

## HOPE AND FEAR IN THE STEPHEN KING'S THE MIST

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### Abstract

Hope and Fear are something that lies in the deep of the human mind that affect how people act. This research is conducted to reveal fear and hope in society as part of human psyche that build its very foundation. The topic of this research is hope and fear in Stephen King's *The Mist*. The research instrument uses observation sheets, while the data collection is based on the library research. This is a descriptive qualitative research that used structuralism theory by Levi-Strauss. By using the structuralism theory, the analysis of the study was conducted through binary opposition found in the novel. This research results in several findings as follows: 1) People lose themselves as human when fear constantly breaks them, while hope is the one that can keep them as human even in the hard times. 2) In religion aspect, fear has changed the way people think about God. The disaster, the death, and the monster are said to be God's will. It shows that the fundamental of belief is changed from blessing life to cursing life. Furthermore, society's moral has degenerated that they justify the wrong thing as right, and otherwise because they only think about their safety.

**Keyword :** Hope, Fear, Society, Binary Opposition, Structuralism

### INTRODUCTION

Hope, people usually hope for something, and it gives them a strength to do something to accomplish what they want. Hope is a way of positively and expansively inhabiting one's agency, and our energy is oriented toward the future (McGeer, 2004: 104). It always becomes a tool to give a positive mood or energy to the people. The positive energy that comes

from hope has been used in medical section to help curing the patient faster. In religion section, hope is described as the way people believe to the God and maintain themselves as a good member of religious community. In general, people use hope to make a reason to

live, to do something good to others, and keep their humanity inside.

According to Pettit (2004: 158), hope will consist of acting as if a desired prospect is going to obtain or has a good chance of obtaining, just as precaution consist in acting as if this is the case with some feared prospect. Individual does not react the same way to obstacle they face in hope. People with high hope will see the obstacle as challenges to overcome and use their pathway thought to plan an alternative route to their goals (Snyder, 2000:10). Emily Dickinson wrote a poem entitled "*Hope*" is *the thing with feathers* (1891). She describes hope as a bird that never stops singing to

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inspire human. It can be used as an imaginative plot device that becomes a motivating force for change in dynamic characters. Modern philosopher Richard Rorty (1994) states that hope is more than a goal setting. It is a story that serves as a promise and reason for expecting better future.

If there is a hope, there will be always a fear. Fear is an unpleasant emotion or thought that you have when you are frightened or worried by something dangerous, painful, or bad that is happening or might happen. Fear in human beings may occur in response to a specific stimulus occurring in the present, or in anticipation or expectation of a future threat perceived as a risk to body or life.

According to Lisa Fritscher (2018), fear can be divided into two responses, they are biochemical and emotional. Biochemical fear is a natural emotion and a survival device. Physical reaction to fear includes sweating, increased heart rate, and high adrenaline levels that make us extremely alert. While the emotional fear is highly based on the individual. For some people, they enjoy fear. They are looking for adrenaline. It is like watching scary movies or doing dangerous sports. Others who do not enjoy feeling fear or having adrenaline is having a negative reaction to the fear and avoiding fear-inducing situations at all cost. Fear can lead to a change in metabolic and organ functions and eventually a change in behavior such as fleeing, hiding, or freezing from perceived traumatic events. The fear response serves survival by producing appropriate behavioral responses, so it has been well-maintained throughout evolution. Fear today has a free-floating dynamic. It can attach itself to a

wide variety of events and phenomena. Consider the fear of terrorism. Since 9/11, this fear has continually expanded to cover almost all aspects of modern life (Frank Furedi, 2007).

In the work of literature, *The Mist* written by Stephen King presents the story about a disaster that gives them a terrifying situation, creates disunion between people, and separates them into groups of what they believe is right without knowing their actions are consumed by hoping to survive or fearing to survive. Based on the background presented, this study is intended to analyze and explain the phenomenon of how hope and fear consume and change the society during the disaster or chaotic situation, making the people choose their choices based on what they believe is right in order to survive as found in Stephen King's *The Mist*.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive qualitative study as the study focused on the analysis and interpretation of the written or descriptive material in context data from the novel *The Mist*. In analyzing the data, the researcher used Levi-Strauss' theory of structuralism and its methodology to form the description of the analysis in this study. The material object of this study is the novel entitled *The Mist* by Stephen King published in 1985. This novel was published by Viking Press United States which contains 101 pages.

