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An Empirical Study of Horror in Stephen King's *The Stand*

Modern horror fiction would not be complete without the landmark works and ideas of author Stephen King. According to the famous critic Hank Wagner the universe of Stephen King is an incredible place of grotesque terror, dark magic and fearsome wonder, a great multiverse conjured from one individual's imagination. That's why Stephen King is known as the modern American writer of contemporary horror fiction whose books are widely sold and acknowledged. We can experience all these aspects in the novel *The Stand* written by Stephen King. The novel *The Stand* is best described as epic fantasy and this novel is compared with the fantasy novels of J. R. R. Tolkien and E. R. Eddison as well as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. *The Stand* is apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novel. *The Stand* talks about the modern mythology, painting the conflict between good and evil. However the main theme of this novel *The Stand* is not about the flu but the author King who

focuses on the world after this modern Black Plague. The highlight of this novel is the war among the good and the evil. This is characterized by Christian theology and outside forces of unnamed fate. King puts forward serious issues of the human condition and human nature as he establishes the framework of his narrative, illustrating his ability to tell an engaging story and makes readers to think about the potential future of mankind. I hope that this research paper will lend new insight to the study of *The Stand*.

Keywords: *The Stand*, Flu, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novel, Christian theology.

In his book *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), 'Noel Carroll' discusses King's work as an exemplar of modern horror fiction. King's novels are an escape from both life and death. Analyzing both the narrative structure of King's fiction and King's non-fiction ruminations on the art and craft of writing, Carroll writes in the book *Stephen King* (2002) edited by Harold Bloom that "the horror story is always a contest between the normal and the abnormal such that the normal is reinstated and, therefore, affirmed"(Bloom 67). One can experience the same journey in Stephen King's universe of horror fiction. For Stephen King, Horror is a solid sentiment of stun, shock, fear or dread caused by something to a great degree startling and frightening. Horror fiction as for the meaning of horror can be clarified as an anecdotal story that is expected to engage readers by terrifying and startling. This is, otherwise, called horror dream and horror story which is a class of writing, which panics, unnerves, or startles the readers or watchers by prompting sentiments of horror and fear. As indicated by J. A. Cuddon, English author, dictionary writer, horror fiction writing can be characterized as a bit of fiction in composition of variable length which stuns or even alarms the readers, or maybe actuates a sentiment of aversion, repulsion, loathing or hating (Cuddon). Horror can be created by making use of either powerful natural, supernatural or non-otherworldly agencies. Stephen King follows these dictums in his writing and *The Stand* is the finest example of this.

The Stand is published in 1978 by Doubleday publications and it is a horror fantasy novel which is nothing but a classic example of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genre. The novel *The Stand* is best described as epic fantasy and this novel is compared with the fantasy novels of J. R. R. Tolkien and E. R. Eddison as well as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. *The Stand* talks about the modern mythology, painting the conflict between good and evil. Based on his earlier short story "Night Surf" this novel portrays the breakdown of society after the accidental release of a strain of influenza that had been modified for biological warfare, which causes an apocalyptic pandemic where majority of the world's human population is wiped out. King dedicated the book to his wife, Tabitha, 'For Tabby: This dark chest of wonders' (*TS Dedicated page*). As far as this novel is concerned, there are three different setting dates in three different editions. The first setting date - 1980: First originally published in 1978 and in hardcover where the setting date was 1980. The second setting date - 1985: The first paperback release in 1980 had the setting date set in 1985. And the third setting date -1990: Later this book was re-released in 1990. Its name was *The Stand: The Complete and Uncut Edition* where King restored some text originally cut and added and revised sections and changing the setting of the story from 1980 and 1985 to 1990, and updated a few pop culture references.

On his Web site, Stephen King writes that:

For a long time ten years, at least – I had wanted to write a fantasy epic like *The Lord of the Ring*, only with an American setting... Only instead of a Hobbit, my hero was a Texan named Sru Redman, and instead of a Dark Lord, my villain was ruthless drifter and supernatural madman named Randall Flagg. The land of Mordor was played by Las Vegas.

