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Genealogies of Fear and Magic: Inheritance, Lineage and the Transmission of Terror in Stephen King's Fiction

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Abstract

Genealogy is about the things that are transmitted from one generation to the next: blood, name, property but also grief, guilt, belief and dread. A genealogical reading of Stephen King's fiction suggests that this is the last category of inheritance that preoccupies the writer's imagination and that the entire oeuvre is more concerned with the transmission of fear and supernatural power through kinship, community and place than with the terror of the haunted subject alone. In King's fiction, fear is inherited rather than merely experienced, supernatural power is transmitted rather than acquired and horror is reproduced through families, communities and social institutions. This study, which uses King's novels as evidence rather than as objects of close reading and draws on genealogy studies, cultural and collective memory theory, trauma studies and family-systems thinking, traces four recurrent genealogical structures: the family lineage of fear; the inheritance of supernatural capacity as a form of cultural transmission; the ancestral burden carried by communities and reproduced through their memory; and the consolidation of these into durable genealogies of identity, power and trauma. King's fiction thus provides an underutilized archive for genealogy studies: a popular genre in which cultural fears of lineage, descent and social reproduction are performed at the interface of the affective and the supernatural. In all these novels, the struggle to break free from what one has inherited is hard and it is this struggle that the present study examines.

Keywords: genealogy; inheritance; kinship; lineage; intergenerational trauma; cultural memory; ancestral transmission; social reproduction; horror fiction; Stephen King



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1. Introduction

Inheritance is the receiving of something that is not earned and cannot be rejected. As a field of enquiry, genealogy takes precisely this condition as its subject: the descent of name and blood but also of memory, obligation, trauma and belief, through the kinship

structures and communities that bind the generations to one another. Stephen King may not seem an obvious subject for such an investigation. He has been read as a craftsman of dread (Aleksanyan 2023; Baranovska and Albota 2022; Didukh 2020; Qurbonova 2024; El-Sayed 2023; Ramesh 2022) and the scholarship has largely validated that reputation, dissecting the stylistic mechanisms by which King's prose produces unease, the evolved threat responses which his terror mobilises (Clasen 2017, 2020, 2023; Dubourg and Scrivner 2026) and the pathways by which his horror traverses linguistic and cultural borders (Özbek 2022; Makarova et al. 2024; Aleksanyan 2023). What these approaches share is their focus on the present experience of fear: fear is an effect in the present; it is done to a reader or suffered by a character in the moment of the scene.

King's fiction invites attention to a different temporal dimension. The fear that permeates his work is not the one that arises in the moment but one that is passed down, embedded in the earth of a town, in the stories told and the stories not told by a community, in the family. His gifted children are the children of parents who bore the same gift and the same persecution. His haunted houses are haunted not only by ghosts but also by the accumulated presence of the dead. His towns are haunted by their own ancestors, by a violence perpetrated by the founders and for which the descendants are responsible. As read in this way, King is as much a part of genealogy as he is of horror, and the supernatural in his fiction becomes a way of literalizing what genealogy describes only obliquely: the hold of the dead over the living.

This insight has long been present in scholarship on King but it has not been named. His work has been read through the prism of the Gothic, the most ancestral of genres, with its cursed bloodlines and returning forefathers (Chonka et al. 2024; Oklopčić 2024); through archetype and the collective unconscious, where the doomed lineage and the cursed site precede any individual who enters them (Muzh et al. 2022; Popović 2024); through hauntology, whose specter is precisely the ancestor who will not stay buried (Davis 2005; Tamilmani and Sridheepika 2024); and through the global circulation of horror across cultures and generations of readers (Ordiz 2019; Özbek 2022). A recent turn has started to view King's monsters as the result of institutions and inherited stigma, rather than spontaneous evils, created by communities and reproduced through social structures (Ochilov et al. 2026a, 2026c; Nilufar 2026). All of these readings point to a fall, a transmission and a return to the past. To our knowledge, few studies have synthesized these perspectives within an explicitly genealogical framework.