The formal object of this study is the study of hope and fear in *The Mist*. The hope and fear are elaborated from the story using the Levi-Strauss' structuralism theory in order to see how they are described, furthermore, they affect and change the society.

There are two types of data in this study, they are primary data and secondary data. The primary data of this study are taken from the material object, which is novel entitled *The Mist* by Stephen King. In addition, the secondary data of this study includes scientific journals, books, articles, and any other writings, and theories applied to the study. These sources are expected to be able to strengthen the analysis.

In collecting the data, the researcher does some steps as (1) Reading. The researcher reads the novel several times in order to get a deeper understanding of the content and meaning of the novel to get ideas to analyze the issue(s) related to the topic. (2) Identifying. The researcher identifies the data that has been collected. The researcher identifies which one is classified as the data and non-data. It is needed to make appropriate data related to the topic. (3) Classifying. The researcher classifies the quotations relevant to the topic related. The researcher has done the grouping to the collected quotations into some sections that provide support in analyzing the study.

In analyzing the data of this study, the researcher used several steps based on the structuralism theory by Levi-Strauss (Bressler, 1998: 96-100). The writer chooses the transcription of the novel that matches with the issue(s) and making the binary opposition of it to answer the related question. Then, the researcher dismantles the meaning of the related binary oppositions to make the interpretation of all the findings related to the issue(s).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Hope and fear as described in *The Mist*

The researcher explains the description of hope and fear through the sequence of events. It presents the detail of what happened to people when hope and fear affect them. Each person reacts differently to the disaster and each reaction implies the hope and fear. The issues are described with binary opposition to emphasize the meaning of each unit of the text and show the relationship between each other that leads into people's action as quoted from each chapter of the story.

#### *The beginning of the disaster at home*

At the beginning of the story, the town has been lashed by a big thunderstorm. The protagonist, David as husband, Steff as wife, and Billy as the child are affected by the storm. They are blinded by the dark and they only can listen and look at the lighting. The situation breaks their concern that they do not even think about other things. Billy's bedtime represents the daily activity they always do, but as they reject this situation, it implies that the disaster has given them anxiety about their safety. Their daily activity is nothing important compared to the fear of the disaster (King, 1985:40).

Steff shows a sign of fear when she feels frightened and worried about their condition. On the other hand, David tries to comfort her by telling it will be alright (King, 1985:4). His action is the resemblance of hope. He puts himself as the source of his family's hope by trying to calm them.

In a bad condition, a kid does not know what might do or not, that sometimes it puts him in danger. David knows that kid has big

curiosity in things even when it is not in the right time. Rather than scaring him, David tries to show that everything is alright, as long as he listens to him. He hopes that it will make him less worries about what has happened to them, and it will be better rather than fearing what has happened. However, Steff reacts contrarily with David. She is not as calm as him in dealing with the problem. It portrays that she is paranoid. She acts like everything will become a threat to his family (King, 1985: 6).

Despite the bad thing happens to them, David always tries to find a way to make the situation better (King, 1985: 9). He believes that putting hope can make a significant effect, although it seems like something simple and naïve. David's hope brings calmness in his family, especially Billy who does not seem afraid at all. Steff indeed is so afraid and paranoid about everything, but by the time being, she knows that David is right. Even though David himself has to lie about the situation, he does not mind it as long as they have hope (King, 1985: 15).

David and Steff give a different response to deal with the chaotic situation. David with hope, while Steff with fear. Hope from David is described as an act to stay positive in everything. As seen when he is worried but he chooses to remain calm and ask his family to do something nicely. From that attitude, he keeps his family stays out of danger in the right way without scaring them that leads them to feel better and lead them that having hope is better than fear. On the other hand, Steff who is consumed by fear always thinking negatively. She is too afraid that something bad will happen to them, and then becomes stress and paranoid. She is

concerning everything that can harm them, which become too much and it even makes her more afraid than she should be. This attitude leads her to a feeling that makes her worse. In the end, David's hope leads them to a better situation. It shows that hope gains dominance over the fear as reflected in David's approach to make his family feel save is working.

