

## Two *Kingdoms*, Two Kings

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This article compares two contemporary television dramas of the global age: the Danish miniseries *Riget/The Kingdom* (1997) and the US serial *Kingdom Hospital* (2004), or rather, to give the programme its full title, *Stephen King's Kingdom Hospital*.<sup>1</sup> The analysis considers both dramas as individual projects with distinct forms and concerns, but also explores the close relationship of the original Danish **miniseries** and the later US remodelling or 'reimagining', in terms of the effects of this transition.

In particular, and following Glen Creeber's work on the Danish miniseries in *Serial Television*,<sup>2</sup> *Riget* is seen as deeply concerned with matters of national identity, of Denmark's historical and cultural markers. Contrastingly, under the guidance of renowned horror writer Stephen King, *Kingdom Hospital* is understood to abandon the distinctively local, European considerations of Lars von Trier's miniseries, in a search for global recognition. Latterly, the US **serial** extends beyond cultural theory to offer an alternative way of viewing King's remake. While global in its reach and concerns, *Kingdom Hospital* relates to a particular national sensibility in its connections to American Transcendentalism and, in particular, displays evidence of Emersonian influence. A re-appraisal of *Kingdom Hospital* through its parallels with Ralph Waldo Emerson allows for a critical re-evaluation of this overlooked and undervalued television **serial**.

First though, to retrace the rise of the original *Kingdom: Riget* is an eight-part miniseries (with a sequel released in 1997), created by the controversial self-appointed (or self-anointed) king of European art-house cinema Lars von Trier. The

**miniseries** is set in the neurological ward of Copenhagen's Rigshospital, the city and country's main hospital, nicknamed by patients and locals 'Riget' meaning 'the realm' or 'the kingdom'. Over the course of two seasons, the **serial** follows an eccentric ensemble of characters, comprising both carers and cared-for. Gradually, the trappings and politics of medical science enmesh with a number of supernatural phenomena.

As an overview to the distinct visual style of *Riget*, the most prominent features include the **serial's** muted sepia colour schemes, the grainy look and texture of the film-stock, and the director's selective trial of particular criteria of his reactionary movie-making manifesto to be launched the year after *Riget's* release: Dogme '95. For example, in *Riget*, von Trier embraces hand-held camera footage, and the rawness of shooting mostly on location. Yet, he also 'indulges' in points of style that would soon be banned under the Dogme remit, such as artificial lighting, non-diegetic music and post-dubbed sound. Equally, the **serial** draws freely from a wealth of latterly 'forbidden' generic formulas, including the hospital drama, detective series, horror, comedy, and the tone and format of soap opera.

To briefly detail some of *Riget's* central plotlines: there is the detective work of repeat patient and spiritualist Sigrid Druse (Kirsten Rolffes), who investigates the sound of a girl crying in the elevator shaft. Through her search, Druse discovers that the girl died decades earlier, having been killed by her father to hide her illegitimacy. Meanwhile, the odious Swedish neurosurgeon Stig Helmer (Ernst-Hugo Järegård) covers up his botched operation of a young girl, and a female neurologist, impregnated by a ghost, ultimately gives birth to a full-grown man. **Two (Down's Syndrome) dishwashers (Vita Jensen and Morten Rotne Leffers)** oversee events

from the depths of the hospital basement; the two sagacious characters offer a gleeful commentary on the increasingly chaotic proceedings.

Most often in *Riget*, the chaos of intertwining plotlines develops from clashes between opposing forces, between ancient and modern, between supernatural and scientific, **both the local and foreign**. All of these thematic tensions come together in the world of a modern hospital. In socio-cultural terms, its building can be read as a microcosm of the contemporary state of Denmark. As Creeber notes, '*The Kingdom* appears to explore ... different and varied aspects of national life via the metaphor of a medical institution.'<sup>3</sup> In turn, the emphasis on matters of *national* identity provides an atypical, locally focused work of modern television. Creeber details how:

Despite many critics' fears that increased market forces have meant that contemporary TV drama is gradually becoming more homogenised and globalised, *The Kingdom* seems to deliberately resist such trends. Not only is it sometimes difficult viewing, its subject matter seems peculiarly parochial. Its strange and frequently sensational action takes place almost exclusively within the walls of ... the Rigshospital ... In this way, the series offers the viewer a contemporary television drama that actively goes against the apparent tide of global television practice, presenting a less than conventional television narrative centred around issues of a uniquely local nature.<sup>4</sup>

*Riget's* involvement in local European and Scandinavian concerns is exemplified by the behaviour of a central character: the Swedish neurosurgeon, Stig Helmer. Throughout the series, the Swede alienates the Danish staff with his adherence to procedure, and, more importantly here, with his misplaced sense of cultural superiority. Helmer's proud assertion of his national identity and arrogant stance

against all things Danish is, in turn, a defiant stand against continental collectivism in the global age. It is point raised by Creeber:

Helmer appears out of place in a country (and city) whose history and culture he is unable or unwilling to understand and appreciate. Medically and politically arrogant, his obsession with business and cost-cutting ... **[stands]** in stark contrast with Denmark's longstanding belief in the principles and ideals of the welfare state. 'In your Danish language', he sarcastically asks at his first board meeting, 'is there a word for budget?'<sup>5</sup>

In his position and manner, Helmer characterises politically stubborn nationalist assertions of distinction, separateness and isolation.

These concerns are brought to a head in a recurrent scenario, in which Helmer surveys the local territory from the hospital roof, binoculars in hand, scanning the horizon across the water to his native country. In the pilot (1: 1), he stands on the roof in view of his beloved Swedish shores and watchtowers, looking down on the 'Danish bastards' and pointing up his notions of Swedish supremacy. He spits out bitter eulogies such as, 'Thank you Swedish watchtowers, your plutonium will bring the Danes to their knees. Here is Denmark, shat out of chalk and water. Over the water, Sweden, hewn from granite. Bloody Danes!' The shape of Helmer's curse highlights the raw physical materials of distinct national infrastructures; the countries, according to Helmer, are borne out of chalk, water, shit and granite. Whereas Sweden's constitution is firm and unyielding, Denmark is slippery and unstable. The connection between physical mass and national standing **is made manifest** in the visual imagery of *Riget*; Helmer's words later appear to cause an earthquake, and water gushes up and out of walls and manholes, as if the **very** foundations of the hospital react against the prejudice of the present moment. The imagery rhymes with the design of the

opening credits, as ruby-red blood spills from the word 'Riget' carved on a cracked wooden surface. In *Riget* then, national divides form physical rifts, and Denmark's troubled past leaks into the present as the bricks shift and water muddies the groundwork.

Yet, at the same time, *Riget* also offers examples of a striving for community and the forging of local connections. In his pre-surgery pep-talk to the collected student body, Professor Bondo (Baard Owe) encourages an embracing of others. Akin to the form of Helmer's rooftop curses, an emphasis is placed in the physicality of foundations and connections. Bondo exclaims, 'I can say that the fear of being touched, of getting close to others, is the fear of death. Why? Because it is the fear of fellowship. Every time you edge along a bus seat to avoid contact, every time you avoid poking your fingers into a patient, it's the fear of fellowship.'

Outside of the operating room, **the miniseries** explores two further examples of community and convergence, one marked by transparency and democratic union, and one by clandestine selectivity. The first is 'Operation Morning Air', a hospital-wide initiative described by the ever-cheerful Dr Einar Moesgaard (Holger Juul Hansen) as 'our new human resources plan'; he says, 'we must be receptive; we must be open to new ideas regarding patients and personnel.' Needless to say, 'Operation Morning Air', and its message of openness, progress and unity is met with contemptuous disapproval by the separatist Helmer. The second group is as closed as the first is open, namely the underground Masonic lodge of doctors known as the 'Sons of the Kingdom'. This secret society comes complete with its own enigmatic greeting signal, used to recognise fellow brethren: each member solemnly raises his thumb to his nose, fans his fingers and blows out his cheeks, like a deadpan childish riposte. Although covert and discriminating in its membership, the society functions

by a collective spirit. The development of unity is instigated by physical connections: first, by the hand signal; secondly, by a painful initiation ceremony involving a lemon and a long blade, undertaken in **the pilot** (1: 1) by Helmer, resulting in a deep cut to his nose.

