that his Brooklyn is not the Brooklyn of this world.

Stanza 8: a Game of Toss

Roland, Eddie, and John Cullum are in John Cullum's cottage. Eddie remembers Brooklyn in the mid-1980s, when he lived with his brother Henry, read *The Lord of the Rings*, and developed a heroin addiction. Cullum asks him about his leg, where he was shot, and offers him some painkillers. Eddie talks with Cullum about his collection of signed baseballs, then tells him about a man he and Roland need to find, a book dealer named Calvin Tower.

Tower's store in Manhattan was destroyed by Jack Andolini. Tower is supposed to be hiding out in Maine, keeping a low profile, but Cullum knows immediately who Eddie is talking about and where he is staying. He will take Eddie and Roland to Tower, but before they leave, Eddie asks him questions concerning the writer Stephen King. King wrote *'Salem's Lot*, in which Eddie and Roland's companion Father Callahan was a fictional character. Eddie wonders whether they are all fictional characters from books by Stephen King. He asks where King lives and Cullum tells him he lives nearby. Eddie also asks whether the "walk-ins" increased after King moved to the area. Cullum agrees that they might have.

Following the discussion, John Cullum lends Eddie a car. Cullum drives his truck and leads Roland and Eddie to Calvin Tower.

Stanza 9: Eddie Bites His Tongue

An angry letter from Callahan (sent two weeks before the battle in stanza 7) warns Tower to hide because he is not safe from Andolini in Maine. However, Tower ignores this warning. John Cullum easily leads Eddie and Roland to Tower's rented lakeside cabin. Roland tells Cullum his own life is now in danger from Andolini, and convinces him to leave town. He and Eddie then enter the cabin and find Tower's attorney, Aaron Deepneau.

They discuss the possibility of Tower selling the vacant lot with the rose in it. Deepneau thinks Tower will refuse even though he has promised to sell, because Tower has trouble giving up his possessions. Tower shows up and does refuse, but Eddie and Roland remind Tower that if he does not sell, he will remain in danger from Andolini and Andolini's boss, Balazar, who also want the lot. Tower reluctantly agrees.

Talking with Deepneau, meanwhile, Eddie learns that Co-Op City, where he grew up, is in the Bronx in this world. Perhaps, he thinks, Stephen King put Co-Op City in Brooklyn by mistake when writing one of his novels.

Roland removes the bullet from Eddie's leg with a paring knife. Eddie sends Susannah a message telling her to "burn up the day," which means stall for time, because help (in the form of Callahan and Jake) is on the way.

Stanza 10: Susannah-mio, Divided Girl of Mine

Back at the Plaza Park hotel, Susannah hears voices that list the deaths of great people from the past thirty years; she remembers being jailed for participating in a civil rights protest, again associating the evil she fights with real historical events. She then returns to her Dogan to check the dials, and receives Eddie's message to "burn up the day." Mia, meanwhile, is controlling Susannah's body, trying to get to the Dixie Pig so she can bear her child. She asks for Susannah's help. Susannah agrees in exchange for another discussion, partly to waste time as Eddie instructed.

For this discussion they are transported to an Old West theme park run by North Central Positronics. It contains a building where children's brains are fed to servants of the Crimson King. Mia tells Susannah more of her personal history, and of the fall from a time of magic and faith to a time of rationalism and machines. She also says the child they carry, Roland's son Mordred, will grow up to kill Roland.

Their discussion over, Susannah gets Mia out of the hotel. A street preacher named Reverend Earl Harrigan helps them into the cab that will take them to the Dixie Pig.

Stanza 11: the Writer

Aware that they are nearing the end of their long quest, Roland and Eddie decide to seek out the author Stephen King to discover whether or not he created them. They also wonder if he has any special relationship to the Dark Tower or the rose, and if he might be some kind of god.

Soon after arriving at King's unexpectedly modest house, they surprise the writer as he rounds a corner. King immediately recognizes Roland (but not Eddie, whom he will not write about until later). Deeply frightened at the prospect of facing a fictional character he created, King runs away. Roland and Eddie corner King and calm him down. A question-and-answer session follows. King reveals that he created Roland and began the "Dark Tower" series several years before but gave up because he found Roland and his story too disturbing.

Wondering how he could be this apparently unexceptional man's creation, Roland hypnotizes King. He discovers that his story came to King unbidden from "Gan," which is the good (or at least non-Discordian) side of the universe. Satisfied, Roland orders King to resume the series, working on it when he is inspired, until it is finished.

Stanza 12: Jake and Callahan

This stanza begins where stanza 2 left off, with Jake and Callahan being whisked into New York City in 1999. Jake immediately gets into a fight with a cab driver and draws a gun on the man. Reverend Earl Harrigan, from stanza 10, defuses the situation. Jake and Callahan realize they must go to the Dixie Pig as soon as possible, but when Harrigan helped Susannah into a cab she left a message for them: they must go to the hotel first.

At the hotel in room 1919 they find Susannah's bowling bag. Inside it is Black Thirteen, a magic ball of value to the Crimson King. Almost driven insane by the strange song it plays, they manage to take the ball to a storage locker in the World Trade Center.

Jake and Callahan take a cab to the Dixie Pig. Limousines are lined up in front. Inside, Susannah is about to deliver the baby, surrounded by powerful followers of the Crimson King. They will likely die in there, Callahan realizes. Some hope is provided when they find the magic ivory turtle in the gutter, where Susannah dropped it for them.

