

**THE PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS' HYPERREALITY  
IN STEPHEN KING'S *THE STAND***

**THESIS**



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THE PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS' HYPERREALITY IN  
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by

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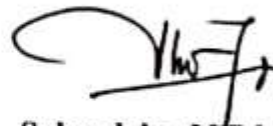
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Nicol (2009, p.13) says that “reality is always already manufactured, an ideological illusion sustained by the matrix of postindustrial capitalism and media culture.” It has functioned as an artificial environment that does not have an actual existence. The images in cyberspace are only copies of the real world. As a result, the virtual reality world only contains a series of simulations. It is relevant to Baudrillard’s hyperreality theory that there is no original document or only copy for another sign (1994, 10). For that reason, in a virtual world, the world is simulated. Technology has deceived us into seeing synthetic forms as accurate. In Baudrillard’s perspective, hyperreality blurs the boundary between real and virtual and makes it appear natural.

Literature is a reflection of society. Between art and reality, there is a complex form of interaction, often in opposite directions. In literature, postmodern criticism becomes one of the critical approaches to analyze a text and compares it with the current social condition. According to Bertens (2001, p.142), “Postmodernist criticism ... is also interested in connecting what it finds in the texts it reads with social reality.” In this case, literary works do not merely depart from several imaginations or fantasies but also have a clear foundation, namely the reality of life. It becomes a reflection and bridges between the realities of life and literary creations. Nevertheless, in literature, hyperreality creates a condition where falsehood mingles with authenticity, the past mingles with the present, facts confuse with manipulation, and image merges with reality.

Literature related to hyperreality is shown in horror novels like *The Stand* written by Stephen King. This novel is about a virus that was accidentally released

from military laboratories conducting biological warfare research. Because of this virus, an event that causes contact between people contaminates with another. Almost the entire population of the world dies within a few weeks. The world has changed permanently. Under the burden of mass death, small numbers of survivors must find ways to overcome it.

The type of this virus is known as superflu which is Project Blue. The virus is firstly brought by Charlie, who moved from military invitation to Arnette. However, he is already contaminated with superflu, and then other people get involved. Because of this superflu epidemic, 99.4% of the population dies within few weeks. Their lives begin to collapse, and the government cannot contribute more to minimize the destruction. Because of the superflu, new societies begin their lives in an area called Free Zone. This area is believed free and safe from superflu. Moreover, the characters also have their free will to do what they want without any limitation.

Many previous studies have been done to discuss the issue of hyperreality in literary works. Dewi (2017) made a research of hyperreality and simulation world in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*. Astutik (2018) conducted a study of hyperreality in a cyberpunk novel entitled *The Mortality Doctrine Series* by James Dashner. Paramitha (2018) also studied the hyperreal world and social alienation of the main character in *England, England*, by Julian Barnes. Onal (2019) conducted a study of hyperreality in *The Magus* by John Fowles and *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster.

















control them. According to Ward (2003, p.75), the logical order of things might be that reality expresses itself through representation, but this has been turned upside down. They choose to live within the illusions because technology has blinded them from the real. Technology provides them a better place where they can escape from reality. In Baudrillard's perspective, the real world is presented as a corrupted world. Therefore, the artificial world or the virtual world created by a computer or machine seems more acceptable. The phases when people start to ignore reality then lead to the disappearance of the real itself. Therefore, the reality is being simulated with the help of technology.

Baudrillard believes that the advancement of technology has emerged the concept of hyperreality. Hyperreality, according to Baudrillard, is the act of making a fake thing that seems to be considered natural. There is no more extended connection between real and fake because it has already mixed and blurred the reality and reality by-product of technology (fake reality). Baudrillard stated that hyperreality occurs in generations who consider everything real without knowing the origin of reality (1994, p.6). He argues that hyperreality is further than expressing symbols representing the original. He wants to make a symbol that represents something natural that does not exist. He also stressed that the world we live in had been replaced by a world of copies, where we only seek simulation and no more (1994, p.3). The world that is surrounded by technology is a world dominated by a chain of simulacra. Therefore, the real has vanished and been replaced by simulacra.