The notion of a physical connection comprising a route to communal kinship is met elsewhere in the **serial** with the forging of spiritual links; the most notable example is the relationship between the Miss Marple-esque, psychic busybody, Sigrid Drusse and the ghostly little girl crying in the lift shaft. In this instance, in spiritually transgressing the boundaries of space and time, Denmark's past and present come together. Drusse uncovers the terrible truth of the little girl's history, and lays her body and memory to rest. In turn, the physical and spiritual wounds of the hospital's, and the hospital-as-Denmark's, history are acknowledged, scrutinised and healed. In all of these ways, *Riget* speaks most eloquently and expressively of local concerns. It considers the state of Denmark as a country in the fragmentary times of the global age, working to sustain or re-establish a sense of unified national identity in **the** face of both local divisions and encroaching forms of Europeanisation, looking to reconnect with its past heritage.

Whereas the title of *Riget* may suggest Denmark's nation state, there is another kingdom at play in **the US adaptation**, *Kingdom Hospital*: the global powers and position of the US visual entertainment industry. With the backing of von Trier as Executive Producer, *Kingdom Hospital* was filmed in Vancouver by Sony Pictures Television, in association with Mark Carliner Productions and Touchstone Television. It was broadcast on ABC: **one of the major US TV networks**, and **one** with international status (being aired in the UK, for instance, as the cable channel abc1). As a primetime **serial**, *Kingdom Hospital* received hefty financial backing,

leading to a super-sizing of both its budgetary and aesthetic sensibilities, creating a television work of epic proportions and aspirations. Further, as a successful mainstream product, and with the heavy-weight backing of Sony, Touchstone and **the US network**, *Kingdom Hospital* secured considerable international distribution deals, being screened on, amongst others, Network Seven in Australia, M6 in France, Kabel 1 in Germany and BBC3 in the UK.

These facts raise the issue of the international terrain of US TV and the putative Americanisation of the contemporary television landscape; yet, the most crucial factor, in terms of the production's desire to gain global recognition, comes with the involvement of the writer Stephen King. The pitch may have worked something like this: Stephen King, the undisputed international king of popular horror fiction, would adapt the cult European **miniseries** to produce a mainstream worldwide hit. In one move, the auteur-director king von Trier is replaced by the more usual television auteur figure of the writer; art-house aesthetics switched with a mainstream US 'Quality TV' sheen; and the insular, locally European thematic preoccupations swapped with the personal, yet globally familiar concerns of Stephen King as master of 'pop' and purveyor of Americana. The aim for mass appeal is encapsulated by a description of King as the 'self-proclaimed McDonalds of the Macabre'.<sup>6</sup> The title acknowledges King's status as a globally recognised brand, with both international application and a distinctly, mythically American association; both McDonalds and Stephen King can be seen as universal trademarks of a fast-food, fast-fiction culture of global exchange.

An appraisal of some of the **serial's** distinct forms and concerns allows for a scrutiny of King at work in *Kingdom Hospital*. Most immediately, the central setting of the hospital (the kingdom itself) is relocated from a real location in Copenhagen to

a fictional facility in Lewiston, Maine (not only a **US state**, but also the setting of many of King's **fictional** works). Thus, the **serial** is stripped of any local European political context; gone are the ideas of Scandinavian schisms. On the surface however, it may appear that **it** retains an interest in local and national socio-cultural divisions. In **the pilot**, an incoming physician (**Dr. Stegman, played by Bruce Davison**) bemoans the differences between life in Boston and 'up here' in Lewiston. Further, in King's reimagining, the hospital is built on the grounds of Gate Falls Mill, burnt down in 1869 and helmed by workers 'good Yankees all' in support of the Union Army's fight for the abolition of slavery. Yet, these nationally charged references are fleetingly noted and only superficially addressed; this *Kingdom Hospital*, under the rule of this King, houses matters more personal and universal.