Stanza 13: "hile, Mia, Hile, Mother"

The cab drops Susannah off a block away from the Dixie Pig. She walks past a folk guitarist performing the song "Man of Constant Sorrow." She stops to listen and sing along; she is reminded of singing during the civil rights movement. She feels the goodness of the people she knew then, and sorrow for civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi. Mia feels this along with Susannah, and begins to understand the difference

between good and evil. She realizes Susannah was correct to warn her against trusting the figures who now await them in the Dixie Pig. Nonetheless, they enter.

The Dixie Pig is a scene of horror that only confirms Mia's growing suspicions. What appear to be people are actually giant rats. Also present are vampires and a man with a hawk's head. Mia begs Richard P. Sayre to keep his promise and let her raise her son; he makes her lick his boots. He then leads her through a door with a North Central Positronics sign on it, into a large room filled with beds and medical equipment. There she gives birth to Mordred.

Coda: Pages from a Writer's Journal

Having placed himself in the story as the author, King adds fictionalized diary entries from 1977 (when Roland and Eddie visited him in stanza 11) through 1999, when *Song of Susannah* concludes. Included are references to other King works like *Pet Sematary*, along with incidental scenes from King's life; he also describes the unusually fast and easy composition of the previous "Dark Tower" volumes. The last diary entry is dated June 19, 1999. On this date, the real Stephen King was hit by a van and severely injured while walking along a road near his home. In the book, an excerpt of a newspaper article reports that King was killed in the accident.

Characters

Donald Frank Callahan

The Catholic priest Donald Frank "Pere" Callahan originally appears in an earlier Stephen King novel that is not part of the "Dark Tower" series. In *'Salem's Lot* (1976), Callahan helps battle vampires in Jerusalem's Lot, a small town in Maine. In the "Dark Tower" series, he enters Mid-World, sets up a church in the town Calla Bryn Sturgis, wins converts, and fights alongside Roland in the battle against the robot wolves before joining Jake on his trip to New York to help save Susannah.

Jake Chambers

A twelve-year-old boy when *Song of Susannah* takes place, Jake Chambers ended up in Mid-World after being thrown in front of a train by the villain Jack Mort in an earlier "Dark Tower" volume. He subsequently becomes an apprentice gunslinger under Roland's tutelage. He is a person with both adult and childlike qualities. He also has the ability to read thoughts. When he and Callahan are about to enter the Dixie Pig and battle the forces of the Crimson King, Jake takes control of the situation and lays out a strategy.

Despite all of this, he remains a preadolescent boy; this is perhaps best evidenced by his close relationship with Oy, a "billy-bumbler," which is essentially a Mid-World version of a dog. Unlike a dog, Oy can speak some words; like many dogs, he is utterly attached to his young master. Oy and Jake take on their adventures together, and when Jake leaves Mid-World through the magic portal, Oy follows him even though Jake has reluctantly commanded that he stay behind.

The Crimson King

The Crimson King is a mysterious and powerful figure who is trapped inside the Dark Tower. His ultimate goal is to destroy the Dark Tower so he will be free to rule the darkness that will engulf the world thereafter. Throughout the "Dark Tower" series, The Crimson King is considered Roland's ultimate enemy; however, he does not actually appear in *Song of Susannah*. Instead, Richard Sayre appears as a representative of The Crimson King in his dealings with the demoness Mia.

John Cullum

A resident of East Stoneham, Maine, John Cullum is a laborer/caretaker with a heavy New England accent. A confirmed bachelor, he enjoys his motorboat and his large collection of signed baseballs. Though uneducated and modest in his needs, Cullum is clever and adaptable; he can even handle himself in a sudden gun battle, as shown

when Roland and Eddie are ambushed at the East Stoneham Mobil station. He is a good judge of character, recognizing immediately that Roland and Eddie are good people despite the violence. He is also a keen observer, quickly recognizing that Roland and Eddie are after Calvin Tower. He takes the two men to Tower's rented cottage. Cullum also shows himself surprisingly open to fantastic events: Eddie and Roland's appearance from some kind of alternative universe does not faze him.

Trudy Damascus

Her last name refers to the road to Damascus on which St. Paul is converted to Christianity in the Bible. Trudy is a very practical-minded accountant, but her view of life is radically altered when she witnesses Susannah Dean appear as if out of thin air.

Eddie Dean

Roland's main follower Eddie Dean is from the Brooklyn neighborhood Co-Op City, which in reality is in the Bronx. This discrepancy is the fault, as Eddie discovers in *Song of Susannah*, of Eddie's creator, Stephen King. Earlier "Dark Tower" volumes detail Eddie's difficult, parentless youth under the guidance of his irresponsible older brother Henry, as well as his descent into robbery and drug dealing. He is saved from a life of crime by Roland, who takes Eddie under his wing and makes him a lethal fellow gunslinger. Where Roland is stoic and taciturn, however, Eddie is talkative and has trouble keeping his emotions in check. When he and Roland confront Calvin Tower, Eddie gets so angry that he bites down on his own tongue and draws blood.

Eddie's talkativeness, passion, and intelligence prove helpful throughout *Song of Susannah*. He earns John Cullum's trust with his interest in baseball. He also continues interrogating Cullum when Roland wants to get moving. By doing so, he gains crucial information about mutant "walk-ins" in the area, who seem to be servants of the Crimson King crossing over from another world. He also learns about the author Stephen King. This information is important to the success of the quest to save the Dark Tower.