King has also been described as a philosopher of fear (Biskub and Smoliar 2025), as an heir who transforms the Gothic tradition he inherits (Chonka et al. 2024; Vasileva 2024), as a fabulist writing in the register of fairy tale and apocalypse (Coulardeau 2022) and as a global author who reshapes the literary systems he enters (Ordiz 2019; Özbek 2022). His shorter fiction has been noted for its interplay between mysticism and the mundane (Lushnikova and Osadchaya 2025; Poluektova 2025) and for the way terror undermines the self (Sandí et al. 2022); his longer fiction for its suspense structure (Ramesh 2022), for its doubling of self and psyche (Golovacheva 2024) and for its disruption of time (Trofymenko 2023; Borzova 2023). The fear itself has been explored through style (Aleksanyan 2023; Baranovska and Albota 2022; Didukh 2020; Nikam 2019; Qurbonova 2024), cognition (El-Sayed 2023), translation (Makarova et al. 2024), screen adaptation (Smoliar 2025), the dialectic of hope and dread (Syarip and Hetami 2019) and the relation between author and reader (Kurbonova 2025). In this spectrum, the themes of inheritance, descent, repetition and the return of what was buried are recurring themes. They are preoccupations of genealogy and they require a genealogical frame.

Viewing King's fiction through this framework shifts the focus of interpretation. King's vision of fear and supernatural power is not an individual one but one that is genealogical,

that is, one that is inherited and that, over the course of generations, constructs identity, kinship, memory and who is included and who is excluded. The pages that follow elaborate on this claim by taking it from the idea to its manifestations. The theoretical basis is provided by genealogy, inheritance and cultural transmission. The three main modes of King's genealogical imagination are provided by the family lineage of fear, the inheritance of supernatural capacity and the ancestral burden borne by communities. A final movement brings these together in the genealogies of identity, power and trauma his fiction maintains. The novels are treated not as objects of close reading but as evidence of recurring genealogical patterns and the interest is in the genealogical logic that underlies them.

This study is motivated by two problems. First, while King's fiction has been the subject of criticism on inheritance, descent, repetition and the return of the buried many times, these have not been brought together under an explicit genealogical framework. Second and as a result, little use has been made of an archive in which the transmission of memory, trauma and power is dramatized with unusual clarity. The purpose of this article is to tackle both these gaps simultaneously: to demonstrate that fear and supernatural power in King are forms of inheritance, as well as to bring a usable body of evidence back to genealogy studies. The analysis is guided by three questions. How is fear passed on, not just felt, from one generation to the next that King portrays? How is the power of the supernatural transmitted as an ancestral gift, through kinship, folklore, communal memory and/or institution? How do these transmissions become entrenched in lasting genealogies of identity, power and trauma? The method is thematic and structural and not close-textual: King's novels are read as a set of recurring genealogies of fear, the inheritance of supernatural power, the burden of the ancestors on the community and the consolidation of these into genealogies of identity and power.

2. Genealogy, Inheritance and Cultural Transmission

Genealogy is sometimes interpreted in a very limited way as the study of biological descent, the line that determines who came from whom. Such a definition captures only a small part of a much broader field. What genealogists now trace is the transmission of memory, trauma, value, belief and identity and the kinship and communal structures through which they travel. Inheritance is not merely biological; it is also cultural, emotional and social. Families function not only as reproductive units but also as channels through which memories, values and traumas are transmitted. A genealogical perspective asks how the buried bear on the living, how ancestry weighs on the present and how the buried continue to make claims on the living.

In this expanded sense of genealogy, King's fiction is genealogical. In his work, the lines of descent that are important are rarely biological. They are lines of fear, guilt, supernatural power and collective responsibility, shaped by the accumulated weight of communal bloodguilt—of the dead that have accumulated in a haunted house, the founding violence of a town that has grown into what it is today, the lethal power of a burial ground passed down from one grieving family to the next. King repeatedly suggests that both power and terror can be inherited rather than chosen. Here, inheritance operates through memory and social structures rather than biology alone and the family is its primary, though not exclusive, vehicle.

This expanded genealogy is the subject of several traditions which converge and give it analytic precision. Cultural memory studies speak of the storage, transmission and reactivation of collective images of the past, fear among them; on this account, the horror genre is a repository of the collective unconscious, a projection of the community's repressed fears into a transmissible image (Popović 2024). King's "poor place" is an archetype whose threat is culturally inscribed and passed on from generation to generation, as a recurring

figure and site of archetypal criticism (Muzh et al. 2022). Although these traditions employ different terminology, they describe similar processes of transmission. Horror often derives its power from what communities continue to transmit across generations.