On a personal level, King draws on autobiographical experience to extend and reshape the plot. Indicative of an (understandably) obsessive interest in his near-death experience in 1999, in which he was hit by a car and hospitalised for months, King places the event at the heart of his script. The **experience** manifests itself in the form of central character Peter Rickman (Jack Coleman) being run over by a drugged-up van driver. Recovering in Kingdom Hospital, Rickman as 'one of America's best known artists' acts as a conduit between the medical and supernatural worlds, bed-ridden by the hit-and-run but freed by his creative, psychic abilities.<sup>7</sup> King layers and complicates the play between fact and fiction by naming the character Rickman: an amalgam of the *nom de plume* adopted for many of his works, Richard Bachman. In shadowing facts from his life, King offers a promise of intimacy, while playing games with such a notion through kaleidoscopic shifts of identity.

On a universal level, the most distinctive and bewildering addition to the narrative involves a talking anteater named Antubis, who acts as Rickman's spirit

guide; Antubis is locked in battle with a further new creation: the vampire-child Paul, victim of gruesome experimentation in the ‘Old Kingdom’ hospital. One way of understanding this rather baffling exertion of writer-power is as a means of transcending the local ghostly goings-on of *Riget*, to extend the narrative of *Kingdom Hospital* into global myths of good versus evil. King as consummate storyteller draws on common characters from childhood tales across the globe – a talking beast, a vampire, a healing hero, an eternal villain – to create an epic narrative that moves beyond national concerns. The introduction of universal mythic figures also connects, in *Kingdom Hospital*, with the suggestion of a collective means of psychic communication between all beings. When Rickman is knocked down by the truck, he communicates with a hungry raven, the anteater and, later, with the dead girl in the hospital. Again, this archetypal ‘King-ly’ narrative device is consummate with the notion of the global myth, in which, in exploring primitive, pagan, sacred and scientific mythologies, the common humanity of various people becomes apparent, and we learn that beings – divine, human and natural – need one another in order to survive.

We may also consider the re-application of the term ‘global myth’ in discussions of our contemporary socio-political situation. Cultural commentators often point to the myths of global expansion, of the global market and of the myths surrounding the causes of terrorism in the global order.<sup>8</sup> Equally, our political leaders are quick to engage in the rhetoric of global myths, condemning the ‘axis of evil’ and vaunting the ‘forces of good’. Whilst King’s stance on such matters remains ambiguous in *Kingdom Hospital*, further seemingly idiosyncratic writerly touches reveal a complex engagement with the place of America, and the mythical face of **that nation**, in the global age. The series is peppered with images and sounds of

‘pop’ Americana. For example, there is a proliferation of colourful fizzy drinks cans often on prominent display, and a middle-of-the-road AOR soundtrack accompanies much of the action.

Most revealing, however, is the re-fashioning of the characters’ names. While some characters retain the roots of their Danish names in the US series (with Sigrid Drusse becoming Sally Druse [Diane Ladd]), others are given distinctly American mythical monikers. There is Dr. Hook (Andrew McCarthy), named after the US rock ensemble of the 1970s and 1980s; Dr. Jesse James (Ed Begley Jr.), named after the folklore hero and outlaw of the Old West, and subject of many ‘good ol’ boy’ musical tributes, such as Cher’s ‘Just Like Jesse James’. Continuing the musical theme, there is also the mysteriously ever-absent Head Custodian of Kingdom Hospital, a Mr. Johnny B. Goode (previously the poor-boy-made-good of Chuck Berry’s 1955 song). And, just as Johnny B. Goode makes a cameo appearance in Ricky Nelson’s (1972) hit ‘Garden Party’, in *Kingdom Hospital*, he is finally revealed as the subject of another cameo, this time by none other than Stephen King.