The one thing that keeps Eddie from focusing exclusively on the quest is his relationship with his wife, Susannah Dean. He worries about her throughout the novel. Despite their separation, they manage to send each other reassuring mental messages confirming that they are both still alive.

Henry Dean

Henry Dean is Eddie's older brother from Brooklyn. He is an important figure in Eddie's life before Eddie joins up with Roland. In the 8th Stanza, Eddie recalls Henry's girlfriend Sylvia Goldover, a petty thief with bad hygiene. Henry mocks Eddie for his interest in fantasy literature like *Lord of the Rings*. Henry is also mentioned by Susannah, who blames him as a bad influence on Eddie.

Susannah Dean

The legless, wheelchair-bound Susannah Dean is actually two personalities in one, both African American. She is Odetta Holmes, college-educated daughter of a dentist and active participant in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. She is also the vicious, uneducated Detta Walker, a former prostitute who hates white people. In an earlier "Dark Tower" volume, Roland forces these two distinct personalities to acknowledge one another and coexist in the single person that he names Susannah. The name Dean is added after she marries Eddie.

The personality of Odetta Holmes appears to be the one most clearly identified with Susannah. It is Odetta who talks to Eddie from her Dogan, remembers her mother, and holds to the values of the civil rights movement. Susannah suppresses the personality of Detta Walker, though she comes out during times of extreme stress. Detta's profane and confrontational outbursts are useful to Susannah insofar as they intimidate adversaries like Mia and Richard P. Sayre.

Susannah is possessed by a third personality during *Song of Susannah*, a demoness named Mia who grows a pair of legs so she, and Susannah, can walk around. The fact that these legs are white emphasizes the issues of identity and race that are being explored in the character of Susannah Dean. She finds she can escape temporarily from Mia through a visualization technique in which she imagines herself in her Dogan, a room with monitors and dials where she can see herself on screen and take measurements of what is occurring inside her body, including the progress of her pregnancy. She can also use the knobs in her Dogan to influence her situation. Susannah's Dogan begins to deteriorate over the course of the novel.

Aaron Deepneau

Calvin Tower's attorney, Deepneau is an amiable man who warns Roland and Eddie that Tower will renege on his promise to sell them a vacant lot. He then helps them deal with Tower, and writes up the contract for the sale. Deepneau is suffering from cancer.

Roland Deschain

Roland Deschain is the hero of the entire "Dark Tower" series. His quest is to save the Dark Tower, as well as discover exactly what the Dark Tower is and who occupies it. Over the course of the series, he recruits three people to help him on this quest: Eddie Dean, Susannah Dean, and Jake Chambers. The quest is his "ka," or destiny, and they are his "ka-tet," with their own destinies bound to his.

Roland is a gunslinger—the type of character who might have once been played by John Wayne or Clint Eastwood in western movies. He is generally a man of few words, allowing his gun to speak for him. He rarely laughs or even smiles. He is obsessed with his quest. Although basically a good man, he will not hesitate to kill anyone who

opposes him, or even sacrifice innocent bystanders if doing so will improve his chances of completing his quest. This makes sense to him because all of humanity hangs in the balance; sacrificing a few innocents can be justified in order to save the rest of humanity. It is, however, a responsibility few would readily shoulder. Indeed, in the 11th Stanza, King explains to Roland that he stopped writing the "Dark Tower" series partly because he became afraid of Roland when Roland let a young boy fall to his death. Roland could have saved him, but doing so would have cost time and might have jeopardized his quest.

Roland is largely relegated to the background in *Song of Susannah*. Nonetheless, he remains a strong presence in the narrative, influencing events at crucial moments. While young Jake tries to open the magic portal, Roland ensures that the necessary rituals are performed without delay. Similarly, Eddie gets murderously angry at Calvin Tower for his reckless behavior and his unwillingness to sell the vacant lot as promised, but Roland is able to change Calvin's mind.

Stephen King

The author of *Song of Susannah* makes an appearance as a character in his own novel when two of his own creations, Roland and Eddie, seek him out to try and grasp the meaning of their own existence. King is portrayed as a somewhat confused man who smokes Pall Malls, guzzles beer, and is absorbed with daily family concerns. He has no real grasp of the earth-shaking importance of the story he started five years before and then shelved. Roland hypnotizes King and orders him to finish the "Dark Tower" series; however, in a coda, or conclusion, to the novel, King is struck and killed by a van before he can do so.

Reverend Earl Harrigan

A street preacher who ignores the parking tickets he regularly receives, Reverend Harrigan quotes the Bible and offers salvation to passersby. In his car are piles of pamphlets identifying him as the head of the Church of the Holy God-Bomb. He helps Susannah into the cab that takes her to the Dixie Pig, and later helps Jake and Callahan when they get into a fight with a cab driver.

Mia

Originally a stunningly beautiful, immortal demoness who knows almost nothing about herself and who hungers solely for sex, Mia realizes her life lacks something essential when she sees a human couple with their child. This leaves Mia vulnerable to the inducements of Walter, a representative of the Crimson King, who offers to let her bear a child in exchange for her becoming mortal. He promises her that she will raise the child for the first seven years of the child's life. For this to occur, Mia must take over Susannah Dean's body.

The pregnant Mia cares about nothing but bearing and raising her child, whatever the consequences might be for others or for the universe as a whole. However, she is rattled by Susannah's assertions that she will not be allowed to raise the child. She seems to gain an awareness of right and wrong through sharing Susannah's memories.