The second axis is that of trauma studies. The intergenerational trauma, the unmastered suffering of one generation passed on to the next, is a clinical description of what King is depicting when the violence or grief of one generation comes back to claim the next. A third is provided by hauntology (Davis 2005). The ghost is the very symbol of genealogical persistence: neither alive nor dead, it comes back to haunt its descendants and criticism has demonstrated how the ghostly in horror is a form of historical inheritance (Davis 2005; Tamilmani and Sridheepika 2024). Such returns, in turn, create temporal vertigo, the past refusing to stay past, which has been theorized as a part of the fantastic and the horrific (Borzova 2023; Trofymenko 2023). A fourth axis is that of family studies and the analysis of social reproduction, which is the way in which kin groups pass on not only status and resources but dispositions, fears and patterns of conduct down the line. In this context, King's broken families are means rather than spaces: they are the kinship apparatus through which terror is reproduced and transmitted.

These traditions also help clarify how a genealogical reading differs from the Gothic approaches that have long shaped interpretations of Stephen King's fiction. The hereditary curse, the return of the uncanny, degeneration, doubling and the Gothic family are all motifs that have traditionally been the focus of Gothic Studies and much of the existing scholarship on King follows this interpretive path (Chonka et al. 2024; Oklopčić 2024; Vasileva 2024). A genealogical reading does not reject these familiar motifs. Instead, it asks a different set of questions. Rather than being used as a means of creating atmosphere or psychological discomfort, the returning ancestor, the cursed bloodline or the recurring catastrophe are explored as ways of transmitting fear, memory and power between generations and how these mechanisms affect identity, kinship and social relations. The difference lies less in the themes themselves than in the perspective from which they are interpreted. Hauntology already gestures towards this change, as it sees the ghost as a kind of inheritance of history, not just a fearsome presence (Davis 2005). Similarly, recent research on King's fiction has revealed the tendency for monstrosity to manifest not as a out-of-the-blue supernatural event but as systemic violence rooted in institutional and inherited cultural and social configurations (Ochilov et al. 2026a, 2026c; Poetri and Salam 2025). From a genealogical perspective, the cursed bloodline is a device of social reproduction, the hereditary curse is a metaphor of cultural memory and the uncanny return a pointer to unresolved inheritances that are passed on across generations. In this way, Gothic fiction offers the imagery and genealogy the processes of transmission that give the imagery its enduring force.

Viewed in these terms, genealogy is the passing down of fear, trauma, belief and power, not just blood but dread and capacity, from generation to generation, through kinship and community. This perspective reshapes how King's fiction is understood. Viewed through this lens, King's fiction can be understood as a literature of inheritance, a body of fiction about what parents pass on to children, what the dead impose on the living and what a community's founding exacts from its descendants. The following is organized around the forms of inheritance: the family line of fear, the genealogy of magic, the ancestral burden of the community.

3. Family Lineages of Fear

King's fiction seldom features fear as a stand-alone emotional reaction. More frequently it is inherited, transmitted from family to family and activated in those who inherit it. The threat-responses that cognitive and Darwinist criticism rightly see as the raw material are what King constructs into a structure of descent (Clasen 2017, 2020, 2023;

[Dubourg and Scrivner 2026](#)). In King's fiction, dread frequently precedes the individual who experiences it. It functions as a form of inheritance, much like a family name.

The primary vehicle of this transmission is the family. King repeatedly returns to families in which a parent's fear, sickness or brutality is passed on to a child, who carries it on as a psychic inheritance. The religious fanaticism passed on by a mother becomes the daughter's inheritance and the daughter's horror becomes the community's: criticism of this pattern has identified the roots of King's horror in the domestic transmission of oppression from mother to child and in the figure of the monstrous mother whose fear is generative rather than merely suffered ([Nilufar 2026](#); [Miquel-Baldellou 2024](#)). *Carrie* is the most obvious example: Margaret White's fear of sexuality and sin is not her own personal fear but a doctrine she passes on to her daughter and Carrie begins her adolescence with a fear she did not choose. The novel's horror arises from the way that the mother's fear manifests itself as the daughter's sickness and then as the town's disaster. A similar transmission is at work in *Pet Sematary*, where Louis Creed learns about the cemetery from Jud Crandall and the need to use it is passed on from one grieving family to another and the fear of death is transferred from one grieving family to another. Parental fears often persist beyond one generation and shape the experiences of the next. These fears are transformed across generations but remain recognizable as part of the same familial inheritance.