To give an illustration, the researcher is using a model in a magazine as an analogy. First, when we see a model in a magazine, it directly crosses our mind that she is attractive. Then we consciously try to imitate her in such a way because we want to look as appealing as her. However, in reality, the model in the magazine does not look the same as the magazine has shown us. This model has gone through various processes of construction, including make-over and photo editing, to look beyond attractive on the magazine. Some makeup artists and professional photographers worked together to create this amazing illusion.

Therefore, people who happen to read the magazine try to imitate the model. People who try to imitate the model do not realize that the image or sign they refer to does not exist. The model in the magazine is merely a product for the needs of advertisements that is different from real life. In this case, a simple created picture with no origin has gained its strength to stand on its own as a reality. It is a form of simulacra and simulation that leads to hyperreality because the image has no relation to any reality (Lechte, 2010, p.200).

### **2.2.1 Simulacra and Simulations**

In this stage, Baudrillard's point is that hyperreality can no longer be the mirror of reality (Kiaei and Masoumeh, 2014, p.2). In this stage image is a pure simulacrum without any ties to meaningful reality. A sign has completely separated or lose its connection to the real signified. The existence of signified has blurred. For instance, sign moves, transfers, and creates own reality. Therefore, the resemblance to reality is only through reflecting other signs and their relationship to the meaning of reality, simulacrum. In this case, Disneyland is not

merely a theme park representing America; instead, it is a simulated America. Unlike representation who tried to absorb the simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, sign in the form of simulation warps representation as a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994, p.6).

Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality explains the concept of 'Simulacra and Simulation.' Simulation is defined as the repetition of copies without absolute origins. Baudrillard regards simulation as the boundary line between right and wrong, real and imaginary. So, simulation is no longer a reference or substance. The sign is not a changer for meaning but merely for another sign (Baudrillard, 1994, p.10). Simulation is a copy of the actual model without knowing the origin of reality, in other words, hyperreality.

Furthermore, the simulacrum (plural: simulacra) is used because of repeated simulations (Kiaei and Masoumeh, 2014, p.10). Thus the conditions are then determined to be accurate and become simulated or hyperreality. In addition, hyperreality is a world of simulacra in which everything has no previous meaning or without intermediaries. Nowadays, our life experiences are mediated by media and media without us even noticing it. In brief, our society is a mediated world where life is a matter of simulation.

From the order of images states by Baudrillard above, it is proved that simulacrum is a simulation of endless simulations that blurs the relation of the imaginary to reality. Simulation and simulacra have created fake reality, which appears to be more accurate than 'the real one.' It further produced what Baudrillard stated as hyperreality, "the generation by models of a real without

origin or reality” (Baudrillard, 1994, p.1). It means that hyperreality is a representation without accurate references. It is just a distraction from the unreal original world. Disneyland, which at first seemed like a representation of America, slowly changed to be the simulation of America and other constructs the ideal American society should look like.

So, Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality can no longer be a reflection of the reality about what happened. This theory is influenced by the concept of simulacra and simulation. Simulacrum creates an image without any apparent connection to reality, whereas simulation tries to repeat a copy without a clear origin. Simulacra and simulations create a false reality that seems more accurate than reality. Thus, hyperreality becomes a world where not everything has an apparent reference and the same meaning as before.

### **2.3 Previous Studies**

There are some of the previous studies that have to comprehend which relates to hyperreality theory. Dewi (2017) conducted a study of hyperreality and the simulation world in James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner*. In this study, Dewi analyzes how the simulation world is depicted in the novel and how the simulation world affects people experiencing hyperreality. The result of this study showed that the simulation world in the novel is called Glade. Gladers, people who live there and pass through the transformation process, will get their memories back to the real world. Those memories bring them back into their old life. They will lose their memory. At last, the simulation world leads Gladers into

hyperreality. They prefer to enjoy their life there than go back to real life because the real world is worse than the simulation world.

Astutik (2018) also conducted a study of hyperreality in a cyberpunk novel entitled *The Mortality Doctrine Series* by James Dashner. In this study, she analyzes how is the implementation of hyperreality in the novel, the significance of competition in achieving the position of being a god, and how hyperreality is constructed. As a result, hyperreality in the novel is portrayed through the lives of Americans in the future who are addict to the virtual reality world that they call VirtNet. With the use of the technologies, they experience hyperreality. After that, Life Blood Deep, one of the most popular virtual reality games on VirtNet, appears and ends in the simulation of the world, god, and heaven.