Richard P. Sayre

The smooth-talking, manipulative Sayre is a powerful follower of the Crimson King. Sayre calls Mia on the telephone at the Park-Plaza hotel and allays her suspicions about the deal she has made with Walter; he also meets Mia at the Dixie Pig and oversees the birth of her son Mordred.

Calvin Tower

A book dealer, Tower owns the vacant lot where the rose that connects all worlds together grows. In an earlier volume in the series, Tower promises to sell the lot for one dollar in exchange for Roland and Eddie's help. However, he is selfish and miserly and tries to renege on his promise. Roland ultimately convinces him to make the sale.

Themes

Good and Evil

While the reader of *Song of Susannah* might sometimes wonder whether the characters that King presents as heroes are entirely good, there is little doubt that King's evil characters are purely and entirely malevolent. In stanza 10, Susannah describes her enemies as eating the brains of children. When Mia rips the fake flesh from the followers of the Crimson King in the Dixie Pig, she discovers they are actually monstrous rats disguised as humans. The name Dixie Pig itself might reflect the historical malevolence of the Southern whites against African Americans. The greeting Mia receives upon entering the Dixie Pig, "Hile Mia," echoes the Nazi salute, "Heil."

The presence of purely evil figures in *Song of Susannah* means that anyone acting against those figures is good almost by definition. This includes Roland, Eddie, Jake, Callahan, and Susannah, as well as those who help them, like John Cullum and Reverend Harrigan. However, while the evil figures are purely evil, the good are not so straightforward. While Roland is good, he is also cold, distant, and a remorseless killer. While Eddie is good, he is also a former heroin addict and thief who has trouble containing his anger. And while Susannah is good, she is also the vicious former prostitute Detta Walker. The problem they all face is how to best deal with the evil that is within them—whether to suppress it, or try to harness it without becoming evil themselves.

Quest

The struggle of good against evil gives meaning and shape to Roland's quest to enter the Dark Tower and save the universe from falling into chaos. This structure places *Song of Susannah* in a long line of quest literature extending as far back as ancient Greece. The poem by 19th century poet, Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1852), which directly inspired King's "Dark Tower" series, also deals with a quest. However, Browning never states why the hero Childe Roland comes to enter the Dark Tower or what he finds there.

Quest literature, as Browning's poem suggests, may be less about good and evil and more about the search for the meaning of human existence. Certainly, this seems to be King's understanding of Roland's quest. In stanza 2 of *Song of Susannah*, Henchick asks Roland to pray. Roland answers that he does not "hold to any God," only "to the Tower, and I won't pray to that." Roland does not assume that there is a god or that the Tower is good or worth praying to—only that the Tower is necessary and significant to life, the meaning of which is what he arguably seeks.

Religious Faith

If Roland refuses to believe in anything but the Tower, he also fears he will not find anything there worth believing in. As he admits to Eddie in stanza 11, he worries that the top room of the Dark Tower will be empty and that the "God of all universes" is either dead or nonexistent. Roland's doubts have to do with a general loss of religious faith associated in *Song of Susannah* with the modern world. In stanza 6, Mia tells Susannah that when "faith fails … you replace it with rational thought," and that this is the exchange made when religion is replaced by science as the method people use to understand the world. Mia argues further that where faith is eternal, rationalism is loveless, temporary, and dead. Roland's quest might be read as a response to this problem, an attempt to determine in an empirical manner—by actually entering the Dark Tower—if faith can be justified.

Machines

In stanza 6, while denouncing rationalism, Mia also denounces the loss of magic from the universe, and the use of machinery instead. Machines, she says, eventually run down. In *Song of Susannah*, machines are generally portrayed as being on the side of evil. They are the robot wolves that attack a town prior to the start of the book, and they are the android prostitutes in the Wild West theme park from stanza 11. The theme park is also where a group of children is brought to have their brains mechanically removed and fed to servants of the Crimson King; and where, in a room full of sinister machinery, Mia will bear Mordred.

Magic, Mia informs Susannah, is what created the universe, including the six beams that support the Dark Tower. It is significant, in this context, that the novel opens with Roland wondering whether there is enough magic left to open the magic portal from Mid-World. It is also significant that Susannah uses a magic totem, the small ivory turtle, to get shelter when in New York.

Fantasy

Magic, a force for good in *Song of Susannah*, is also a hallmark of fantasy literature like J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, which Eddie Dean remembers reading at the beginning of stanza 8. *Song of Susannah* itself, like the entire "Dark Tower" series, is an example of fantasy literature. Mid-World is a realm of fantasy not unlike Middle Earth in Tolkien's series. However, whereas Tolkien's entire story takes place in Middle Earth, the "Dark Tower" series juxtaposes, or compares, the realm of fantasy with places like Maine and Brooklyn. King makes no firm division between fantasy and reality, though. Instead, the two intermingle throughout *Song of Susannah*.

Music

Like magic, music in *Song of Susannah* represents a force for good. The novel's title, the use of the term stanza instead of chapter, and the song-like poems that end each section all serve to reinforce the significance of music. In stanza 3, when Trudy Damascus returns to the place where she saw Susannah appear as if from nowhere, the humming she hears is a sign of the goodness of that particular spot. A man tells her, "That's not humming, that's *singing*," and goes on to explain how, when he was young, the same singing helped clear up a bad case of acne. Music is also a force for good in stanza 13, when a street musician's rendition of "Man of Constant Sorrow" reminds Susannah of her participation in the civil rights movement.