This cavalcade of postmodern references turns on suggestions of American mythology, as signifiers of nostalgia, folklore and mass culture. From a socio-cultural perspective, King’s insistent use of these references as tokens of personal characterisation extends outwards to notions of national and transnational identity. That is to say, in an age of constantly projected and rejected global myths, the concept of national identity for America is reduced to a cotton-candy panorama of pop mythologies: of Americana, of fizzy drinks, of Jesse James, of good old Rock n’ Roll. In *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*,<sup>9</sup> Chris Barker raises similar **ideas in relation to** Western cultural identity:

The impossibility of identity is a reference to the mounting critique or deconstruction of the western notion of whole persons who possess a stable identity. That is, within western culture, people have been thought of as unified agents who have a universal, fixed identity which belongs to them. In contrast, conceptions of identity within cultural studies have begun to stress the decentred subject, the self as made up of multiple and changeable identities.<sup>10</sup>

In turn, Barker relates the notion of the ‘decentred subject’ made up of ‘changeable identities’ to globalisation’s creation of a ‘chaos culture’, in which,

Metaphors of uncertainty, contingency, and ‘chaos’ replace those of order, stability and systemacity ... In other words, globalization and global cultural flows should not necessarily be understood in terms of a set of neat linear determinations, but instead viewed as a series of overlapping, overdetermined, complex and chaotic conditions.<sup>11</sup>

A final citation shows how such ideas of an opaque western identity and global cultural flows can be seen to connect directly to the contemporary position of television.

The globalization of television has provided a proliferating resource for both the deconstruction and reconstruction of cultural identities. That is, television has become a leading resource for the construction of identity projects. By *identity project* is meant the idea that identity is not fixed but created and built on, always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival.<sup>12</sup>

If we are to follow Barker’s argument and associations, then it is telling that Stephen King chooses to fill a specifically televisual work with shifting signifiers of an

American mythos. On two levels, the writer presents the ‘identity project’ of his main character and America in the global age: Rickman is physically and psychically ‘decentred’ in his accident; just as his body fractures in the collision, the communicative connection with various creatures and beings reveals a fragmenting into multiple agencies of identity. Equally, the playful deconstructive concatenation of pop brands as nametags can be seen to hint at the overlapping cultural conditions of America’s globalised personality. The identities of both Rickman and the figures of (medical) authority in that most systemic of institutions – the hospital – are ‘not fixed but created and built on’ through popular myth. And, just as Barker discusses the splintering of national and personal identity in the global age, King thickens his plot with refractive references to Rickman as himself, himself as Bachman and as a cameo of a cameo from musical myth. Thus, King’s playful visions and revisions intimately bind personal, national and global concerns until one is indistinguishable from the next. In turn, the game-playing cycles back to the fact that pop culture comprises one of the United States’ most lucrative commodities: making everything from McDonalds’ hamburgers to Stephen King TV projects popular on the international market.

If we redirect ideas of the ‘decentred subject’ as represented in *Kingdom Hospital* away from a socio-cultural context and towards a philosophical one, then a more particularly national set of concerns may finally appear. While presenting an oblique critique on globalisation in a globally marketed television **production**, Stephen King also positions himself close to the conditions of American Transcendentalism. King’s visions in *Kingdom Hospital*, as in some of his novels, when placed in a certain intellectual context, correspond with currents in the writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>13</sup> This may seem a bold claim and hysterical clash between

cultures ‘low’ and ‘high’; yet Stanley Cavell offers us apposite insight into the validity of such combinations, as well as perspicacious readings of Emerson, in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*.<sup>14</sup> Beginning a conversation with Emerson’s conception of moral perfectionism, Cavell suggests the possibility of a conversation being held between texts, in which the cultures of America and Europe debate amongst themselves:

Suppose that there is an outlook intuitively sketched out (sometimes negatively) in some imaginary interplay among the following texts: Plato’s *Republic* ... Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus* and *The Tempest* ... Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll’s House* ... Emerson’s ‘The American Scholar’ and ‘Self-Reliance’ and ‘Experience’ ... Beckett’s *Endgame*, and (the film) *The Philadelphia Story* ... Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* ... and (the film) *Now, Voyager* ... And while I mean the lists to contest the sense of arbitrariness or exclusiveness in the perfectionist’s characteristic call for a conversion to ‘culture’, I merely indicate, mostly by the inclusion of two films, that the door is open to works of so-called popular culture.<sup>15</sup>