Paramitha (2018) conducted a study of the hyperreal world and social alienation of the main character in *England, England*, by Julian Barnes. This study aims to analyze the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the novel, hyperreality concept, and social alienation. The result of this study indicates that the consumer society in the novel brings out the portrayal of hyperreality, and then it causes social alienation. The imitation of the world of England brings the destruction of the natural world of England. Martha Cochrane, as the main character, experiences social alienation because she struggles to return the old England. During the story, she experiences powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement.

Onal (2019) conducted a study of hyperreality in *The Magus* by John Fowles and *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster. This study aims to investigate how



hyperreality in both novels and how to escape from hyperreality. As a result, both novels have the same characteristics in the postmodern era. These two novels depict hyperreality experienced by the protagonist in different settings. In the end, the simulation world is possible for every individual in the postmodern era. Each individual can not only go through it to get specific meaning and purpose but can also escape when situations and conditions allow.

The previous studies related to the novel entitled *The Stand* by Stephen King are done by Schurings (2015), who wrote *Stephen king's the stand as a contemporary morality play*. This study aims to analyze *The Stand* in the framework of both genre and ideological criticism. The theory used in this research is Frow's genre theory, concerning popular culture genres with the morality play genre, to analyze *The Stand's* generic situation. The study shows that the morality plays are spiritual fall, redemption, humanity's free will, and a particular virtue for supporting characters.

A study entitled *The walkin dude randall flagg in stephen king's post-apocalyptic epic the stand* is made by Lippert (2018). This study investigates the subject of Gothic status, moral decisions, and the power, control, and domain in the dystopian novel with a scientific approach to the villain, Randall Flagg. This result shows that Randall Flagg has free will and good determinism, canvas toward religion, moral choice, and individual responsibility character.

Morris (2001) conducted a study entitled *Morality in the american west: the origins of evil in stephen king's the stand and desperation*. This study investigates a type of entertainment similarity and considerable fame just as the topic of

King's horror that must go to film. This result shows that God is not dead, and King refuses the title of morality. The novel brings back to the American societies during the time of the puritan by the plague of superflu. So, humans, as the reader, can learn anything from the novel.

So, this current study is different from the previous study. The first is the novel entitled *The Stand* by Stephen King, and the second is the theory of hyperreality by Jean Baudrillard used to analyze the novel. From the previous study above, there were many researchers studying hyperreality, none of them analyze hyperreality in this novel. The previous study above inspired the researcher to conduct this study. The researcher also analyzed the simulacra and simulation in the novel.



Project Blue, as in the quotation above, is a deadly disease made by Starkey and his friends in a laboratory that was displayed on several monitors with different functions. Starkey is a government steward, servant of the State, and holds many titles for about “thirty-six years” (p.45). The monitor that Starkey pushed its button showed the Project Blue in of western California desert emitting a reddish-purple infrared light. Project Blue showed a very frightening disease from this desolation area.

The western California desert was a desert “where so many military projects had been carried out” (p.1074). One of them is Project Blue which was started in this desert. The project was in the form of a cold outbreak and a virus that is entirely illogical to humankind. The plague or virus killed anyone, and the virus did not matter who is killed. The project was used by a major “who had been transferred from something top secret in California called Project Blue” (p.234). The major has dark, haunted, and scary eyes. He has been charged by the security there.

Starkey still had not closed his eyes and could not believe what was going on. Vic Hammer, who had been “son-in-law” (p.48), committed suicide by using his service gun and fired himself into his eye. “Project Blue specs are on his desk” (p.48). Project Blue has been confirmed and looked reasonable with stretch code 848-ab. The project was an antigen shift and mutation to produce a disease that can be transmitted. The transmission was estimated through communication with a speed of 99.4%. The disease then has a high risk, and the rest could cause death.