Style

Metafiction

In metafiction, the author intentionally calls attention to the fact that the reader is reading a created work. This self-awareness is a conscious and deliberate contrast to the typical escapism of most literary works, wherein authors attempt to create worlds so believable that the reader can overlook the fact that the worlds of the story are, in fact, an artificial creation. In *Song of Susannah*, King uses metafictional devices on several levels. Throughout the book, the main characters realize that one of the ka-tet, Father Callahan, appears as a literary character in a book written in the "real world" by an author named Stephen King. Indeed, Callahan was a primary character in King's *'Salem's Lot*. This leads them to wonder if they all might be characters in some book. Additionally, the novelist himself appears as a character in the book and interacts with his fictional creations. Finally, King ends the book with a fictionalized journal that includes entries from throughout his career; he intermingles fact with fantasy, and discusses at length his work on the "Dark Tower" series.

Epic

The epic, which includes such works as Homer's *The Odyssey* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is among the most ambitious of literary forms. Epics are stories that celebrate heroic feats and legendary events. The "Dark Tower" series in general can be considered epic in scope because it addresses such all-encompassing themes as the existence of God and the creation of the universe. Placing such themes within the context of a highly eventful adventure story, which takes place over an expansive stretch of time and geographical space, also gives the "Dark Tower" series an epic feel.

Like J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, King's "Dark Tower" series combines epic scope with the conventions of the fantasy novel, including invented worlds, magic spells, and imaginary creatures. Both series also use an invented language. In *Song of Susannah*, for example, Roland and his ka-tet (followers) employ such terms as ka (destiny), calla (town), todash (empty space between worlds), and gunna (possessions).

Epics tend to use a very poetic and formal language. In *Song of Susannah*, King generally maintains a colloquial tone. In other words, he uses common terms in an everyday voice, easily recognizable as contemporary American English. King uses both profanities and slang terms and also limits the use of stilted or formal language to the speech of characters such as Henchick, the town elder in stanza 1.

Foreshadowing

King creates suspense in the novel through the use of foreshadowing, or the suggestion of events to come. For example, Susannah learns of the Dixie Pig and its evil spectators long before she actually enters the restaurant's door. The reader also learns that Jake and Callahan have gone to 1999 New York several chapters before they are shown arriving there.

Allusions

Song of Susannah is full of allusions, or indirect references, to other works of literature, as well as many non-literary sources. When Mia discusses a plague, she calls it the Red Death; Susannah recognizes this as being from an Edgar Allan Poe story. One of the beams that hold up the tower is named Shardik, after the gigantic bear in the Richard Adams novel of the same name. Allusions are also made to Patrick O'Brian's novels, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and the Bible. There are also nonliterary references to Bill Gates, the 1986 World Series, and the television soap opera *General Hospital*. The use of so many references to different aspects of modern culture arguably makes the novel more grounded in reality. It also underscores the story's ambitious, epic quality: this book, King seems to be saying, is about everything.

Historical Context

The Civil Rights Movement

Probably the most obvious historical event King uses in *Song of Susannah* is the civil rights movement, which is referenced on several occasions in the narrative. In stanza 13, for example, Susannah recalls taking part in protests in Mississippi in the early 1960s. She laments the deaths of "James Chaney, twenty-one; Andrew Goodman, twenty-one; Michael Schwerner, twenty-four; O Discordia."

These three were actual historical figures; Schwerner and Goodman were white men from New York, and Chaney was a black man from Mississippi. All three were working on behalf of the Congress of Racial Equality in support of integration issues. They were murdered by members of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan on June 21, 1964. The discovery of their bodies several weeks later prompted one of the most famous FBI investigations of the era, dubbed Mississippi Burning. (A movie based on this investigation, *Mississippi Burning*, was released in 1988.)

The Sixties

King also references the violence and upheavals of the 1960s at the start of stanza 10. In particular, King mentions the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. These events defined for many the distress and chaos of the decade. In stanza 10, King writes of President Kennedy's assassination, "America's last gunslinger is dead. O Discordia!" He seems to suggest that Kennedy might be considered a forerunner of King's own Roland Deschain. In this way, King also implies that since the 1960s, our world (or at least the United States) has descended ever closer to chaos, just as Mid-World has. Both worlds have experienced a loss of innocence and wonder, and both are now on the verge of destruction.

The Attack on the World Trade Center

King sets much of *Song of Susannah* in New York City in 1999, where Susannah and Mia will give birth to Roland's evil son Mordred. The late1990s in America was a time of relative peace and strong economic growth. However, as King knew while composing the novel in 2003, America (and New York in particular) was just two years away from a devastating terrorist attack. To emphasize the point that troubled times lay ahead, when Callahan and Jake need to hide the evil bowling ball-like totem known as Black Thirteen, they place it in a coin-operated locker in the World Trade Center for long-term storage. This bit of metafictional foreshadowing seems to be intended to suggest that Black Thirteen may have acted as some sort of beacon for evil, though King stops short of spelling this out (perhaps for fear of trivializing such a tragedy).

Critical Overview

While there are collections of academic essays dedicated to Stephen King's work, academia as a whole has been dismissive of his writing. The "Dark Tower" series in general and *Song of Susannah* in particular has received little attention among literary scholars. However, this sixth volume of the "Dark Tower" series, like most of King's fiction, has received a great deal of attention from mainstream reviewers.