#### ***Mass-Panic situation at the Supermarket***

The next sequence of event happens at supermarket. With electricity and phone line down, David, Billy, and his neighbor, Norton, go to the supermarket in town to get some supplies and see if phone line or radio works. All of sudden the mist starts to cover the area, some people go out to take a look, and some just do not want to give up to their queue line. At the same time, Mrs. Carmody yells something that makes people scared and irritated, "Don't go out there! It's death! I feel that it's death out there!" (King, 1985: 25).

From what Mrs Carmody says, it describes a fear that influences the people feeling. Using the word 'death' all of sudden without knowing what happens is a strong move to spread the fear. Her line is supported by a man entered the supermarket with his nose bleeding and telling there is something out there (King, 1985: 26).

In a terrible situation, there is still a little light. It does not change much but it makes people feeling a little bit relax. That light is a little joke told by Bud Brown, the worker from the supermarket (King, 1985: 26). Brown tries to enlighten the atmosphere. By giving a joke that makes everyone laugh and smile, it gives the people hope that they are

okay, even though they still have the same problem, fear.

Norton asks all people to just stay inside waiting and see the situation to decide what to do next. It implies hope that they can still survive if stay together, work as a team, and figure out what to do next. At least it makes them relieved about what to do in this situation. However, not everybody agrees with what Norton suggests. A woman says that her children are in home and they are her priority (King, 1985: 29). The decision she makes is an interpretation of fear. She is afraid that her children are in danger, and it is described when she has to go home to check herself.

People who have hope within them remain calm despite bad things happen, as shown when they stay in the line queue when the mist/ fog coming. This leads to someone tries to enlighten the situation to drag people out of their panic/ fear state by giving a joke to laugh at. Because of stay calm, they can think clearly and have the best solution to the people in the market, which stays in the market until they figure out what happened. Opposite to hope, fear makes people panic, confused, and scared, as shown when Mrs Carmody said the death thing. It makes them unable to think clearly which do not help them at all. Fear just worsen their condition as they become more affected to be scared of things, as shown when Mrs Carmody repeats about the death from the outside of the market. They become silent and feeling powerless.

### *The incident in the storage area*

The next event happens in the storage area inside the market. David, who is trying to

calm Billy, is looking for something to cover up him who just lays down solidly out. He goes to the storage area, where the generator of the market is. He decides to turn off the generator and the emergency lights fade out leaving the room in darkness. After the generator is down, he starts hearing a sound from outside (King, 1985:31). He hears a sound from the outside that makes him afraid. He states that he regressed magically to four years of age hitting the doors straight-arm and burst through into the market. it shows that David is struggling to control himself. It implies that he loses himself because he is in completely in. Regressed to four years old is the representation of how he cannot handle the feeling inside of him, and also how he cannot move his leg as soon as he wants to also the representation of how big the fear that makes him panic and doubt.

There are four people standing in front of the storage door, they are Ollie, Myron, Jim, and Norm. They are surprised as they see David coming from that door with fear in his face. After explains what happens, they all decide to go to the storage area and check the generator. David tries to stop them to go near the loading door. From the fear he feels like the effect of the sound from the mist, he tries to warn them that it may be a bad idea since they do not know what is outside (King, 1985: 33).

Norm is going to fix the generator because that is the only thing he can do in this situation (King, 1985: 35). When the town is covered by an unknown mist and makes chaos, this mechanical thing is the only thing he can fix. It is hope that makes him believe to do it. If it is fixed, he hopes that it makes them less confused, and feels useful. That is

why, he and the other two guys, Jim and Myron, insist to fix it. He goes outside through the loading door, and suddenly a tentacle comes over the far lip of the concrete loading platform and grabs Norm. David is the closest to him, even though he is shocked, he grabs Norm and tries to save him as he can (King, 1985: 36).