In just a few days, the Project Blue that was created could spread quickly. It started by Charlie, who initially took in his Chevy on a visit to Hap's Texaco. His wife and daughter, who sat in the front seat, were found dead in the car while he was still alive, but he was sick and delusional. Charlie transmitted the disease to State patrol officers, Joe Bob Brentwood, and Harry Kent after the accident. Then, "Harry, a gregarious man who liked his job, passed the sickness to more than forty people during that day and the next" (p.87). Then these people continue to other chains, such as family, friends, and others. Finally, the disease spreads to all country residents regardless of their profession, such as doctors, patients, visitors who are on vacation there, and all such "A very lethal chain letter" (p.87).

The simulacrum process in the novel about Project Blue was also portrayed by describing the research process to diagnose the illness carried out by the team of Dr. Denninger, "which is the only halfway decent diagnostic tool Denninger's got so far" (p.131). The submitted reports showed that many people were infected and then died when they tried to talk to each other. Joe Bob Brentwood showed a positive response. He "went reeling around the room, yelling, coughing, blowing snot, the whole bit. Then he fell over and died." (p.131), but something different happened to Stu, who used the code name Princess in the novel. He showed no signs of the virus and looked completely normal.

So, Project Blue as a simulacrum was started from the technology used to create deadly diseases. Project Blue was made in a laboratory which was displayed through several monitors in it. The Project Blue was created as a disease through transmission with incredible speed. Project Blue has an impact on the





not drink much beer that night. The headache, which he did not know the cause, really made him dizzy and broke when he tried to talk to his sons, Luke and Bobby. Norm was still curious about the accident because the woman and the baby died in the car at that moment while the man was sick and died on the way to the hospital. The accident seemed strange and sad.

Joe Bob, who was also there that night, also experienced the exact wrong thing. He advised Hap, the owner of Bill Hapscomb's station, to close his station at that time. He told Hap what doctors had said and explained to Hap that "doctors look scared like that" (p.41) to the disease. Besides that, Vic Palfrey also woke up with a strange and bad feeling all over his body. He said, "I woke up this morning sneezing and hacking away like sixty" (p.42). It was the simulation of Project Blue at the beginning to be a disease.

Harry Trent is "an insurance man" (p.87) in Braintree. In the novel, he was transmitted disease, as a simulation of Project Blue, by Joe Bob. Then Harry, who liked the job, transmitted the disease to everyone he meets approximately forty people in every day. It could be said that by using "the same conservative formula" (p.87), these forty people can then transmit the disease, which continues to infect one thousand people, five thousand people, twenty-five thousand people, fifty thousand people, and so on.

Judy Horton, who was seventeen years old and beautiful, was quite happy to participate in various events. A grave mistake was made by her two years earlier. She was pregnant, and her mother told her to "into marrying the boy responsible" (p.378), but she did not want to do. This accident happened when he was still a

college student. During those two years, she has struggled with her husband by working in various jobs. And then when the disease, which they call superflu as a simulation of Project Blue, struck away, she thought that the disease “had solved all her problems.”

Richard Hoggins, a black man who was “addicted to the fine white powder he called ‘hehrawn’ for the last five years” (p.379), lived in Detroit, Michigan. During his lifetime, he drank heavily and consumed heroin. One day he overheard people saying that Allie McFarlane, who owned the third-largest company, had just gotten a large shipment of heroin. Of course, Richard did not think much of trying to get it and stool it, but he still did not know surely “where McFarlane would keep a big order like that” (p.379). However, during the superflu disease, which is a simulation of Project Blue, many customers and users died, and then he also died “on the bags of heroin” (p.380).

According to Nick, who was first introduced as a deaf man and being robbed, the world is no longer based on the will of the powerful “but according to the superflu” (p.698). If we compare what happened to superflu, which was the simulation of Project Blue, it was like a bomb placed in a children’s toys box. A massive explosion occurred inside. The toys would automatically burn from one to another. The toys would break and would be difficult to repair. It took a long time to repair because he had to wait and find out the extent of the damage. Likewise, Project Blue, the new world, should have started when the disease was gone.















had adopted the name with an almost religious zeal, as if it was talismanic. (p.658)

The quote shows the hyperreality when it is broadcasted that there will be a zone where the place is free from superflu to start a new life. The media also has an essential role in broadcasting about this zone. So, the people responding to the broadcast were excited to go to that place and survived the superflu epidemic. Lucy, one of the characters in the novel, heard the news but did not have an apparent reference to this place, but she likes and is interested in registering it as if it sounds like this place exists to live a new life for her.