On the positive side, Matt Thorne of *The Independent*, an enthusiastic fan of the "Dark Tower" series, called *Song of Susannah* "by far the best in the series so far." The book, he argued, has "none of the bagginess" of other"Dark Tower" volumes, and "almost works as a stand-alone novel." Thorne said it should appeal especially to those readers who like King at his most "metafictional," referring in particular to King placing himself as a character in his own work. A similar point was made by Michael Berry in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Berry described the move as "an audacious gambit" that could have easily disrupted the story, but ultimately lends even more life to an already exciting tale. Berry further maintained that *Song of Susannah* is significantly focused on the theme of death, noting that at the conclusion "every major character" is "in terrible jeopardy." In the *Boston Globe*, Erica Noonan agreed with Thorne and Berry about the book's metafictional quality, arguing that the fictional diary entries that make up the book's Coda section are "the most entertaining 20 pages of the novel." Noonan also noted the story's "feverish, page-turning ending" is alone"enough to prompt one to keep reading" the series to its conclusion. Similarly, Phaedra Trethan, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote that King"leaves you dangling from the precipice of what's next." Dorman T. Shindler, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, argued that the novel works despite many unexpected story developments, odd combinations of genres, and metafictional devices: "King brilliantly juggles all the plot elements."

On the negative side, the *New York Times Book Review* afforded *Song of Susannah* no more than a capsule review by Ben Sisario. Sisario wrote that King's "attempt at a Tolkien-like epic" has in this sixth volume "become dauntingly overstuffed and complex," and that King's prose is "indulgent." Michael Agger's *New York Times* article, "Pulp Metafiction," offered a more thorough condemnation of the novel, along with the entire "Dark Tower" series. Agger accused King of relying on clicheés, "hackneyed" scenarios, an overly complex plot, and one-dimensional characters. Detta Walker, he argued, "speaks in a guttural ebonics," implying that she is an offensive stereotype of an African American. And while Agger agrees that King's use of himself as a character adds life to the book, he thinks it does so only because the book as a whole is generally weak. As a character, Agger writes, King "instantly becomes" the entire "Dark Tower" series' "most believable element."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Gordon Theisen is a freelance writer with a Ph.D. in English literature from Binghamton University. In this essay, Theisen discusses King's use of a wide variety of popular media genres and how magic plays a key role in the novel and popular literature.

Song of Susannah sometimes seems like an unwieldy bag stuffed with ideas taken from a variety of different popular literary and movie genres. Stephen King draws from spaghetti western-era Clint Eastwood as a model for his hero, Roland Deschain, and western movies, in general, for the lengthy shootout in stanza 7. He also includes creatures and plot devices from countless monster movies and horror novels, including vampires, an army of wolves, bizarre machinery, trances, demonic possession, split personalities, and magic totems with which a character might turn any passerby into a virtual slave. He creates a separate fantasy realm called Mid-World with its own special language, not unlike J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth or the invented worlds of numerous other fantasy novels. He also makes use of a classic science fiction motif—robots in disguise—in a couple of places in the book.

The common thread in all of these genre devices is the idea of magic, the element that is holding Mid-World together and without which, Chaos will reign. But magic is also responsible for the "Dark Tower" series in the first place. The character of Stephen King in the book understands the indefinable—in a word, magic—process of writing, and that he must surrender to it in order to create. The magic of creation is as essential to *Song of Susannah* as the magic that takes place within the story and unifies the various genre devices.

There is little wonder, then, that Ben Sisario, writing for the *New York Times Book Review*, called *Song of Susannah* "dauntingly overstuffed and complex." It seems like a hundred other books and movies put through a blender. However, King manages to corral his many influences into a single, coherent, suspenseful narrative that keeps readers engaged. The novel presents elements borrowed from a surprising variety of popular genres combined with deeply serious themes. This is not unusual in popular fiction, and is a constant in King's own work from early in his career. For example, King's first novel *Carrie* deals with the same themes of adolescence as classics like *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Catcher in the Rye*, but within the conventions of a supernatural horror novel. Though popular fiction may not aspire to the standards of high art, it often takes on social issues of great importance and reaches a wider audience. In the case of *Song of Susannah*, King most notably addresses the issue of racism in the character of Susannah. She is an African American woman with three radically different personalities contained within her: one is a civil rights activist who has experienced firsthand the ugliness of deep-seated racism; one is an inner-city miscreant whose life has been shaped by less overt "economic racism"; and the last is a once-immortal demon who knows nothing of compassion and equality.

However, this is not the only hint that King believes popular fiction can deal with deep issues, or be as worthy as loftier fiction. In addition to the subject of racism, King

examines problems of faith, as well as the existence or nonexistence of God. In stanza 6, the demoness Mia denounces the entire modern era for its rationalism, and its celebration of and reliance on technological advances and machines. Rationalism is a school of thought that encourages finding truth through reason rather than through religion or faith. Mia's complaints echo concerns that have been expressed by serious writers and philosophers since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. They also call to mind the great modernist writers of the twentieth century, such as James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, who have garnered serious scholarly attention. In fact, the title of an earlier "Dark Tower" volume, *The Waste Lands*, is a nod to a famous poem by Eliot from 1922. This connection is made clear by King himself in the "October 9th, 1989" entry of the fictionalized diary that makes up the Coda section of *Song of Susannah*.

Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" is famously difficult to understand, because the author gives the reader no obvious story line or explicit theme to grasp for meaning. Instead, he provides the reader with an onslaught of various powerful images. This is in part because the poem is meant to reflect the chaos of a civilization that has lost any strong moral center in the wake of World War I. Instead, civilization has come to rely on the very machines that caused so much death and destruction during the War. The entire "Dark Tower" series, like Eliot's poem, also deals with the idea of the universe falling into a state of chaos after too much trust is put in machines to keep things working in Mid-World.

In the novel, Chaos will consume the universe if the Dark Tower topples, and the Dark Tower will topple if the six beams that hold it up are broken. Two beams have already broken before the start of the book, and a third is lost in stanza 1. As Mia tells Susannah, these beams were created through magic. If that magic came from God, then perhaps God himself was made by magic. This passage, in stanza 6, introduces a creation myth into *Song of Susannah*, making its scope even wider than most popular or literary fiction. In doing so, King marks magic as the most important and fundamental force in the entire universe. Magic is a common plot device in popular fiction, though King, despite his frequent use of supernatural elements in his stand-alone books, has seldom used the notion to any great extent outside the "Dark Tower" series.

Magic appears in many other forms throughout *Song of Susannah*. It is required to open the portal between Mid-World and the real world in stanza 1, and it suffuses the ivory turtle Susannah uses to hypnotize a passing diplomat and a hotel desk clerk in stanza 5. Magic is the subject upon which the novel opens, with the hero Roland Deschain asking the Manni leader, Henchick, "How long will the magic stay?" Magic is a mainstay of horror fiction, and of fantasy stories like J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, which Eddie Dean recalls reading in stanza 8. Magic is what holds together Mid-World, the site of much of the action in the "Dark Tower" series. Magic might even be a metaphor for the artistry of popular writers like King, who create imaginary worlds and make them believable and significant to their legions of readers.

That King consciously intended his readers to take magic as a metaphor for at least his own artistry is especially evident in the meeting in stanza 11 between Roland and Eddie and their creator—the novelist Stephen King, known as "The Writer." By this point,

Eddie is already convinced he is the creation of a writer from a world very much like his own—the most notable exception being that Co-Op City, where he grew up, is located in the Bronx instead of Brooklyn. He is also aware that a man he knows as a real person, Father Callahan, is actually a fictional character from another novel by this same writer (*'Salem's Lot*). Eddie discovers that he comes from Brooklyn simply because of a mistake: King thought Co-Op City was located in Brooklyn when he created Eddie and discovered only later that he was wrong. This suggests that writing might be a form of magic. It allows a mortal, error-prone man to create his own version of the world, shaped by his own unique, and sometimes faulty, viewpoint.

King lives humbly, as Roland and Eddie discover, in "the sort of house real-estate agents call a ranch," and is mainly worried about making sure he picks up his son on time. He drinks, he smokes, and he is, at first, struck with fear, and then merely confused, at meeting Roland. This Stephen King is an earlier version of the King who is writing the book we are reading. He is evidently not aware of his wizard-like status, of writing as magic, or that the worlds he makes with words take on their own existence. For this reason, his answers to Roland and Eddie's questions about the Dark Tower and their own fate are unsatisfactory. Roland ends up hypnotizing King to try to get at the truth about their mission, their fate, and the Dark Tower.

It is at this point that King, the character, reveals that he is in touch with a deep force of which he is not consciously aware. This force (referred to as "ka") is related to Roland's quest and to the Dark Tower; it is also crucial to the salvation of humanity, and to the very same magic that Roland wonders about on the novel's opening page. As the character King puts it, "ka comes to me, comes *from* me, I translate it, am *made* to translate it." He is not consciously aware of this because, in the end, it is not Stephen King, the man, who has special access to a magical realm where words become reality; it is only Stephen King, the writer.

The older, wiser King, the author of *Song of Susannah*, has arguably become more aware of how and why magic might be a useful metaphor for writing. The novel's multifaceted narrative demonstrates that writing allows him to use those unreal realms defined by lowbrow novel and movie genres to create something at least real enough to keep readers turning pages. This also seems to hold true for other creators of popular fiction, no matter how they may be regarded by academics and serious-minded literary critics. In *Song of Susannah*, King makes numerous allusions to popular writers like himself, some with literary prestige and some without, from Edgar Allan Poe and Frank Oz to Richard Adams and Patrick O'Brian. He does so in a context that emphasizes the importance of such writers' contributions to culture, through a story that explicitly deals with issues such as racism, rationalism, science, technology, faith, and the fate of humanity.

In his literary masterpiece *Ulysses* (1922), James Joyce used allusions to the myths and literature of ancient Greece, in particular Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, as a way of organizing a wealth of detail from the modern era. This helped give the confusions, ambiguities, and moral crises of the twentieth century a coherence they seemed to lack at the time, and gave his readers a deeper sense of the significance of

human life. In *Song of Susannah*, the conventions of genre fictions, including westerns, horror, fantasy, and magic, play a similar role. They bestow upon readers a sense of coherence that may be otherwise lacking in their own lives and in the world around them. By revealing order where none appears to exist, the familiar genre conventions may even help keep the universe from falling into chaos.

Source: Gordon Theisen, Critical Essay on *The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006

Adaptations

- *Song of Susannah* was released in an unabridged audio version on CD by Audioworks in 2004. The narrator is George Guidall.
- Information and interviews about *Song of Susannah* and the rest of the "Dark Tower" series can be found online at Stephen King's official website, www.stephenking.com.

