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# THE EPIPHANY OF FACES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC AS REFLECTED IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH*

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**Abstract**
Edgar Allan Poe's The Masque of The Red Death is a famous story of a plague in which the infected ones died with blood coming out from pores. Prince Prospero as ruler of that area ignores it but then was killed by a figure with a face full of blood covered in a mask. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the infected ones are quite seen as terror and disgust. People stay away from them as if they are dirty and sinful. It is similar to how Red Masque and Red Death are indicated in Poe's story. However, Emmanuel Levinas argues that the epiphany of the face invites people to be ethical to others. Then, how is the epiphany of the face reflected in Edgar Allan Poe's The Masque of The Red Death? By using the qualitative method, written data, concepts, and theories are asserted to answer that question. Comparing Levinas' explanation, Poe's story, and today's pandemic situation could bring in better insight into how the infected ones should be treated better. They must not be excluded, but they need our ethical compassion in answering their presence to us.

Keywords: COVID-19, Edgar Allan Poe, Emmanuel Levinas, epiphany of face, The Masque of The Red Death

## Introduction

The Masque of The Red Death is a famous story written by Edgar Allan Poe. This short writing reflects how a country is depopulated by a plague. It is told that The Red Death is such pestilence in which the infected ones are suffered from horrible pain as blood is coming all way out from the pores. It could be seen that the red color is derived from the color of blood itself (Zhang, Pei, & Sun, 2017). Meanwhile, Prince Prospero as the ruler in that country ignores the plague. Instead of helping people, he locks himself and his friends altogether with many performers to entertain them in a castellated abbey with a magnificent cellar. The cellar is divided into an enormous hall and several rooms with different colors (Cheishvili, 2015, p. 712). After enjoying the party for months, at a midnight, a mysterious shadow comes and kills all people including Prince Prospero. The shadow is spoken as The Red Masque.

The existence of plague in Poe's story could be reflected in today's COVID-19 pandemic situation. Those who are infected by this virus seem to be excluded from society. The increasing COVID-19 cases make them be treated specially and isolated in a certain place. Moreover, the infected ones are differentiated from normal people. They are labelled as suspects which need specific treatments and observations



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(Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020). They are indicated as special among society but then result in the action of total exclusion. Other persons then think that these people should be excluded from society so that it does not worsen the outbreak.

It seems quite normal for people to exclude those who are sick from society. History also speaks how those who bear diseases are marginalized (Sianturi, 2020, p. 130). It has a purpose of justification to both limit the virus and restrict the movement of people. However, it is not ethical at all. Emmanuel Levinas thinks otherwise. He shows how the epiphany of the face invites people to be ethical to others. When someone sees others, he or she is invited to be responsible to others (Doren, 2020, pp. 244-245). It is like asymmetrical ethical relations. Others are such opportunities for self to accentuate good deeds. By doing good deeds, responsibility is reflected well too. It is totally different from the exclusion zone to the infected of COVID-19 cases. So, the question is how is the epiphany of the face reflected in Edgar Allan Poe's The Masque of The Red Death? Comparing Levinas' explanation, Poe's story, and today's pandemic situation could bring in better insight into how the infected ones should be treated better. They must not be totally excluded, but they need our ethical compassions in answering their presence to us.

## Method

By using the qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Both online and offline scripts are used to explain the connection between Levinas' explanation, Poe's story, and today's pandemic situation. Online writings and offline scripts are derived from books and journals as keys to understanding the shown matters. The steps of data analysis include attaining sources, reading the sources carefully, comparing them with other related issues, quoting them into this paper, and writing them down in the references lists.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Ignorance of Death and Plague in The Masque of The Red Death*

The story by Poe indeed reflects such mystery and horror to the readers. It is such Poe's specific theme that he builds up upon his writings (Ramadhanti, Muhaimi, & Ahmadi, 2019). The story may somehow relate to Poe's own experience of losing families especially because of tuberculosis disease and his reflection on the massive Black Death plague in years of the 1300s in Europe. Originally written and published as The Masque of The Red Death: A Fantasy in 1842, this story takes place only in a castellated abbey (Almahameed, et. al., 2018). The conditions, the actors, and the backgrounds mostly color the story furthermore. In a general, this short story offers a fantastic vision of a human's failed attempt to escape death. The main focus is Prince Prospero who wants to step away from the dangerous plague but then the Red Death in the shape of Red Masque eventually comes to him. No madness could escape the passage time of death despite how ignorant people of the plague (Sova, 2007, pp. 110-111).