Such transmission is bound up with the reproduction of violence along the bloodline. The victim becomes the perpetrator, the place of a parent's abuse is the place where a child's fear grows and the loss of a loved one leads one generation to another of the same destructive decision. Each of these patterns is genealogical in the most literal sense, a pattern that is inherited by descendants who did not create it. Gender- and Southern Gothic-sensitive readings have demonstrated the extent to which these inheritances are inscribed by cultural codes of family, shame and sexuality, codes that the kin group passes on even as it is being destroyed ([Oklopčić 2024](#); [Miquel-Baldellou 2024](#)). It is not just a behaviour that is reproduced but a relation to the past, a way of being claimed by one's forebears.

In King, fear is not just a matter of the household but also of the broader kinship of the community. The town itself carries a buried past, a founding violence, a complicity, a catastrophe, repressed but unresolved, comes back to terrorize the inhabitants who have inherited it. Here fear is not a thing of any one mind but of a place and of those who have lived in it. The cursed or "poor place" is the spatiality of this collective fall, a place of accumulated terror that each generation is forced to confront ([Muzh et al. 2022](#)). Derry offers perhaps the clearest example of this spatialized inheritance: the entity that preys upon the town comes back every generation and the adults who faced the demons as children are drawn back, since the fear was never addressed but rather pushed off onto the next generation of victims in *It*. *'Salem's Lot* follows a similar pattern, with the Marsten House representing an older corruption that is passed on to the later residents of the town. The horror genre is the obvious choice for such a transmission of fears from one generation to the next, as it is the genre that has a history of externalizing a community's shared fears ([Popović 2024](#)) and studies of fear in King's fantastic narratives have demonstrated how a collective fear can be passed on to the next generation ([Araújo and Costa 2021](#)).

That this fear can be contagious and can be organized is not a literary conceit but a social reality and the social science helps explain what King dramatizes. Fear is a force that can be deployed to shape belief and behavior among entire populations ([Tannenbaum et al. 2015](#)); the anxieties and fantasies of political communities are inherited and reactivated to bind identity through shared fear ([Kinnvall and Svensson 2022](#)); and magical thinking in public life is a communal inheritance that has consequences beyond the individual ([Abbasi 2025](#)). King's towns and communities act in the same way. Their fear is contagious, shared and inherited, not just of individual nerves but of lineages and their histories.

The universal nature of King's terrors does not negate their descent but is a condition of their transmissibility. Darwinist criticism sets the stage for the fact that he is tapping into fears that are rooted in the deep history of the species, the threats that have haunted human groups throughout evolutionary history (Clasen 2017, 2020, 2023; Dubourg and Scrivner 2026). These fears are shared by all and can be reactivated in every generation and passed on through the cultural forms (story, warning, folklore) that embody them. Two forms of genealogy therefore emerge: the particular descent of a particular dread through a particular family or town and the more fundamental descent of the capacity of human beings to fear, which makes any such descent possible. Existential criticism identifies an important dimension of King's horror but it does not fully explain its genealogical character (Biskub and Smoliar 2025; Coulardeau 2022). The abyss King's characters encounter is rarely empty and never fresh but rather populated by the ghosts of previous generations and defined by the misfortunes of a family's past. In King, fear most often arises from what one has inherited rather than what one encounters for the first time.

4. Inherited Supernatural Power and Genealogies of Magic

In King's fiction, supernatural power follows patterns of transmission similar to those of fear. Magic is rarely acquired. More often it is inherited—embedded in family lines, folklore or the memory of particular places. It is rarely a neutral talent. It is more often an endowment that brings identity and danger together: the bearer is the one who has become heir to a power greater than his or her own, a power inherited from previous generations that often demands a personal cost.