David tries to save Norm by himself while the other three guys just watching without doing anything. The other three guys are in fear as same as David's when he first hears the sound outside. They are too shocked about something beyond imagination happens in front of their eyes. David is so disappointed and angry because he and others cannot save Norm. He unleashes his anger to Myron and Jim who agrees to send him out before. He brutally just punches Myron and blames everything to those two (King, 1985:39). It shows that his hope has failed him, his hope is to save Norm has become nothing, despite trying hard as he can.

Being one of the reasons why Norm death makes Myron and Jim feel guilty. The situation is described how Myron and Jim regret it (King, 1985: 39). They acknowledge that it is their fault and all they can do just sorry. Myron tries to say how sorry they are but got beaten by David. On top of that, he does not defend himself, he just accepts it just like he knows he deserves it and it can be paid off by this.

The unexpected incident happens in the storage area make David occupied by Fear. It makes him lose control of himself and that leads him cannot do something as shown when he tries to move from the storage area.

On the other hand, Myron, Jim, and Norm look the broken generator as a hope that at least it is the problem they can understand, and fix it will make them felt better. As a result, they have the bravery to take action. When the tentacles suddenly grab Norm, they are all shocked and stoned. Only David who is brave enough that lead him to take an action as he hopes to save Norm. Oppose from before, Jim and Myron who are brave enough to deal with the generator, they are too afraid to even move. David is so angry that they do not even try to help. As he cannot bring back Norm, he unleashes his anger to Myron and beat him like he does not care. Myron just takes all the blame and regrets his decision and feels really sorry to David as he got beaten so bad.

#### *The first night of the attack*

After the incident that happens to people who go outside, people inside the market have been left frightened and shocked. David is having conversation with Mrs. Turman about the fate of his wife and her husband (King, 1985: 61). She has lost her faith. She does not have hope about the safety of her husband. She is consumed with the negativity that she just accepts the worse possible fate. However, David does not think the same way as her. He still has hope in his heart. He believes his wife is okay, even though he only has a little hope about it.

The day keeps getting darker and turns into night. Darkness is not the only one the night brings at that time. There is a creature identified as a bug, but bigger and terrifying. They land on the window glass and people begin to freak out. Some people are fearing for their lives and crying. Before even know what that is about, they are already running

to avoid the window glass (King, 1985: 62). It represents how fear really affects them. It makes them a coward. But some people have the bravery to see what happens as they run toward the front. It represents how people's curiosity can resolve their fear. This curiosity leads them to the bravery which makes them go toward the dangerous and try to help.

The fear brings them into chaos. From the silence that reflects a terrifying situation, turns into a noisy sound of fear. People express their fear by howled, screamed, and cried. They just express their feeling without trying to how to overcome it (King, 1985: 65). Different with others, David and Mrs. Reppler tries to kill the creature. In a terrifying situation, they still think about other people. It shows how much hope and bravery they have to face the fear. The action they do is the representation of hope that leads them into bravery. As seen from that, they are brave enough to face the creature in order to help others.

In that chaotic situation, people start to become pessimistic. It is shown how fear succeeds to consume their feeling. The fear is portrayed by Mrs Turman who lose the faith about her husband. She just accepts the worse fate possible for him, which is death. Meanwhile, David refuses to let the fear consumes him. He still has hope about his wife. He believes that his wife has a good fate. He believes that she will be okay until he comes for her. It reflects that hope has led people to believe a good fate, while fear just has made people thinking about worse fate. The next things that affected by hope and fear are bravery and coward. Hope makes people brave to face the problem/ threat, while fear makes people coward to face the

problem/ threat. They are reflected when the bug creature lands on the window. On the other hand, people who consumed by fear reflected the coward. All they do the whole attacked is run away, cry, scream and moan. As a result, in the end, they do nothing.

### *The expedition to the Pharmacy*

This event explains about their journey to the pharmacy to find a way out. There is an argument between a father who seeks for a way to out with a son who is afraid of losing his parents. Billy does not want his father left him after he cannot see his mother either. However, as a father, David does all the best he can to make them safe from the mist. He is ready to sacrifice himself just to make his son safe. So, he has to build faith in himself to make Billy has it too. It represents how he is full of hope as seen the way he encourages his son to believe in him. However, Mrs. Turman does not have the same page as David. She does not agree on how he builds hope in his son, because she thinks that something bad will happen.