The plot in this story consists of several big parts; center, past, and future ones. With the theme of ignorance of death, Poe includes how death is always approaching no matter how rich people are (Almahameed, et. al., 2018). The center plot of this macabre story is the happiness, dauntless, and sagacious atmosphere in the castellated abbey. Prospero invites his closest friends, especially the rich ones, along with many performers to bring joy to the below ground. Masquerades are well performed within

the glorious party. This place is locked from the inside which indicates its difference from external conditions (Sianturi, 2020, pp. 130-131). No time for grieving or thinking of the outside world. Enjoying the current time is the main idea in that place. Magnificence is provided by Prospero from time to time to bring joy to himself and all of his acquaintances. Poe states that this condition goes on for about six months.

That center plot is not the only one but provided with both past and future ones. The past plot speaks about the Red Death. It is the plague that brings death to people; the ultimate truth of the inevitability of death (Kao, 2016, pp. 34-35 & Debnath, 2020, p. 731). Half of the area is depopulated. No one knows what or who may cause such horror. People just know that the victim suffers severe dizziness and pains before the reaper comes. Blood coming out from pores, not naturally, but mysteriously pushed out from the inside, leaving the infected ones with the scarlet of their own blood (Zhang, Pei, & Sun, 2017). It can be imagined how painful the death is seen from this plague situation. That circumstance is totally ignored by Prospero. By locking his abbey, he leaves the death of the people behind and comes to the magnificent joy forward. He does not only want to be safe, but also he wants to enjoy his life by stepping out from others' problems of death and plague. He consciously is ignorant and neglects the illness by pretending that he could easily control the uncontrollable nature (Sianturi, 2020, p. 137).

The future plot is about midnight in the abbey. A specter is seen among the guests; the Red Masque as the personification of death is present (Debnath, 2020, p. 732-733). The apparition is wearing masks which is different from those who perform joy inside. It is standing still and tall as brings in disgust and then horror. Arising murmurs among those people speak that it is the face of the Red Death that exists among the joy of masquerades. It is like a shadow that haunts the whole room. It comes to Prospero himself and leaves him in his death before he could attack the shadow with his dagger. The figure with a corpse-like mask then brings death to all of the people in the castellated abbey. The flame is gone as the black of death disseminates darkness and decay alongside (Manikandan, 2017, p. 447). No one could escape this Red Death even though the door is locked and Prospero ignores it. Death from the sin of pride is inevitable (Popescu, 2012, p. 4).

The past, center, and future plots above indicate that ignorance of death and plague will never solve the problems by themselves. It may bring joy temporarily but still time always moves forward. The ignorance is such denial of responsibility seen from Prospero and his acquaintances' deeds (Almahameed, et. al., 2018). Instead of doing something to the victims of the plague, he and all of those people neglect such reality that they are parts of society. Prospero chooses his own likings and leaves out all the rest. He thinks that his power and wealth could save him from death and responsibility to others (Manikandan, 2017, pp. 447-448). Actually, individuals are never subjective at all but related to inter-subjective sides too. At this point, selfish ego accompanied with hedonism is the face of ignorance of death and the plague. More than just leaving out others, these people would attain more joy by avoiding such willingness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others.