The clearest form of this inheritance appears within the family itself. The figure of the gifted child whose abilities are shared with or inherited from a parent is a recurring motif in King's fiction: the pyrokinetic or telepathic ability that one generation sees in another. The "shining" of Danny Torrance in *The Shining* is not something he acquires but something he is born with and that is what makes him stand out in his family before he is exposed to the Overlook's dead; in *Doctor Sleep*, the same gift is passed down a generation later to the child Abra and the novel makes this continuity explicit, so that the ability becomes a line of transmission rather than an isolated talent. Carrie White's telekinesis exists on the same register, dormant in the mother and only getting to the surface when her fear is transmitted. These gifts are genealogical endowments, not skills learned and passed on and they tie the generations together as the endowed and the imperiled. The child inherits a gift and with it the persecution that goes with it. Here, magic functions as an inherited legacy rather than an acquired skill, received from previous generations and, in turn, passed on to those that follow.

This spiritual inheritance is suffused with the religious imagination, an idiom that King uses as an inherited one. Resurrection, damnation, sacrifice, the unholy return of the dead—these are the grammar of his ancestors and they provide the grammar for his supernatural power to be understood and communicated. The use of biblical motifs has been discussed as a way of structuring the logic of death and return in King's fiction (Simsone 2022). This burial ground that returns the dead has an inherited power in the most literal sense: the power to return the dead is passed on from one bereaved family to the next, each generation receiving—and neglecting to heed—the warning that the previous generation failed to transmit. The magic accumulates across generations, carrying with it knowledge, danger and communal memory.

Folklore and communal memory form the second great reservoir of inherited magic. In King, supernatural power is as often found not in the person but in the stories, the warnings, the local lore or legend, the stories a town knows but rarely speaks about yet refuses to discuss openly, that a community maintains. Such magic is passed on culturally,

embedded in stories, as folklore. The cursed place is again used as a carrier, carrying the meaning of the supernatural and passing it on to the generations of people living there (Muzh et al. 2022). King's indebtedness to the Gothic is further proof of this, as the Gothic is a genealogical form, obsessed with ancestral curses, inherited guilt and the return of the forefather (Chonka et al. 2024; Vasileva 2024).

The vampire is the most obvious example of the supernatural power that is inherited and King's use of it awakens an ancient mythological lineage. An analysis of the vampire mythologems in his fiction reveals how he appropriates a stock of motifs, inherited from a long tradition of folklore and literature, such as the undead, the contagious bite, the community corrupted from within (Vasileva 2024). The vampire is genealogical by definition: it reproduces through transmission, turning the living into the undead and extending its lineage through the body of a community. When a town is infected, as in King's vampire novels, the town itself becomes a genealogy of supernatural transmission in real time, uncanny power passing from one body to another until the community as a whole is a lineage of the transformed.

This double valence—power as endowment and as liability—accounts for the fact that magic and fear fall together in King. The line of the gifted is the line of the hunted: the capacity that runs in the line marks its bearer for persecution, isolation or destruction. The uncanny power inherited by these characters often becomes a source of both social fear and personal danger. That is why King's supernatural fiction provides little consolation that one might hope from a tale of extraordinary gifts. The gift does not free its bearer but rather more often determines a genealogical destiny (Ochilov 2026; Ochilov et al. 2025).

Finally, King's supernatural fiction also participates in the broader currents of magical realism and the fantastic, which are characterized by the mundane and quotidian descent of the marvelous (Rahmani and Nayel 2024; Ochilov 2026; Ochilov et al. 2026b, 2026c). Comparative work has placed his American supernaturalism side by side with other cultures where the magical is culturally inherited and communally held and has revealed that the descent of power through lineage and community is not an idiosyncrasy but a part of a broader transcultural mode (Ochilov 2026). Phenomenological readings show how the marvelous is experienced in King's fiction as something that comes from elsewhere, a power that is not one's own and not of one's making (Ochilov et al. 2026b). In all these framings, magic functions as a form of cultural inheritance transmitted through kinship, tradition and communal memory that gives identity, demands a price and entitles the heir to a supernatural past that he did not choose.