This shows that how he penned down this novel. Originally published in 1978, this is considered as an epic novel which is based on a super-flu that destroys 99.4 percent of the

world's population. However the main theme is not about the flu but the author King who focuses on the world after this modern Black Plague. The highlight of this novel is the war among the good and the evil. This is characterized by Christian theology and outside forces of unnamed fate. King puts forward serious issues of the human condition and human nature as he establishes the framework of his narrative, illustrating his ability to tell an engaging story and makes readers to think about the potential future of mankind.

This novel is very important in the literary career of King. It is here, King first introduces the demonic Randall Flagg. Flagg later reappears in various forms in *Eyes of Dragon*, *Hearts in Atlantis*. In the *Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass* the hero Roland along with his friend cross over from their dimensions into the reality in which the events of *The Stand* occur. One of the many things that set apart *The Stand* from rest is Americana. All the versions of *The Stand* are decorated with many pop culture references. However on a deeper level the story tells us the battle between the good and evil communicating familiarity among American lives. Commentary on *The Stand* would be incomplete if not talked about two important things. Both these things are heavily related to moral and religious values. King projects in *The Stand*, two very important messages and these are “No matter what happens, the good will ultimately win over the bad”. “But for that to happen, we the humans must fight till the very end otherwise the evil will find a way to resurface and take revenge”. Many critics from ‘Observer’ say that his work plumbs with unnerving accuracy, the hopes and fears of an entire nation. Also the critics from ‘Daily Express’ review that, “there is a reason why Stephen King is one of the bestselling writers in the world. He creates an entire world and make the readers live in *The Stand* (TS back, cover page).

The Stand is apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novel. In the book *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness* Winter says:

Much of the power of *The Stand* draws upon the juxtaposition of the world that was the post apocalypse wasteland. The Gothic tradition has always played a major but unspoken role in apocalyptic fiction, and *The Stand*, much like Mary Shelley's *The Lat Man*(1826) and Shirley Jackson's *The Sundial*(1958), brings that tradition to the foreground.(Winter 56-57)

In this novel *Stand*, an influenza named project blue is released in air accidentally in a secret lab at a remote U.S. Army base. The first patient who suffers the influenza is Charles Champion. In a pandemic situation, the first person who suffers the effects of the disaster is called as patient zero. Here, Charles Champion is the patient zero and somehow he manages to escape the base of the station in a car along with his wife and kid. Soon USA Army traces down this patient zero in East Texas and establishes cordon sanitaire around it. Cordon Sanitaire is the barrier implemented to stop the spread of infectious diseases. It is sometimes alternatively used with quarantine. It is a measure designed to prevent communication or the spread of undesirable influences. This deadly super-flu is so severe that it wipes out almost the entire population of earth.

Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction can be defined as a sub-genre of science-fiction, science-fantasy related to horror fiction literature where the civilization is collapsing. There are many reasons for the apocalypse event. It is due to climatic change, runaway climate change; natural, such as an impact event; man-made, such as nuclear warfare or resource depletion; medical, such as a Pandemic, whether natural or man-made; Eschatological such as the last judgment, second coming; or imaginative, such as a zombie apocalypse, cybernetic revolt, technological singularity, dysgenics, or alien invasion. The story may involve attempts to prevent an apocalypse event. It is the post-apocalyptic, set after the event. The time frame may be immediately after the catastrophe, focusing on the travails or psychology of survivors, the way to maintain the human race alive and together as one, or

considerably later, often including the theme that the existence of per-catastrophe civilization has been forgotten (or mythologized). Post-apocalyptic stories often take place in a non-technological future world, or a world where only scattered elements of society and technology remain.