The ignorance is also portrayed by how Prospero and his friends see the victims, the infected ones, and the Red Masque as the ultimate. Acquiring masquerades and musicians to the hall has a purpose to contradict themselves from the victims outside. Colorful costumes, joyful music, and magnificent entertainments are contrary to infections in the city which are fulfilled with the scarlet color of blood (Zhang, Pei, &

Sun, 2017 & Kao, 2016, pp. 34-35). Joyful colors are total opposition of scarlet of blood and black of death. The madness of joy is the opposite of the madness of sorrow.

The infected ones are left alone in the city while its ruler enjoys himself in an abbey. No aid is given but the only struggle of people may help them from suffering death. Painful dizziness is coming to the infected ones yet no sympathy is given from above. People inside the locked place enjoying parties by being insensitive about current situations (Kao, 2016, p. 35). They think that death is not familiar to them or maybe unknown in their everyday life. Life must be glorified full of amusement to satisfy needs and wants. That ignorant life denies how death that is always being so close to human creatures (Phillips in Hayes, 2013, p. 124). No one will live forever since death is unescapable. Prospero and his friends wall themselves from death but still, their bodies are eventually the prey for the death. Instead of fulfilling life with grateful deeds, their goals are reaching the apex of happiness only at the current time. Ignoring the past and future time will merely aim for themselves that are limited and restricted naturally and socially.

The existence of Red Masque is the ultimate ignorance of people in the castellated abbey. The presence of it is the paradox of leisure. It is the paranoia of representation of the ability to evade time (Fisher, 2008, p. 85). Prospero thinks that he successfully escapes the plague and death too, but the Red Death comes in front of him in the face of Red Masque. The shadow with the mask arises buzz and murmur among people. They talked to each other about how come such a figure could come to the party. The masque is corpse-like that is out of current joy (Phillips in Hayes, 2013, p. 124 & Popescu, 2012, pp. 3-4). The scarlet color of blood could not be borne by the attitude of those people. They are confused about what they have seen since they are separated from death as part of their everyday life. Instead of asking the figure to reveal itself, they instantly judge the figure by accentuating such horror and disgust to the party (Sova, 2007, p. 111). Even Prospero himself asks guardians to capture him and taking out his dagger to the shadow despite the Red Masque has not done anything before. By arresting it, he thinks he could get rid of the sighting. It seems that he does not want anything that disturbs the joy. He does want to compromise with anything that interferes with glorious masquerades (Fisher, 2008, p. 27). The choice is only between joy and death.

The figure is so indefinite that no definition of joy may capture such existence. Those people are dead soon before they could understand the meanings behind the face of the Red Masque. As they neglect the responsibility to aid others' condition, they could not perceive the ultimate of otherness portrayed by Red Masque. They only focus to avoid and ignore the real situation and condition (Fisher, 2008, p. 50). Actually, they are afraid to respond to otherness reflected in the suffering of the victims of the plague. They fail to respond to the death of the others that results to they could not figure out their own deaths too. They try to escape but the way is never possible at all. They think that joy and happiness in the abbey are forever, but they forget that death may come to stop the party and even end their soul existences (Cheishvili, 2015, pp. 712-713).

### *Existence of Stigma in Today's COVID-19 Pandemic Conditions*

COVID-19 virus has resulted in such a pandemic today. Started from the beginning of 2020, this virus has spread and infected millions of people. Some of them face light symptoms while others must bear severe conditions. Some people also have

died because of this serious virus. At the beginning of the outbreak, the virus was undermined and stated only as common flu which will be recovered easily by taking good rest. Then, the virus is the key factor of the whole change in the world. The condition has become extremely dissimilar only in about a year (Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020).

It is pandemic that many limitations and restrictions are urgent to be realized until now. Limitation means prohibition from the inside; people should keep distance from another, stay away from the crowd, and/or wear a face mask any time. Everyone needs to limit himself and herself not to be much involved in society to keep good health conditions intact among people (Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020). Being aware of surrounding and paying attention to own self actions are the main keys in this limitation. Reminding others of the danger of this pandemic is another issue to be included too. On the other hand, restrictions are constrained from the outside; official governments tell people to do many things only from home; studying, working, and praying. Those indeed touch both private and public spheres of individuals and societies (Choirunnisa, 2020). Studying at schools and colleges is not allowed to prevent the wider spread of the virus. Working from home has become the ultimate solution to contain the virus isolated. Praying then has to be done online and inside the home to stop the incoming infections. Individuals and societies have to move from offline to online realms as well as to transform from direct into non-face-to-face encounters.