5. Community Memory, Ancestral Burden and the Reproduction of Horror

Fear and supernatural power do not circulate independently; they are transmitted through social structures—the family above all but also the communal and institutional structures in which families are embedded and which outlast them. In King's fiction, horror is socially reproduced. It is not the individual but the family and the community that serve as the primary mechanisms of transmission and it is they who carry the ancestral burden forward whether descendants wish it or not.

The family serves as the primary mechanism of transmission. The household becomes a closed system in which fear, trauma and violence circulate from one generation to the next. Throughout his fiction, King repeatedly returns to this pattern. Each of these haunted houses is a way in which kinship is a social reproductive mechanism in its darkest form: the haunted house where a father's rage meets a buried family history; the home where a parent's pathology is handed down to a child; the line in which grief propels succeeding generations to the same catastrophe. What is reproduced is not merely status or

property but fear, trauma and violence. King's domestic terror has been critiqued as the family's medium of fear and the parent and the mother, in particular, as the medium and the embodiment of the fear that reaches the child (Miquel-Baldellou 2024; Nilufar 2026; Oklopčić 2024).

This reproductive function is not merely a feature of the setting; it is central to the horror itself. Whereas in the usual narratives of social reproduction the family is the vehicle of dispositions and resources that enable a social order to reproduce itself, King's work is the pathological limit of that process, where what the line conveys is its own undoing. It is the closure of the system that is crucial. Terror in his families does not pass away from generation to generation but rather it is concentrated within the household, which is isolated from corrective influences from outside and which, as it passes down, breeds and intensifies terror. This logic is the source of the recurring image of a parent destroying or endangering a child, the source of intergenerational transmission, the medium of which is the intimacy that should protect. The bond of kinship that would normally protect the child from terror is the very bond that conveys terror.

Cultural memory has the same logic on the level of the community. King's towns are collective subjects; they have histories and memories of their own, they have buried something and they reproduce, from one generation of inhabitants to the next, the conditions of their own haunting. The past is not buried but is activated in cycles and the unresolved past of the place is passed on to each new generation. It is collective memory functioning as a mechanism for reproducing horror, the town holding onto the horror and passing it on to its descendants, who are forced to confront an ancestry that they did not create. The cursed place provides the descent with its recurring spatial figure (Muzh et al. 2022), while the externalization of collective anxiety is an apt fit for horror (Popović 2024).

Historical memory deepens this pattern even further. King's communities often inherit the consequences of ancestral violence, racial terror, institutional oppression and collective catastrophe. His fiction has been the subject of recent criticism that has brought out his inherited histories of racial violence and institutional power, read through the genealogies of race, disability and abolition and that has revealed how social institutions produce the very deviance and monstrosity that they then punish (Ochilov et al. 2026a, 2026c). In these readings, the monster is not the aberration but is the product of the community and its history, reproduced through the institutions which carry the social violence down the generations. The point can be taken further with necropolitical analysis of King's pandemic fiction, which reveals that power over life and death is inherited and institutionally distributed in the organization of whole populations around a logic of survival and abandonment that is transmitted (Poetri and Salam 2025). *The Stand* is a civilizational level version of this: the plague is a clearing of the way but the survivors are soon to rebuild the old systems of authority and violence and the catastrophe is not so much a break as a passing of the torch to a less-populated world. So defined, horror is the violence of one's ancestors, come back through the structures that bear the past into the present.

Cyclical repetition is one of the defining features of this process. The loop is the catastrophe that happens every generation, the terror that comes back when its victims have grown and forgotten, the violence that repeats because the trauma that underlies it was never laid to rest: King's fiction turns on the loop. The form of genealogical transmission is cyclicity: Horror comes back because it was not addressed but inherited, not worked through but reproduced. Such returns, which disrupt the time they return to, have been interpreted as at the heart of the horror of the fantastic (Borzova 2023). This circularity is literalized in the form of the *Dark Tower* itself: Roland's journey is a journey back to the beginning and inheritance is not just a theme but the form of the story, the compulsion to

repeat itself, which no one generation can escape. The figure of the forefather's unfinished business, carried forward through family and community rather than buried with the past, functions as a recurring specter that returns across generations (Davis 2005; Tamilmani and Sridheepika 2024).