Various ancient societies, including the Babylonian and Judaic, produced apocalyptic literature and mythology which dealt with the end of the world and of human society, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, written c. 2000-1500 BC. However, this form of literature gained widespread popularity after World War II, when the possibility of global annihilation by nuclear weapons entered the public consciousness. The apocalypse is also depicted in visual art, for example in Albert Goodwin's painting *Apocalypse* (1903). Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Events: Climate change, Cyber war, Nuclear warfare ,Virus, Manmade or natural deadly diseases ,Zombie or Alien invasion, Divine Judgment, Pandemic, Ecological Collapse, Resource Depletion , Technological disaster

Apocalyptic phenomena can be defined as the religious belief or ideology where it projects that there will be an apocalypse. This term which originally referred to a revelation of God's will is now usually referring to the belief that the world is about to be ended, even within one's own lifetime. This belief is usually accompanied by the idea that civilization will soon come to a tumultuous end due to some sort of catastrophic global event. Apocalyptic phenomena is often conjoined with the belief that esoteric knowledge that will likely be revealed in a major confrontation between good and evil forces, destined to change the course of history. Apocalypses can be viewed as good, evil, ambiguous or neutral, depending on the particular religion or belief system promoting them. They can appear as a personal or group tendency, an outlook or a perceptual frame of reference or merely as expressions in a speaker's rhetorical style.

Sometimes in an apocalyptic novel, some are shown as immune to the disaster and they have some good supernatural powers. Some of the survivors use these supernatural powers which have saved their lives, for evil purposes and may bring out even more disaster. The deadly influenza as it spreads very rapidly gains various names like Captain Trips and Super-flu. It affects almost 99 percent of the population. The entire earth civilization is on the verge of extinct. However few of them survive and the super-flu does not have any effect on them. They form a free zone of those survived in Boulder, Colorado. It is due to the courtesy of 108 years old lady Abigail. She is popularly known as Mother Abigail. It is supernatural that all the survivors had the dreams of Mother Abigail. One group of survivors is led by Abigail and the other survivors are led by evil Randall Flagg. This group led by this evil presence settles in Las Vegas. When the members of Randall Flagg make a bomb explosion, many people are killed. However, most of the survivors of the group led by Abigail manage to escape this explosion and are safe due to the efforts of Mother Abigail. The suggestions and guidance of mother Abigail prove beneficial to her members in fighting with the evil presence. This scene makes the novel horrifying.

In the final confrontation between the members of free zone and members of Randall Flagg, two elements create what we call as a feeling of horror and these elements are hand of god and dark magic. The free zone members decide to begin the final confrontation and eradicate Randall Flagg and his army. Randall Flagg and his army too know this danger. Some of the members of free zone are killed while some have been captured by Randall Flagg. The moments before the rest of the free zone members are to be killed, Traschan Man arrives with a nuclear weapon. Randall realizes the danger of explosion of this nuclear weapon but it is too late and it is transformed into a giant Hand of God which helps in detonating the bomb. All the members of Randall Flagg are killed. The love interest of Stu, Frances Goldsmith delivers a baby. But the parents are suspicious of the fact of the baby

would survive the super-flu. They do not know if the baby too is immune to the virus but the baby survives and indicates that it is too immune to the super-flu. The evil, Randall Flagg is not dead yet. He somehow manages the explosion of the bomb at the very last second and teleports himself to an island using his dark magic powers. There he begins recruiting adherents among a pre-literate, dark-skinned people, who worship him as a deity. These supernatural and non-supernatural elements gain the horror agencies in the novel *The Stand*. That's why Magistrate Tony says in his book *The Moral Voyages of Stephen King*:

The horrors, King describes are recognizable; his monsters are not found on intergalactic planets or in exotic locations, but live on the ground floors of factories, schools and churches. Because they are recognizable, King's world is even more horrific because people comprehend its immediate relevance to their daily lives. (Magistrate 15-16)

Readers can see the same things in this epic novel *The Stand* that's why it is the best-selling novel of Stephen King.