Many people outside the zone asked and wanted to hear the opinion of the Free Zone committee whether the place was good enough and safe from superflu. Many people know the zone “by virtue of a single poster turned out on a hand-crank mimeograph machine, the Free Zone had been transformed from a loose group of refugees into potential voters” (p.714). They love the zone. The zone made them feel safe and free from superflu. The condition reflects the form of hyperreality because when a superflu epidemic attacks, the Free Zone becomes something beyond their minds.

Harold, the only person who seemed all right in the previous city when superflu attacks, realized that the Free Zone was a different place, “This small-town society was like no in American pre-plague society.” (p.712). There is no longer any limit for the men and women who live there. There was no wedding ceremony as usual. They lived together according to their desires. All of them lived harmoniously in a small community in the zone. Nothing was set and regulated. Therefore, there was no fighting there. They were no longer questions





The concept of hyperreality was also built through the image of Mother Abigail, whom they believed was a holy prophet in the Free Zone. The people there “recognize that the Free Zone sees Mother Abigail as a theocratic symbol” (p.763). One afternoon, news of the disappearance of Mother Abigail hit the Free Zone community. However, she was considered to be like Jesus, who went out for lunch for several years. His teachings would always be there to follow. She was also considered and believed to be like Moses, who could destroy the golden calf so that the Israelites stopped worshipping it. The committee of Free Zone believed that one day she would return, “That is the way the Free Zone feels about Mother Abigail.” (p.755).

In Free Zone, the image of a baby was also built that, in the future, they would see the baby who has gone through an equally painful struggle, “the product of two immune parents” (p.1197). Some of the other babies might have died, and this baby was the only baby in the world. The baby became a part of the Free Zone and the next generation. The baby was also an added consolation for the societies in Free Zone. Everyone was willing to sacrifice for the baby. Therefore, the image of the baby that the societies hope in Free Zone portrayed hyperreality until many people interested in coming there.

Interested people came to the Free Zone as well to see Abigail’s mother in this place. With her holiness believed by some of the characters through the dreams they experienced, she was also believed to be the new leader for their civilization. Mother Abigail in the story acted as a kind leader, “Her understanding of him was surprisingly sophisticated. The people who had been



as a safe place from the superflu but also in the form of free will that was begun by the dream.

Stu Redman was the first person who experienced the dream, which later became the concept of free will. That night, he slept more soundly than usual. Stu had often dreamed the night before and, “he had never had a dream like this” (p.128). At the beginning of his dream, he was on a wonderful country road. The sun shone brightly, and all around it was full of greenery. He heard a melodious singing voice accompanied by good acoustic guitar music, so he was delightful to hear. The song reminded him of his childhood and “this is the place” (p.128) where he had to go.

Suddenly the music stopped, and then “there was something terrible” (p.129) in his dream. Black clouds covered the sun that was shining at that moment. He saw the darkness that began to emerge from the plant. The darkness was more terrible than a plague, fire, flood, earthquake, or other natural disasters. The darkness continued to watch over him. Then he saw two glowing red eyes far behind the shadows of the dark. The eyes were without a clear face. He was screaming, “Then the dream was fading, and he awoke with feelings of disquiet, dislocation, and relief” (p.129).

Nick also had the same dream, which had later become the concept of free will. “He dreamed oddly,” (p.167), but upon awakening in his dream, he could only remember to be walking through an endless line of greenery, and he was looking for something terrifying that seemed to be behind him. The next night he tried to sleep again at that time, “and the dream that came was the one he had had







believed in her dream. She also described the characteristics of evils at that time and how to deal with them.

Mother Abigail lived in a humble home in Nebraska. He was the daughter of a farmer. She lived peacefully there but often experienced a sense of loss, the loss of her husband. She had been married several times, but all of her husbands had died. “The woman on the bed was a skeleton covered with thinly stretched, ash-gray skin. She seemed without sex. Most of her hair was gone; her breasts were gone; her mouth hung unhinged and her breath rasped through it harshly” (p.945). At Boulder Free Zone, she taught Stu and the others how to become a community. Her teachings were able to make them be a community.