In the final few paragraphs of this article, in an appeal to King’s peculiarly American philosophy, I suggest that the door is also open to (the television **serial**) *Kingdom Hospital* and to King’s most recent novels *Lisey’s Story*<sup>16</sup> and *Duma Key*.<sup>17</sup>

Recalling Plato’s *Republic*, Cavell sets out numbered ‘candidate features’ of Emerson’s concept of perfectionism. Some of these strike me as directly associable to King’s television text, particularly in relation to the stricken Rickman’s hallucinations and the consequent opening up of worlds in the realm of *Kingdom Hospital*:

Ideas of which the self recognizes itself as enchained, fixated, and (6) feels itself removed from reality, whereupon (7) the self finds that it can turn

(convert, revolutionize itself) and (8) a process of education is undertaken, in part through (9) a discussion of education, in which (10) each self is drawn on a journey of ascent to (11) a further state of that self, where (12) the higher is determined not by natural talent but by seeking to know what you are made of and cultivating the thing you are meant to do; it is a transformation of the self which finds expression in (13) the imagination of a transformation of society into ... (16) the view of a new reality, a realm beyond, the true world.<sup>18</sup>

Both the physical and spiritual healing of bed-bound ('enchained') Rickman, as well as the transformation of the hospital's scientific world into a new supernatural reality 'beyond the true world' can be seen as processes of self-education as Emerson and Cavell understand them. Further, in the cultivation of a new self and realm, Rickman often appears to stand beside himself, or over himself, as a disembodied voiceover/camera angle, from the point of his accident to the process of his hospitalisation. To Emerson, this 'doubling' is crucial to his 'conception of the self' and to, 'the world he thinks is an expression of ... his picture of the doubleness of the self. This expression of doubleness, [is] part of Emerson's continuing interpretation of [Immanuel] Kant's interpretation of the human as the capacity to take 'two standpoints' toward itself ... A principal issue concerns the imagining of the relation of past and future selves.'<sup>19</sup>

The conceit of fantastical doubling and 'the imagining of the relation of past and future selves' repeatedly informs Stephen King's writing. In *Kingdom Hospital*, Rickman's own 'out of body' doubling allows him experience of a twin world of doubles locked in eternal combat, led by Antubis and Paul. In giving the doctors names such as Dr. Jesse James, a further process of doubling begins, projecting

imaginings of other past mythical figures onto present characters, threatening to rupture the fictional world's workings.<sup>20</sup> **The pilot** gradually reveals that, before meeting Antubis, Rickman had painted a life-size portrait of an anteater. A doubling of selves through the creative process is taken up again in King's latest novels. In *Duma Key*, the main character, Edgar Freemantle, suffers an accident to his arm, and becomes 'enchained, fixated' by the process of painting. In turn, his **art** doubles into phantasmagorical creatures moving into a 'new reality'. Throughout the novel, Freemantle explores the phenomenal (and phenomenological) fissures between his 'past and future selves', just as the book tells a tale of history repeating itself via the haunting of an old lady's *twin* sisters. In *Lisey's Story*, two layers of doubling are enacted. Though now dead, **famed US** writer Scott Landon lives on in the memory and remembrances of his wife Lisey. Thus, King presents past and present versions of Scott, just as Lisey 'educates' herself in the truth of Scott's secret ability to enter a fantasy realm. In this supernatural place, a doubled version of Scott lives on.

In each instance, the texts' main protagonists are all artists, engaged in articulating their 'selves' through the creative process: Rickman and Freemantle as painters; Landon as a novelist. The self-reflexive acknowledgment and exploration of 'representing the self' comes to the fore in King's work, and is central to Emerson's philosophical (and moral) obligation to making intelligible the self. Cavell highlights Emerson's, 'incessant attention to representation, to his own presentation of himself, of his authorship, of his constitution of words, together with his reader, as one another's illustrious other'<sup>21</sup> as key to the Transcendentalist's pursuit of recognising, and so revolutionising, himself. Examples abound in *Kingdom Hospital* of King's self-reflexive references, as one inquisitive blogger points out:

People familiar with King can play the same game that King's playing with *Kingdom Hospital*. The obvious, writer-specific references include the hero getting hit by a car (*Dreamcatcher*); recurring rock oldies on spontaneously playing radios (*Christine*); evil ravens (*The Stand*); ghost girls, elevators and temporal schisms (*The Shining*) ... to in-jokes in the form of a guy in a waiting area reading King's *Bag of Bones*, Peter's wife reading *Misery* ... as radio and television announcer comparing something to a 'Stephen King horror story'.<sup>22</sup>

Such references may be viewed as 'easter-egg' fun for hungry fans; they may, following Barker, be seen to offer opaque opinion on the unfixed identity in the global age. If read via Cavell and Emerson, such hall-of-mirrors authorial references can be placed in a new light which, in turn, leads back to thoughts on America's own conception of its 'self'. For Emerson, moral perfectionism encourages an election to making oneself intelligible, to find words that match one's experience of the world, to engage in a self-reflexive, writerly 'education', to draw closer to the 'unattainable' self and to a better future. In turn, these experimental pursuits of personal experience are inextricably linked with those of the nation. As Cavell remarks:

These experiments with or transfigurations of the terms 'representation' and 'election' in Emerson's teaching suggest the reason he characteristically speaks of 'my constitution', meaning for him simultaneously the condition of his body, his personal health (a figure for the body or system of his prose), and more particularly his writing (or amending) of the nation's constitution. The idea of his constitution accordingly encodes and transfigures Plato's picture of justice in the state as justice in the soul writ large.<sup>23</sup>

*Kingdom Hospital* represents the nexus point of King's experimental display of his personal, and his country's, 'constitution'. In the doppelgänger of Rickman, in reflexive reference and the fabric of this diegetic world, inside and outside the text, King presents a/his broken body, the system of his prose and the process of his writing. In an obsessive, layered display of signs (of doubled selves, of tropes from his novels, in painting, in folk heroes and music, in American mythologies) King calls, as Emerson does, for the transfiguration of illustration into illustriousness. Deconstructing the term (and terms) of representation, King is encouraging a consideration of America's soul, of the need to return, recover, revolutionise the self.

Such a proposal of transformative self-reliance based on intuition and the imagination may be positioned as romantic, or, indeed Romantic. A final connection – between King, Emerson and the wider workings of Romanticism – leads us further into considerations of the national. Emerson's relationship with Romanticism is well known and well documented.<sup>24</sup> King's binding of the supernatural with human psychology in tales of the macabre has a strong association with the concerns of Romantic (and fellow American) writer Edgar Allen Poe. The act of detailing such links encourages us to join the gap, to bring together Emerson and King through their Romantic impulses. Indeed, setting up a mirroring relation between Romanticism and King as a present-day artist emphasises the former movement's entrenched interest in the bridges between past and present, and the part played by the individual. Both *Kingdom Hospital* and the wider realm of Romanticism display fascinations with doubling and mirroring past and present 'selves'. As Cynthia Chase observes, 'In the history of "literature" (a Romantic institution) as in the history of politics, Romanticism is *our* past: "we carry it within ourselves as the experience of an *act* in which, up to a certain point, we ourselves have participated".'<sup>25</sup> For the Romantic, for

Emerson and for King, faith is found in the role of individualism. Past and present meet in the individual's experience and imagination, in the 'transaction between the perceiving mind and the perceiving world'.<sup>26</sup> By harnessing the power of the imagination one (we) can envision, improve, escape.

In the author's statement of *Lisey's Story*, King refers to the fantastical, watery pool of nether-world 'Boo-Ya Moon' as a **place** (a pooled resource library of past novels, poems and songs) where 'we ... go down to drink and cast *our* nets' (**emphasis mine**).<sup>27</sup> Further, he places himself as individual at the heart of this Romantic process, of experiencing the past in the present and transformation in imaginative learning: 'Burt [Burton Halden] was the greatest English teacher I ever had. It was he who first showed me the way to the pool, which he called "the language-pool, the myth-pool, where we all go down to drink." That was in 1968. I have trod the path that leads there often in the years since, and I can think of no better place to spend one's days; the water is still sweet, and the fish still swim.'<sup>28</sup> The invocation of a pool as source of all goodness is a profoundly Romantic impulse. That the writer speaks of *drinking* from the pool as a healthy experience for body, mind and art recalls Cavell's remarks on Emerson (**as cited earlier in the article**): 'he characteristically speaks of "my constitution", meaning for him simultaneously the condition of his body, his personal health (a figure for the body or system of his prose), and more particularly his writing (or amending) of the nation's constitution.' If we cast all of these thoughts together under the auspices of Romanticism, then it follows that the *natural* goodness of the pool can be set against the corruption of human society. For King, the natural world promises restorative order for self, society and soul. Consider, for example, Antubis' acts of kindness towards Rickman's broken