The Stand has three parts or we may say books and these are Captain Trips, On the Border, and The Stand. *The Stand* starts with the flight of Thomas Campion and his family. It begins from a secure military institution. Thomas Campion manages to escape before the gates are sealed. However Campion is not too fast to escape the deadly super-flu and his flight allows the spread of super-flu virus to canvas the country. It talks of a large cast of characters as they experience and react to the super-flu: for example -

- Stuart Redmanis from Arnette, Texas. He is inexplicably immune despite endless tests by government officials;
- Frannie Goldsmith is a girl who is pregnant and who is from Ogunquit, Maine. She is one of the two survivors in her city;

- Harold Lauder is an outcast boy from Ogunquit, Maine. He is haunted by aspirations of greatness and obsessed with Frannie Goldsmith;
- Larry Underwood is a one-hit wonder who is patently not a nice guy;
- Glen Bateman is a retired sociologist. He theorizes about mankind's future in the world which is nothing but a post-plague world;
- Nick Andros is a wandering deaf and mute and is being used by divine powers beyond his control;
- Tom Cullen is a mentally challenged man. He has an extreme innocence and it can be said that it even cannot be destroyed by super-flu;
- Nadine Cross is a woman who seems to be tortured with indecision about the part she would play in the world which of course is a post-plague world;
- Lloyd Heinreid is a hardened criminal who by his own will decides to serve evil in the form of his master;
- Trashcan Man is a pyromaniac who has an obsession.

The virus gradually and relentlessly incurs significant damage on more extensive populace. When this returns, whatever is left of the survivors begins to amass themselves into two fundamental classes. the most good hearted Mother Abigail, who is 108 years old Christian lady in Nebraska, and Randall Flagg, King's epitome of malevolence. An epic confrontation amongst great and wickedness starts in the account of the story. It must be essential to state that a significant number of the great characters deceive their companions as they attempt to modify society in Boulder, Colorado; some of the terrible folks end up being awful news for their own kin in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Toward the end of the novel, four heroes set out from the good camp in Boulder, Colorado, at the command of a withering Mother Abigail, to stand against adversaries in Las Vegas, Nevada. Flagg's kin secured three of the legends in Las Vegas (one of which falls en

route and can't proceed. Be that as it may, is protected and rescued later). Of the three heroes, one is cruelly shot when he chuckles even with his enemy, and whatever remains of the other two are paraded out for an open execution. Before things get too far in progress, nonetheless, one of Randall Flagg's cronies, the pyromaniac Trashcan Man, touches base with an atomic bomb. Through, a genuine of lucky calamities one of the awful individuals stands up against the execution and is summarily shocked by an electrical jolt lightning. The bomb is exploded and everybody (aside from Flagg obviously, who figures out how to escape in spirit (soul) shape ultimately) is exploded. The novel ends with the story of the solitary hero's arrival to Boulder, just to locate the new haven are rapidly beginning to resemble the America everybody recalls. He and his family choose to discover a place without such a significant number of individuals, and the novel closures with the unanswered inquiry: Do people ever really learn anything?

King's books are known for their length, frequently a few hundred pages; however *The Stand* is the main book that King needed to impressively abbreviate with a specific end goal to publish and distribute. When he begins to send *The Stand* to his publishers, King was compelled to expel near 500 pages of content with a specific end goal to make the book attractive. When he released another and whole form and uncut version in 1990, after his popularity enabled him to distribute as he needed, King made a few changes to the first story. In the first place, he changed the date of the novel from 1980 to 1990. He included a fresh start and a completely new completion (end) alongside re-establishing somewhere in the range of 150,000 words. King likewise incorporated another introduction to the extended release, disclosing to the readers that, this interpretation was not another story, yet rather an extension of the first. Despite the fact that he demands that users won't discover old characters acting in new ways, King says that readers will discover more data about old characters, and even meet some new ones en route. When he thinks about the topic of length

(that is the reason he extended a book that was at that point more than 800 pages), King gives an expanded similarity. He abridges Hansel and Gretel into a section that catches the basics of the story and then clarifies how that version resembles a Cadillac with the chrome peeled and the paint sanded down to dull metal. The new form of *The Stand* is, in King's psyche, a re-established Cadillac as it should be. King additionally includes as an reconsideration to his introduction that *The Stand* is his fans' top pick, and it is his expectation to have this final version answer a huge number of fan letters inquiring what happened to so- and-so.