Topics for Further Study

- Critic Harold Bloom maintains that King's greatest strength as a writer is his use of evocative images that build up over the course of a novel to create a central, overpowering image. Pick out three of the images used in *Song of Susannah*. Examples might include the white legs on the African American Susannah, and the man with the head of a bird in the Dixie Pig. Consider these images individually: do they grab the reader's attention and why? What do they suggest? Do they add up to anything greater when considered together? Write a paragraph about each image.
- One notable moment in *Song of Susannah* occurs when Stephen King appears in his own book as a character. He engages in a lengthy dialogue with other characters in the book—all characters he created. At the end of the book, he includes diary entries that conclude with a fictionalized account of his death. (King was struck by a van in real life, but obviously survived.) How do these mixtures of real life and fiction contribute to or take away from your understanding of the rest of the novel? Write a three-page story in which you, the writer, interact with characters you have created.
- Susannah, arguably the most important character in *Song of Susannah*, recalls at various points in the narrative her experiences as a participant in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Write a five-paragraph report about one of the incidents mentioned in the book. Some notable examples are the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the "Mississippi Burning" murders.
- A hallmark of King's fiction over the years has been the way he forces his characters to act in ways that are morally significant, whether for good or evil. Pick three characters from *Song of Susannah*, and list at least five ways in which King reveals the moral character of each in the book. Use specific examples from the book. Write a one-paragraph introduction to the lists describing how King seems to define good and evil.

What Do I Read Next?

- *The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower* (2004), follows *Song of Susannah* and concludes the "Dark Tower" series. Earlier volumes, from I to V, are: *The Gunslinger* (1982; revised and expanded version published by Viking, 2003), *The Drawing of the Three* (1987), *The Waste Lands* (1991), *Wizard and Glass* (1997), and *Wolves of the Calla* (2003).
- King's *'Salem's Lot* (1975) introduces one of the characters in *Song of Susannah*, father Donald Frank Callahan. Like *Song of Susannah*, the book deals with supernatural creatures. In *'Salem's Lot*, vampires destroy the populace of a small town in Maine.
- King's *The Stand* (1978) is a massive novel about a plague similar to the one described in stanza 10. In *The Stand*, most of humanity is left dead; the novel tells of the struggles of the few survivors who must get along with one another to re-establish civilization.
- "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842), a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe, is discussed in relation to the plague in stanza10. It describes a luxurious masked ball held while a plague destroys much of humanity. The partygoers incorrectly think they will be spared. Poe's many horror stories are an important influence on King's writing.
- *Shardik* (1974), by Richard Adams, is mentioned several times in *Song of Susannah*. King even names one of the six beams that supports the Dark Tower after the title character. Shardik is a giant bear worshipped as a god by a fictional tribe. Like the "Dark Tower" series, the novel is a fantasy adventure dealing with issues of religious belief.
- *Invisible Man* (1952), by Ralph Ellison, is alluded to on several occasions in *Song of Susannah. Invisible Man* is a fictional and often allegorical account of an African American man's attempts to find a place for himself in a racist society.
- *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (1987), by Juan Williams, is based on a PBS special of the same name. It provides a detailed historical account of the civil rights movement recalled by Susannah on several occasions in *Song of Susannah*.

Further Study

Beahm, George, *The Stephen King Story*, Andrews and McMeel, 1991.

The Stephen King Story is a biography of the bestselling writer. While it was published in 1991, predating many of King's novels and long before he wrote Song of Susannah, the book provides a detailed portrayal of King's childhood, his literary influences, his struggle to become a writer, and his rise to fame.

Bloom, Harold, editor, *Bloom's BioCritiques: Stephen King*, Chelsea House Publishers, 2002.

A collection of essays elucidating important themes in the novels of Stephen King, many of which are relevant to Song of Susannah, though none discuss it or the "Dark Tower" series specifically. Included in the volume are an introduction by Harold Bloom, who dismisses King's work as unreadable, and a biographical essay on King.

Furth, Robin, *Stephen King's The Dark Tower: A Concordance*, 2 Volumes, Scribner, 2003 and 2005.

Furth's concordance for the "Dark Tower"series includes an alphabetical index to significant words along with genealogies of major characters and maps.

King, Stephen, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Scribner, 2000.

King's well-received nonfiction book about writing, On Writing, is both an autobiographical account of his writing career and a more general attempt to explain the art of telling stories.

Russell, Sharon A., *Revisiting Stephen King: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Press, 2002.

This collection of critical essays on King's novels includes a biographical sketch and a rare treatment by an academic of any volume of the "Dark Tower" series, on Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass.

Underwood, Tim, and Chuck Miller, editors, *Conversations with Stephen King: Feast of Fear*, Carrol & Graf Publishers, 1989.

This collection of interviews with Stephen King offers his opinions on writing, movies, Hollywood, himself, and a host of other subjects.

Vincent, Bev, *The Road to the Dark Tower: Exploring Stephen King's Magnum Opus*, New American Library, 2004.

Vincent's study includes summaries of every volume in the "Dark Tower" series, descriptions of traits and backgrounds of all the major characters, critical appreciations

of King's work, and a glossary of invented terms used in the fantasy realm of Mid-World. The book was written with King's approval and assistance.

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Project Editor
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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535