body against those of the hospital's corrupt scientific community. *Kingdom Hospital's* arrival in the globalised world of 2004 presents a quiet intervention of King's Romantic tendencies into more explicit intellectual debates about the contemporary state of the US *constitution*.

In King's involvement in a twenty-first century television production, with a product of the global age seemingly divorced from the nationalist focus of the original *Riget*, there is a compelling study of both self-determination and of the consciousness of national unity. By recasting the concerns into a globalised formula, King asks us to consider the role played by America on the world stage. Despite an initially superficial exploration of US history in its reference to the setting's past involvement in the slave trade, *Kingdom Hospital* interrogates US mythology in its cornucopia of 'pop' references. Through its philosophical interest in the self, the imagination, intuition and its moral enthusiasm, the **serial** invokes Emerson's American Transcendentalism. In the macabre melding of psychological and spiritual matters, King characteristically recalls the tendencies of American Romantic Poe. Finally, in offering a treatise on escape through the imagination, in its preoccupation with aspects of *freedom* (a truly American aspiration), the writer highlights particular nationalist facets of Romanticism. Within and without *Kingdom Hospital*, King explores the transformative and educative effects of freed creativity in an uncertain world, or, in the words of Poe, 'Imagination feeling herself for once unshackled, roaming at will among the ever-changing wonders of a shadowy and unstable land.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was first presented at 'Television without Borders: Transfers, Translations and Transnational Exchange', an international conference at the University of Reading, 27-29 June 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen*, bfi Publishing, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> The description is found in Bill Gibrón's online review of *Kingdom Hospital*, at [www.dvdverdict.com](http://www.dvdverdict.com), accessed on 9 October 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Here, *Kingdom Hospital* joins hands with Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* (1986). In this British series, a similarly bed-ridden artist Philip Marlow (Michael Gambon) seeks solace and suffers schisms in his creative imaginings.

<sup>8</sup> For many examples of such axiomatic expressions, see Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Chris Barker, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, Open University Press, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to fellow television scholar Jason Jacobs for his encouragement in developing this connection.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: the Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen King, *Lisey's Story*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2007

<sup>17</sup> Stephen King, *Duma Key*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

<sup>20</sup> Here again, *Kingdom Hospital* echoes (doubles) *The Singing Detective*'s interest in doubling: as Marlow recreates himself as his own fictional character from his self-penned novel 'The Singing Detective', and reality slides into fantasy. The name of the central character – Philip Marlow – is, of course, another double: of Raymond Chandler's fictional hardboiled detective.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Chow, review of *Kingdom Hospital*, <http://filmfreakcentral.net/dvdreviews/kingdomhospital.htm>, accessed on 9 October 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Neil Hertz's placement and invocation of Emerson (via Thomas McFarland) with William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and 'the Romantic Sublime' in 'The Notion of Blockage in the Romantic Sublime', and Jerome Christensen's comparable allusion to Emerson, Byron, Milton and Coleridge in 'Byron's *Sardanapalus* and the Triumph of Liberalism', in Cynthia Chase, ed, *Romanticism*, Longman, 1993, pp. 78-97; pp. 211-39.

<sup>25</sup> Cynthia Chase, ed, *Romanticism*, p. 1; internal citation Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Earl Wasserman, 'The English Romantics: Grounds of Knowledge,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 4, 1964, 18.

<sup>27</sup> King, *Lisey's Story*, p. 665.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 667.

<sup>29</sup> Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall', in Patrick Frances Quinn, ed, *Poetry and Tales*, Library of America, 1984, p. 979.