As if having free will, Mother Abigail guided Stu and others on a journey and the right path. “‘You are to go west,’ Mother Abigail whispered. ‘You are to take no food, no water. You are to go this very day, and in the clothes you stand up in. You are to go on foot.’” (p.965). Stu Redman led the journey to Las Vegas to fight the darkness. For him, it was not only a physical and spiritual journey to fight crime, but he also had needed to prove himself worthy with Frannie to live together. This choice had become evidence of his free will because it was not following what was directed to him. Mother Abigail said, “‘God didn’t bring you folks together to make a committee or a community,’ she said. ‘He brought you here only to send you further, on a quest. He means for you to try and destroy this Dark Prince, this Man of Far Leagues’” (p.963).

The free will of good was also shown by Glen Bateman, who explained the dark man to Frannie as “the last magician of rational thought, gathering the tools

of technology against us” (p.776). The dark man could even be something much darker than they thought. According to Glen, sociologists, psychologists, and even theologians would not be able to end this darkness unless “white magic will do that” (p.776). The white magician was Mother Abigail, who was worried and alone in someplace over there.

If Mother Abigail represented good, then Randall Flagg represented evil. Flagg, “the dark man,” encouraged everyone to believe in him and led a broken life. His life was full of evil. He fought everyone by threatening and even persuading him. For him, power over others was the most crucial value in his life. “There was evil, and it probably came from original sin, but it was in all of us and getting it out was as impossible as getting an egg out of its shell without cracking it” (p.539). He lived in Las Vegas, where the city was more about the life of a military regime than a community that has freedom in life. The life over there was colored by darkness in the form of distrust of each other.

The concept of free will for evil was shown by Lloyd, who represented the nature of disobedience. Before the superflu epidemic, he became Poke’s right-hand man who ended up dead in prison. Randal Flagg rescued him from prison after knowing that he was also immune to the superflu. He was now entirely under Flagg’s control. Everything Lloyd did was of his own free will, including being the right-hand man of Flagg’s crimes. Lloyd always did what Flagg ordered to him, and finally, he tried to break free by saying to Flagg, “I didn’t do it for you” (p.1128).















What is right and what is wrong becomes a pseudo thing. Automatically people become confused, Project Blue or superflu.

From the description of simulacra and simulation above, Free Zone and free will appear as hyperreality in this research. Free Zone is described as an area that is believed to be safe and free from superflu, the simulation of Project Blue. Many people who are still left are curious and wonder about the place beyond their minds. They are Stu, Frannie, Harold, Flagg, Abigail, Glen, Llyod, Nadine, Lawry, Lucy, and Traskan Man. The area is said to be very different from other cities at the time of the superflu epidemic. So, many people are interested in coming to Free Zone.

In addition to the Free Zone as a form of hyperreality, free will also reflects a state of hyperreality in the novel. Free will begins with a beautiful dream that turns into a nightmare in an instant. Their beautiful dreams are about serenity in life, while their nightmares are about the darkness that haunts their lives. The dream is experienced by Stu Redman, Nick, Frannie, and Harold. They are automatically still confused with interpreting the meaning of their dreams when such a situation, a superflu epidemic.

Then from that dream which is the beginning of a sign of free will, they have the right to choose whatever they want in their lives. The people in the novel who are still alive and immune from the superflu disease are free to will. The concept of community life like that became something that was beyond their minds at that time. They follow two new flows, the good of Mother Abigail and the dark or evil of Randall Flagg, which they believe to be the right thing to live

according to their version. They should have been under the auspices and responsibility of the government, but they already assumed the government did not exist and started a new life.

Finally, free will, as a form of hyperreality is also described in the free will of sexuality. The sexuality of characters depends on the element of their desire to do it. Julie Lawry wants to do it because of her personality, which always wants to do it. Larry also wants to do it because his lust is more vital than the love that he has. Frannie, at the beginning of the story, is pregnant out of wedlock. However, she still wants to do it with other people. Lastly, Nadine allowed everyone to do it to her, including the dark man. So, they are free to practice any form of sexuality without any restrictions.

Based on the conclusions above, the researcher would like to provide some suggestions for further research. Further research development can examine this novel, Stephen King's *The Stand*, as the same object with different theories and perspectives. Further researchers can also develop it by examining hyperreality portrayed in different novels as the object of study.