King's horror is never just personal in any case. It is created and perpetuated by systems—familial, communal, institutional, historical—that function as carriers of terror across the generations. The fear, the gift, is passed to the family; the past, the gift, is passed to the community and buried and dug up again; the violence, the gift, is passed to the institution; the fear, the gift, the unfinished horror of the previous generation, is passed to the next. Social reproduction in its most uncanny form—this is the structural core of King's genealogical imagination.

6. Genealogies of Identity, Power and Trauma in Stephen King's Fiction

Taken together, the preceding discussion reveals three interconnected genealogies: the family of fear, the family of the supernatural and the family of horror, which is reproduced through family and social structures. They are not distinct discoveries but aspects of a single architecture and when viewed together they outline how terror and uncanny capability become hardened, durable structures of descent, structures which form who a person becomes, where a community draws its boundaries and how power is distributed across the generations.

Underlying all three patterns is the same organizing principle. In King's fiction, fear and magic share a common logic: neither is created anew but inherited through family, memory and tradition, placed within you, woven into the folklore, rekindled through collective memory, passed on by kin and town. They are both of the same structure: genealogical forces that move through the generations, that connect the present to a past that it did not choose. The gifted child and the frightened child often represent different manifestations of the same inherited condition—the heir, the one upon whom an inheritance falls. The nature of the inheritance is not as important as the fact that it is inherited, whether it is dread or power.

This framework brings together the theoretical traditions into one account. Genealogy studies have led to the understanding that it is not just blood that is passed down a line but meaning: that inheritance is structural and cultural. The concept of community as a carrier of memory and a repository of the ancestral past, including fear and horror as the form of externalisation and transmission of collective anxiety, is derived from cultural and collective memory studies (Popović 2024; Kinnvall and Svensson 2022). The intergenerational transmission of unmastered suffering and its cyclical return is from trauma studies. Hauntology gives rise to the specter as the sign of the persistence of the forebear, the one who comes back to claim the heir (Davis 2005; Tamilmani and Sridheepika 2024; Borzova 2023). Social reproduction, derived from family studies, explains how dispositions, fears and behavioural patterns are transmitted across generations within kin groups and communities.

In this structure the familiar situations of King's fiction become variations on a single theme. The persecuted talented kid whose power and danger descend through a family; the haunted site that accumulates and passes on the dead of successive generations; the burial ground whose lethal capacity is passed along to the next generation of grieving families; the town that is infected and remade as a family of the transformed; the family whose grief or violence reproduces itself across generations—none is a discrete story so much as an instance of the descent of fear and power through kinship, community and place.

At the heart of these genealogies lies the question of identity and power. King's fiction is a literary space in which fear and magic are inherited, where one's selfhood is shaped by

an inheritance. In King's fiction, inheritance frequently limits individual autonomy. The descent of fear and power is a descent of power in the political sense, too: genealogies of dread and capacity are genealogies of who is vulnerable and who is dangerous, who is hunted and who hunts, who is carrying the violence of the community and who is consumed by it. This has been made clear by the criticism of the social manufacture of monstrosity and of the necropolitical apportioning of life and death, which have revealed that King's genealogies of fear and magic are interwoven with genealogies of social power (Ochilov et al. 2026a, 2026c; Poetri and Salam 2025). The inheritance of terror helps determine who remains secure and who becomes vulnerable within the social order.

In this context, King's fiction is a meditation on transmission—on the inevitability of the line of transmission, on the ways in which kin and community repeat their own horrors and on the processes of capacities and vulnerabilities descending from one generation to the next, from one place to another. The supernatural is not a remedy for this genealogical situation but rather an exacerbation of it. Magic is the literalization of the descent of power that social reproduction effects more quietly; the ghost is the literalization of the persistence of a past that memory and trauma convey by other means. The two great figures of inheritance in King are fear and magic—the terror the dead pass on to the living and the power the living, who can do no other, pass on.

7. Conclusions

Stephen King's fiction makes fear and supernatural power genealogical in nature, an inheritance, a transmission, a reproduction and a preservation of fear over generations through kinship, cultural memory, intergenerational trauma, communal narrative, folklore and the long arm of collective history. Previous scholarship has examined King as a stylist and cultural commentator, yet the transmission of fear and supernatural capacity across generations remains one of the central organizing principles of his fiction.