Moreover, the limitations and restrictions are prolonged until now. From macro (lockdowns and provincial restrictions) to micro (district and residential restrictions) ones, people are told to be always aware of the pandemic situation every time. More people could not go to work or even get better opportunities to fulfill everyday needs. Existing at home condition is always accompanied by fear of being infected by others (Choirunnisa, 2020). Staying alert must be enclosed from time to time while the news always informs about the increasing cases of infections and deaths every day. From how the virus outbreak started until its widespread to now, it seems that the virus has been such furthermost anxiety for individuals and societies (WHO, 2020:9-10).

The above condition of COVID-19 indicates that the pandemic is real. The reality also must be borne by those who suffer an infection of this virus (Choirunnisa, 2020). The existence of stigma is accompanied by stereotypes among people. The infected ones are more than just different from common people, they are told to be isolated from society (Gultom, 2020). People stay away from them as if they are dirty and sinful. In much online and television news, campaigns and promotions have been done to normalize and eliminate stigma among people in society (Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020). However, the reality in the grassroots, as reflected in everyday life, could be totally different. Abundant limitations and restrictions for both individuals and society also portray the worsened images of the stigma of exclusion in this pandemic era.

The stigma of the excluded really happens today. There are some aspects which could indicate why the stigma of COVID-19 sufferers exists. First, those who get infected bear more than just common diseases. They are said to be sick from the extraordinary virus (WHO, 2020 & Dai, 2020). No one really knows the main cause of the virus, but for sure it results in such discrimination (Gultom, 2020). Preventive actions in social distancing, washing hands, and wearing face masks are done. More than those, preemptive action by locking out the infected ones is realized too. Some

infected people sense severe respiratory symptoms while many others do not have symptoms at all (Anindya & Tomhisa in Santoso & Santosa, 2020, p. 306). They only know that they get infected from medical swab tests. It seems that the disease is so hidden that once it is known, then the infected must stay away from others. Even those who have survived the virus could be infected again. It could be a never-ending story of infection that could worsen anytime (Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020). Exclusion is the result of today's uncommon condition.

Second, the infected must be excluded because they are prone to infect others too. More than just the existence of the virus in their bodies, the stigma applies to a strong indication that it may spread to their surroundings. The infected ones could be the center of the wider outbreak if they do not be kept out in certain places (Anindya dan Tomhisa in Santoso & Santosa, 2020, p. 306). It is the fear of being infected that reflects this stigma. This fear could be exaggerated furthermore if those who are infected never got medically tested. People could blame them for being the main determinant in spreading out the virus, even though the infected ones may do it accidentally (Dai, 2020). This fear is planted unconsciously that exclusion could become such best defense mechanism for this angst. Rather than facing the virus bravely, people use exclusion as a tool of denial to deal with the anxiety of being infected.

Third, it has become common for people who have been infected to be quarantined for a certain time in a certain place. They have to stay about two weeks at home or other medical facilities (Chandrawati in Santoso & Santosa, 2020, p. 360). Quarantine as the symbol of stigma is preferred to be normalized today. The infected ones have to be quarantined as the symbol of prohibition from entering society (WHO, 2020 & Dai, 2020). If someone is not sure about being infected or not, he or she has to be quarantined. The quarantine has to be hygienic and regularly disinfected to prevent a wider outbreak. Those who are quarantined even must use specific eating utensils to specify their own everyday needs. Those quarantine concepts shape people's minds about the infected ones. The condition of quarantine has become such an ordinary concept now (Chandrawati in Santoso and Santosa, 2020, pp. 359-360). It has become such ultimate solution for every question today. Then, the stigma is considered normal today in this pandemic situation. It is the monolithic perspective of the infected ones; they are equal to the quarantine itself.