Toward the end of his introduction to the total and uncut version of *The Stand* distributed in 1990, Stephen King alludes to this story as a long dark tale of Christianity. The apocalyptic novel is anything but another thought using any and all means; however King hasn't quite recently composed another apocalypse story. The inquisitive thing about *The Stand* is that it is particularly about the destruction of America, and everything that the nation remains for and envelops the same amount about the perpetual battle amongst great and shrewd as pursued by a few vital characters. The apocalyptic novels center around the annihilation of mankind, what's more, the loss of modernization, and those powers are available in *The Stand* appears more obviously. *The Stand* echoes with a thorough American awareness and consciousness. This is on account that Americans are hard-wired into modernization, and they can envision the loss of mechanical advantages all the more effectively, as somebody who depends on her PC and Internet can envision amid the hours when benefits are inaccessible. King's work requests to Americans since it is about the world in which they live the brand names they perceive the solaces they use, and the autos they drive show up in the novel.

The Stand acquaints a subject common to whatever is left of King's work: the idea of the stand itself. Basically, standing up in a King novel intends to defy fiendish by any stretch of the imagination. At the point when characters are compelled to make their stand, they

frequently do as such without preparing, weapons, planning, or desire for survival. Truth be told, the greater part of King's heroes don't survive their last stand, yet what is vital is that they do stand, for anyway long they can oversee. King esteems the thought over the consequence of the thought. In any case, *The Stand* represents certain issues for readers who need to comprehend what to anticipate from the novel. As a matter of first importance, it shifts from a whole world destroying apocalypse setup to an epic dream about good and evil communicated in Christian religious philosophy. Readers wind up feeling as befuddled as the characters in the novel, not with the account, but rather with their own desires. Collings clarifies this vulnerability best when he says in book *The Many Facets of Stephen King*:

In terms of genre, *The Stand* is problematical, since it lacks the monsters and creatures of traditional horror, except for Randall Flagg occasional shape-shifting. It begins within a science-fictional frame-work, detailing with the care and precision of hard science fiction the consequences of an escaped super-flu virus; yet just as the characters begin to adjust to the new world technology has forced upon them, they must confront something essentially fantastic their dreams of Mother Abigail and the Dark Man. Again and again, King shifts between dark fantasy and science fiction as the novel turns from the super u to Randall Flagg. At the same time, its length and scope link it with the epic quest, as Ben Indick argued recently in *Stephen King as Epic Writer* as he points out a number of thematic and topical resemblances to Tolkiens, *The Lord of the Rings*. (Collings 119-110)

By mixing modes, King figures out how to pull in a wide assortment of readers from all range of intrigue, and he is moreover ready to make an entire texture out of variegated strings. *The Stand* is such a basic work since it is full, complete and 100 percent finished. As Tolkien clarified in his exposition "On Fairy Stories," any great dream should be convincing as indicated by the terms of the world in which it exists. As per these attributes, King

succeeds honorably in making a suitable Optional Reality as convincing to readers as their own lives, and this very similitude enables readers to get required with the characters, themes, plot and occasions of the novel. Whenever, Larry and Nadine gaze out at the left Maine coastline, Larry is clashed by his feelings: Some portion of him clamored at their dismal and glaring grotesqueness and at the offensiveness of the minds that has turned this area of an eminent, savage coastline into one long expressway amusement park for families in station wagons. Be that as it may, there was a more unpretentious, more profound piece of him that whispered of the general population who had filled these roads. Women in sunhats and shorts are too tight for their large behinds. School young men dressed in red-and-dark striped rugby shirts; young ladies in shoreline movements and thong shoes; little shouting youngsters with frozen yogurt and ice cream spread over their faces; they were American individuals and there was a grimy, convincing sentiment about them at whatever point they were in gatherings. No one worries if the gathering was in an Aspen Ski hotel or playing out their mundane rituals of summer. Having known that every one of those Americans were no more, Larry comprehends what readers can envision; the loss of everything that recognizes himself as an individual from America. King shows this disengagement with convenient pictures most Americans will have the capacity to picture such a late spring get away, regardless of whether the readers have never been to U.S.A. The general population, immediately evoked with a couple of short lines, is natural to readers, and King raises that commonality just to wreck the serenity of the readers' involvement. These individuals, so effortlessly envisioned, are gone, casualties of the super-flu and readers can just endeavor to en-vision a world without exciting excursion lands, or far more atrocious, those unfilled get away spots gradually being recovered by Nature. It appears a brutal judgment in fact on humanity. Scenes like these are normal of King's composing, proof of his commitment to authenticity and his capacity to catch the substance of the thing, reverberates in reader's