There is a clash when David's group try to go to pharmacy. Some people are afraid it will bring the creatures inside, especially the argument from Mrs. Carmody who always spread the fear to make people join her cult. Even though, David's group is doing this to look for a chance and medicine for injured people, some of them does not care. They only care about themselves. In the end, David's still go out as planned before (King, 1985: 80).

Dan Miller is in the lead, Ollie came second, David is the last with Mrs Reppler is in front of him. The pharmacy has been a place for slaughtered. The body they have found is in

shocking condition with the blood all over in his shirt and a missing head. Despite the place is completely messed up, they keep going inside. Apparently, after seeing the hideous scene in the Pharmacy, Ollie loses his hope. It is reflected as he becomes a pessimist and confesses to David about it. The fear that has been spread through the condition of the place has become a concern to all the people. The feeling they will succeed in escaping has been decreased as they all feel the fear (King, 1985: 82).

Not different from Ollie, David also loses his hope after he steps in the pharmacy. He is in doubt when he is about to go inside. However, there is something that triggers him to keep trying. It is his promise to Billy. Billy is the reason why David always tries so hard for anything. It can be inferred that Billy is the source of his hope. The relationship between father and son are stronger than the fear that tries to consume him. As a result, he gains back his hope and continues the expedition (King, 1985: 82).

Just a moment after they step in into the pharmacy, David realizes what has been attacking those dead people. It is a spider. The room is full of spiderwebs with a hanging body like a fly. David asks them to get out as soon as possible, but it is too late. The spiders begin to attack them. They desperately try to survive, but some got injured. especially Buddy Eagleton. His leg is trapped with spiderwebs that burn his jeans. Ollie and David save him and carry him. They keep moving to the front door avoiding the devil-like spiders from hell (King, 1985: 84).

David states that his mind is broken and torn for experiencing this chaos. However, he also states that he can keep his sanity in a hard situation because of Billy. It can be implemented that fear has consumed David as he starts losing himself, and mind tore. It is reflected as he makes some sound like laughing, crying, screaming that he does not even know what he does. That action refers to how fear leads him to insanity. On the hand, he also prevents himself to totally lose his sanity. By the time he is feeling fear, he also remembers what makes him keep hoping. He keeps thinking about Billy as he tries to regain his sanity. His action is implemented as hope that leads him to keep his sanity ((King, 1985: 84).

### *The final confrontation*

After David and his group fails to look for a way out through the pharmacy. David and his group are still in a mourning condition because they fail and lose some people. Thou, they have another problem that occurs in the market. It is Mrs Carmody. She gains a lot of follower for her misguided belief about God. All they try to do is defending themselves either it is right or wrong.

However, Cornell still has not given up yet. He shows his will to get out and survive because the market is no longer safe. Not because of monster, but because of Mrs. Carmody's cult. She starts taking control over the majority of people and he is afraid if she starts sacrificing people like she says in the beginning of the disaster (King, 1985:86-87).

Hattie is desperately hoping to see the sun again and will do anything to see it. Not so different with people who see Mrs Carmody

as the Messiah, she also looks something to believe in. The difference is only in hope and fear. People who join Mrs Carmody are driven by their fear that they do not care about the approach they will use. Meanwhile, Hattie who has been with David's group since the beginning, see him as a savior because the approach he uses is rational and human. That is why she always has hope in his efforts. David also always thinks everything carefully, always calm others, and never force people to follow him (King, 1985: 90).

Apparently, their will to go out and survive is not easy. Mrs. Carmody knows and she believes that David and his people make God angry because of their efforts. She believes that they are the reason why the monster keeps coming. As a redemption of their sin and to stop the mist, she asks for human sacrifice. She asks Billy as sacrifice. David and his group try so hard to defend Billy until Ollie interfere and shoots Mrs. Carmody (King, 1985: 93).

Ollie does not have any choices left as the people already out of their mind and chose the wrong path. His action is considered as a hero from David's group. However, his action is considered evil by most people in the market even though he does the right thing. People lose their moral and cannot see the definition of right or wrong. They just want to do what they want.