The analysis answers the three questions that guided this study. The fear is not just felt; it is passed on: Margaret White's doctrine is Carrie's condition and Derry's buried violence is passed on to each generation that inhabits it. Supernatural power is passed down as an ancestral gift through blood, folklore and place: the Torrance "shining" is passed on to a later child in *Doctor Sleep*, the burial ground of *Pet Sematary* is passed on from one grieving family to the next and the vampiric contagion of *'Salem's Lot* remakes a whole town into a lineage of the transformed. These transmissions become solidified into enduring genealogies of identity, power and trauma, where who is gifted, who is hunted and who carries the community's violence is predetermined by descent. On this reading, the recurring situations of King's fiction are not so much individual stories of terror but rather variations on a single structure of inheritance.

The study makes two main contributions. Genealogy provides the frame that collects a diffuse criticism (of the Gothic and its genealogical curses, of archetype and the collective unconscious, of hauntology and the return of the past, of the social production of monsters) into a single story of inheritance for King studies. It shifts attention from the immediate experience of fear to the transgenerational processes through which fear is transmitted and refigures the gifted child and haunted town as figures of descent. King's fiction is a popular genre that provides an underutilized archive for genealogy studies: a popular form in which the anxieties of transmission, inheritance and social reproduction are dramatized in heightened and literalized form. His stories reveal what is usually hidden in social life: fear passed down through families, communities that preserve and resurface their buried pasts, violence passed down through the generations.

Overall, the article makes three contributions. To genealogy studies it provides a surprising archive: a popular genre that renders memory, trauma and power as heightened

and literalized modes of transmission and which makes the processes of descent visible in a way that is unprecedented. It provides a frame of integration for King scholarship, bringing together a collection of otherwise distinct readings (Gothic, archetypal, hauntological, cognitive and sociological) into a single account of inheritance and moving the focus from the fleeting experience of fear to the processes of inheritance of fear and power. It offers a new angle on Gothic Studies; the uncanny figures of this genre, the cursed bloodline, the returning ancestor, the repeating catastrophe, are not only to generate dread but to portray social reproduction, cultural memory and unmastered transmission, thus setting apart a genealogical reading from the atmospheric and psychological focus of much Gothic criticism. This also underscores the contemporary relevance of a genealogical reading of King's fiction. When read in this way, King's genealogies address current issues of inherited trauma, the long arm of historical and institutional violence and the ways communities pass on fear and vulnerability across generations; read in this way, King's fiction becomes a tool for thinking about how societies carry, and might interrupt, the burdens they pass on.

Several directions for future research emerge from this study. The genealogical frame opens up the possibilities of comparison of the inheritance of fear and supernatural power in national and literary traditions, continuing the work that places King in transcultural currents of the Gothic, the fantastic and magical realism (Ordiz 2019; Chonka et al. 2024; Rahmani and Nayel 2024; Ochilov 2026). The institutional and historical genealogies recently explored in his fiction (of race, disability and necropolitical power) could be extended throughout the oeuvre to a more comprehensive account of the transmission and reproduction of social violence (Ochilov et al. 2026a, 2026c; Poetri and Salam 2025). And the broader apparatus of King criticism—stylistic, cognitive, psychological, translational, comparative—may be revisited in the question of descent: how is fear handed down in King's fiction (Aleksanyan 2023; Baranovska and Albota 2022; Biskub and Smoliar 2025; Borzova 2023; Clasen 2017, 2020, 2023; Coulardeau 2022; Didukh 2020; Dubourg and Scrivner 2026; El-Sayed 2023)?

Ultimately, King's enduring appeal may rest on a deeply genealogical intuition: that the most terrifying thing is not the monster in the present but the ancestry that produced it, that we are claimed by what came before us, that fear and power descend whether we consent or not and that the kinship and community through which we are made are the same structures through which horror is reproduced. But to read King genealogically is to take that intuition at its word: to see how his fiction confronts the downward passage of dread and power while serving as an archive of the anxieties that accompany every inheritance.

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