Fourth, people are pushed to be healthy and free from the virus. Rapid test, Antigen test, PCR test, Genose test, are such tools for people to prove themselves in being free from the virus. These abundant amounts of tests are necessary from the medical side, but they may evoke normalization of stigma in cultural aspects (PH, Setiawati, & Sariti, 2020). The pursuit of being healthy has shifted into the pursuit of being fit. Being healthy is not a natural condition but results from being tested. Society is dictated to be healthy anywhere and anytime. Those who are medically proven as positive must be quarantined which will automatically become objects of the stigma (Anindya & Tomhisa in Santoso & Santosa, 2020, pp. 306-307). At this point, being healthy is sharply differentiated from being infected with the virus. The difference is not about 'the sick' and 'the healthy' which will only come to the usual duality of two contradictory things. It is actually about 'the healthy ones' and 'the unhealthy ones' which favors a side and undermines another side (PH, Setiawati, & Sariti, 2020). The other side as the unhealthy is a reflection of otherness. It is not seen as it is, but its existence is considered only from self as the healthy.

From those four aspects above, the stigma moves within the concept of dualism between the healthy ones and the unhealthy ones (the infected ones). The infected ones are not only different from the healthy ones as stated in duality, but the former also has to nod to the strict powerful decree of the latter. The stigma is an exaggeration of differentiation between self and others. Stigma is the representation of others who get infected (WHO, 2020). This is so negative that sharpens the difference between 'us' and 'them'. It is similar to stereotypes in cultural studies where some people are excluded from the 'normal' order of things. Representation of the infected has been such a monolithic perspective for people to see them. People are only seen from either have negative or positive proof of being infected with the virus (WHO, 2020). A condition that is partial in reality then has become such a universal idea to be labelled to sufferers of this existing virus.

The stigma reflects how the infected ones are seen not as 'what they really are' but as 'the sick'. Other identities of them are neglected and being measured with the ultimate healthy condition today. Problems of representations of human beings should also be mentioned here (Wolff, 2011, p. 268). Representation could always worsen conditions rather than clarify the situation. People are only represented by such fixed symbols, that is being infected or not. The 'positive' has brought in negative impact, as well as in reverse. Today's meanings in pandemic situations endow medical conditions to be ultimate perspectives. The condition has become black and white today. It has been politics of representation that identity of being sick from the virus does not reflect the essential state of beings but results of cultural binary oppositions (Wolff, 2011, pp. 268-269). It eventually argues power-related situation in this stigma. The infected ones must bow to the rules of quarantine since they are not healthy or normal at all. They have to follow the condition of being subordinates from the dominant ones. They have to live under the prominent abnormal label of being excluded from society.

### *Levinas' Ethical Perspectives on Otherness*

Emmanuel Levinas is a philosopher who speaks about how human is actually in close ethical relations with others. Someone could not stand alone but his or her existence depends on the existence of others (Soebagia, 2020, pp. 141-142). Levinas states an ethical standpoint beyond inter-subjectivity. He opposes general objectification and relative subjectification, which will undermine otherness as a mere tool to fulfill the needs of self. By rejecting the issues of self, he tells us about how the first philosophy is not ontology or metaphysics, but ethics (Jauhari, 2016, pp. 20-21). Ethics in this case means knowing and even taking care of others. Every single kind of deed should be based on ethical values first before finding its essence in meanings. Ethics must be stated in concrete actions, not just merely concepts or even tensions among abundant poles of paradigms. At this point, ethics is the existence of human creatures; the essence of being is empty without the existence of becoming. The ethic of human deeds is such a continuous process anytime someone meets others.