In the end, David and his people who represent hope have succeeded to go out from the market and start their new journey to find a place where the mist is gone. Meanwhile, Mrs Carmody's people who represent fear have lost their leader and their

messiah. They completely lose their only purpose. They just wait and stuck inside the market without taking the chances to try.

### **The Extent of Hope and Fear That Change the Society**

The novel portrays a normal society life as it should be. People befriend with their neighbour, help each other, create a system, and live with a religion. This chapter explains how hope and fear have created a disturbance in the society's fundamental which makes it does not function as it should be. When the fundamental is broken, people start to abandon values that keep society as one.

### ***Society's Belief***

At the start of the disaster, people still believe with hope, even though they have to deal with problems. They believe that if they keep hoping, God will save them because God is full of miracle and always save people. The fundamental of society in God is that he always shows a miracle to those who do good things in his way. That is the reason why people always try to do good things. However, their belief starts changing when Mrs Carmody starts spreading fear about the punishment of God. Nobody tries to even listen to her, because in society's point of view, she is so wrong. She is just a minority who breaks how society runs. This perspective slowly changes as the time the disaster keep happening. People start to listen and consider what she says. Words after words have been said by her is strength her belief. People start losing hope and join her. The fundamental of society has changed following the majority of people change their belief. Right now, people who believe God is full of miracle and forgiveness become the

minority. It shows that the society's belief has changed from kindness God to Evil God.

### ***Society's Morals***

As seen by how the story goes, the beginning of the disaster is not a problem for society. They still manage to use morals in social activities. They value human, not only themselves but also others. They work out each other, to do something that benefits to them. However, their morals are degenerating when the disaster keeps happening. For example, Norton who loses his morals and starts valuing himself. He does not care about others anymore as he changes from leader to someone who tries hard to prove something. The society also becomes immoral as most of the people join Mrs Carmody. She breaks the morals value and acts like a God who controls humanity. She does not value human life others than hers. So, society also changes where the morals people become the wrong one because of the justification of the immoral people. As shown when Mrs Carmody wants to kill Billy, and then Ollie kills her first. If it works like a normal society where morals become the guidelines, Ollie is the hero and Mrs Carmody is blamed. But this society has experienced a degenerating moral where they justify the wrong thing as right and the other way around.

The way *The Mist* novel describes the condition of society shows that the difference between people is hope and fear. The story tells a disaster that split people up and tearing the team to create their own society. Mostly, their action is based on hope and fear in dealing with something. They manage to survive in their own way. In one event, hope creates a better solution, and fear becomes

good choices in another event. Even though they are different, they connect with each other. The binary opposition shows that they create structures of the story. It shows that both have a significant role in changing someone life, even change the fundamental of society

### **CONCLUSION**

According to the finding and discussion in this study, the researcher pulls out some points as conclusions. Here are the points the researcher has drawn as follows:

People have different perception in dealing with the problem. They respond to problem based on their hope and fear. In this story, they have to deal with the disaster that happens in the town. Hope represents when people respond to it in a good way, however, there are also some occasions that hope is not bringing them something good. The same case is applied to fear as well. Fear represents when people do not have courage to take action and just give up without trying. However, there are also some occasions when fear is the right choice to respond. Even though it can be justified like that, but mostly the case with hope ends up well, while the case with fear ends up worse. People with hope think calmly and have a faith that they are going to be okay. That makes every action they take is logical and beneficial to all people.

Furthermore, hope and fear also change society. It has been changed through belief and moral. In religion aspect, fear has changed the way people think about God. God who has been the symbol of good is interpreted in a bad way. The disaster, the death, and the monster are said to be God's

will. It shows that the fundamental of belief is changed from blessing life to cursing life. Moreover, society's moral is also affected by hope and fear. In the normal working society, the morals of people are helping each other, valuing the life of others, and doing what makes them considered as a human being. As the disaster keep happening to them, the majority of people start to set aside their morals and think about their own safety. The society that should keep the harmony between people has changed to become a tool to gain safety by any means. Mrs. Carmody starts gathering people to join her and follows her cult. She promises that the disaster will be gone if they can provide a human sacrifice. People do not object to it, instead, they agree to do it. It shows that society's moral has degenerated that they justify the wrong thing as right, and otherwise because they only think about their safety.

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