creative abilities to feel abnormally at home in the content. One of the real issues raised by critics and readers alike regarding the matter of *The Stand* includes the clear Christianity of the story. Like Tolkien before him, King's epic is here which about a purposeful anecdote, intriguing in one feature, however such an interpretation disregards the numerous levels of importance entwined through the novel. At the point when gotten some information about the "Christian Allegory" in *The Stand*, King answered in the book *The Many Facets of Stephen King*:

The Stand starts out with a plague that wipes out most of the world's population, and it develops into a titanic struggle that Christianity figures in. But it's not about God, like some of the reviews claimed. Stuart Redman isn't Christ, and the Dark Man isn't the Devil....The important thing is that we are dealing with two elemental forces White and Black and I really do believe in the White force. Children are a part of that force, which is why I write about them the way I do. There are a lot of horror writers who deal with this struggle, but they tend to concentrate on the Black. Look at Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings; hes much better at evoking the horror and the dread of Mordor and the Dark Lord than he is at doing Gandalf. (Collings 110)

Symbolic readings are frequently and excessively near a young reader. A few things in *The Stand* can be perused as metaphorical, (Stu Redman could be an picture of the New American Indian; simply take a gander at his last name) however not as entirely metaphorical (Stu is not really a man who lives on the land and up-holds a "back to nature" belief system); at the end of the day, to center around the balanced connections between The Stand and Christianity appears to zoom in on one division of the work's potential and to disregard the entire picture completely. It might improve the perusing knowledge to think about the Walkin' Fella (Randall Flagg) as the Devil, similarly as it might add to the general credibility

of Lord of the Rings to consider Sauron to be Adolf Hitler, however this is just a sideline translation one that makes it too simple for readers to slight whatever else. *The Stand* offers readers a wide range of American cognizance and conscience past the Christian suggestions; from the residential community of Ogunquit, Maine, to the boondocks of Arnette, Texas, readers are over owed with conspicuous pictures, and after that compelled to look as their natural nation savagely wrecked by a lethal super-flu. Of the greater part of his books, *The Stand* enabled King to dig the most profound into the foundations of many, numerous distinctive characters. This is one of the dissensions that a few readers have of King. Readers ask if they have to know a man's whole history keeping in mind the end goal to grasp that he's the one who will spread the super-flu to everybody at the motion picture theater. The response to this question, at first glance, is no. Readers don't have to know the points of interest of the character. In any case, if one somehow happened to distil King's works into basic plot without much detail, what might be the enjoyment to read and understand him by any stretch of the imagination? King's charm is his skill for making authentic characters for readers to relate to; his expertise does not stop with primary characters. He will give a few pages to the foundation and eccentricities of a character that he will slaughter in the following couple of pages. While some consider this to be an overabundance datum, others see that such dedication to detail is what makes a King novel work. Readers can't be relied upon to think about an arbitrary character that goes to the motion pictures, not when such a significant number of different characters are all around created, but then King's readers find that they do think about that solitary film goer notwithstanding themselves. For his few passages or pages, he is similarly as dynamic to them as their adjacent neighbor, maybe all the more in this way, and this reverberation is the thing that keeps readers fascinated after a few hundred pages.

King's novel provides a good basis for discussion about various possibilities of appropriation of different phenomena. At the end *The Stand* by Stephen King is shown as the

most explicitly didactic book. All the events and issues lead this novel to trap into the paradoxes of myth and reality. This novel figures out the horror elements like apocalyptic agencies, super-flu, the pandemic, the immune people supernatural evil, final confrontation, hand of god, teleporting and dark magic etc. All these elements make the novel readable.

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