Another interesting Levinas' point of view is that relations among human beings are not symmetric but asymmetric ones (Elfi, 2018, pp. 29-30). Someone responds to another not because he or she is equal to him or her. Otherness is far situated above self. Otherness invites self to be responsible to them. It is not symmetric that requires such reciprocal deeds which will result in such mutual inter-subjectivity (Sobo, 2018, p. 69). It is a one-way deed beyond any human freedom of choice. The presence of

others is such an obligation for self to be responsible to them. In other words, we are not ethically pushed to help others, but others invite us to help them. It is 'others' and not 'self' who is greatly emphasized by Levinas' thought of ethics. This great shift has changed the whole perspective of ethics. Imperative categories of self-centered ethics by Kant have been widened by Levinas into others-centered ones.

For Levinas, the history of Western philosophy put too much focus on ego. The ego is the reflection of self which has to be fulfilled so that human beings could find their wholeness of determinations. The ego which is usually stated to be the center of both essence and existence then tends to reach totality; putting self in the majestic throne of the world (Susanta, Yordaniputra, & Christian, 2020, p. 171). The total condition always reduces otherness to be included in the sameness of self. This kind of generalization then never captures others as their own matters, but their existence always depends on the whole of the self. This egologic understanding tends to omit crucial characteristics of otherness by reducing them into total sameness in the being of self (Jauhari, 2016, pp. 19-20). Egocentric perspective has reduced the condition of others into such homogeneity of the wholeness of the self.

That egologic perspective is actually rejected by Levinas (Sobo, 2018, p. 56). For him, reciprocal ethics never really happens. Equal understanding shall never come to the surface. Ultimate good deeds will always be only dreams. All of those are because of an egocentric idea which focuses on self rather than on others. Self must not be the main center since ego will come to power and control others. The real main center is not self or *cogito* or ego, but others with their own character of otherness. Self could never capture the wholeness of otherness. While the self is pushed to fulfill itself into oneness, others then are a spectrum of diversities. The totality of self is out of sense since otherness is infinite (Susanta, Yordaniputra, & Christian, 2020, pp. 169-170). Too many names are eventually too few to define each aspect of otherness. Thousands of hands and heads of ego will always be countable and predictable, but otherness remains intangible and unlimited as its condition belongs to anything beyond anything else.

Infinity is such an utmost contradiction of totality. Levinas states that it is the face of the others that break down the totality of ego (Fawaid, 2013, pp. 133-134). No matter how ego could fulfill itself, he or she has to be responsible to others. That means the ego has to answer the invitation of being responsible to others. The name of ego is the only issue of a kind of otherness. That compulsion lies in the presence of otherness or epiphany of the face or *l' epiphanie du visage* in Levinas' statement (Sobo, 2018, p. 56). The face is beyond any rational or empirical ideas. It is another and other people as the others which remain meaningful in their own otherness. The face is bare as its own understandings. It does not matter whether the face is familiarly known or not since its presence is beyond our knowledge. We could only recognize otherness because of such invitation to be responded to thereafter. The face is the epiphany of unconditional relationship that invites self as being-in in the asymmetric level of being-for others (Wolff, 2011, pp. 268-269 & Elfi, 2018, pp. 29-30). The relationship is a connection of process from a condition of being the same towards the situation of becoming-the-heterogeneity.

Levinas' ethic is about responsibility through and for others (Doren, 2020, pp. 244-245). The epiphany of the face is absolute and we could do nothing besides respond to it. Therefore, any response from the self is beyond its own initiative, it is merely an intention to otherness (Susanta, Yordaniputra, & Christian, 2020, pp. 171-

172). The presence of face comes before the self's freedom of choice. The choices of not responding are impossible. It is not such command to do, so that self could not evade that responsibility. It does not ask what may come in return. It is compulsion and obligation as an ethical impulse that is infinite once the face is present. Responsibility to others is the main attribute of any choice taken (Fawaid, 2013, p. 133). Since that responsibility is beyond knowledge, the self is never sufficient to fulfill itself. It will only relate to otherness, or in other words, self only exists for the sake of others. Existentially, the subject is not for him or herself or *en-soi*, but the subject is for the other or *l' un pour-l' autre. Cogito Ergo Sum* must be replaced with *Respondeo Ergo Sum* (Sobo, 2018, p. 66 & Elfi, 2018, pp. 26-27). Denying self means denying own existence. Then denying others means denying self as well.

***Epiphany of The Face of COVID-19 in The Masque of The Red Death***

The resemblance between The Masque of The Red Death and COVID-19 relates to how the infected ones as a reflection of otherness are depicted. The pandemic followed by sorrow and death is the other. It remains uncommon for self since it involves life, not pain and death. Those who suffer Red Death and COVID-19 are differentiated from the common people. They are labelled as clinical different things (Vora & Ramanan, 2002, p. 1521). Moreover, these people live under the dualism of being subordinate to the dominant ones.

In Poe's story, Prince Prospero and his friends leave alone other people who suffer the plague. Those rich people think that they are different from others. They could choose their life by enjoying amusements in the inside hall for months. On the other side, the others must suffer the painful sorrow of death (Sova, 2007, pp. 112-113). The others must bear ideas of being different or even stated in disgust and terror. Those sick people are horror whom people should avoid. No one helps sick people. Those who could help yet neglect and leave them alone. The rich never cares about the pain and sorrow that others feel.

COVID-19 pandemic finds both similarities and differences from Poe's writing. The main similarity is the plague which has depopulated the countries, and even the world. Just like the Red Death has an unknown case (Vora & Ramanan, 2002, pp. 1521-1522), so does COVID-19. Prevention and preemptive actions are done to stop the wider outbreak. Prince Prospero prevents the victims to invade the locked hall while the infected ones of COVID-19 are being preemptively quarantined. The crucial difference is that countries and many people do not neglect the patients. They are helped in quarantined conditions with proper medical facilities (WHO, 2020). Some emergency hospitals are built to contain the infected ones in a certain place so that they are safe as well as the others too. It is true that the infected ones are excluded, but not neglected. Official governments take care of the people as well as common people too. The Red Death is simply ended by death while vaccines are widely experimented with to heal COVID-19 sufferers.

Hence, at some points, the stigma of the infected ones still exists. The main reason behind that stigma is cultural perspectives of the virus and pandemic situations. Those who have been infected must stay away and even be quarantined (WHO, 2020). No one could do anything since this virus is harmful that may be spread without any certain symptom. The infected ones are otherness who must stay under the view of the healthy ones or the self. Their everyday lives are maintained by the healthy ones in order to heal the patients, contain the virus, and restrict the wider spread of the plague

(WHO, 2020). There is no other way besides accepting this stigma since the condition is still blurred that no one really knows the panacea for the virus. This unclear condition becomes such a source for power-related actions. Dualism then becomes a temporary solution that excludes the infected ones in certain places out of society. The sick people must obey this decree to ensure the safety of their surroundings (WHO, 2020).

The remaining stigma consists of several aspects that should be explored furthermore. As the remaining stigma is related to the reduced condition of otherness by the main power of self, the others only exist by the dictation of the self. In the case of Poe's story, Prince Prospero and his acquaintances enjoy the party so much because they have succeeded in building such a border between them and the sick ones. The border is the stigma between the rich and the sick ones. The rich have more rights of being prerogatives to do anything (Phillips in Hayes, 2013, p. 124). They even think that they can escape and cheat death. They state themselves differently as well as higher than common people, especially the victims. They think that they have reached such totality as self; they could define themselves by their own meanings (Sianturi, 2020, p. 135). But they never reach that point since it is the only illusion of dualism.

At this issue, the self is the healthy ones and the others are the infected ones. The self is crucially differentiated from the others. Stigma is such result of binary opposition. It does not bring in such a neutral condition, but it is always power-related. There must be a side in a higher state and the other is a lower one. Both in Poe's story and COVID-19 condition, binary opposition plays a big role in determining which one is suitable for society (Sianturi, 2020, pp. 135-136). It is such a stigma too since society must be filled with healthy people; perfect ones who together embrace the state of healthy beings. The unhealthy ones then are considered to be necessary taken out from society afterwards (Agustang, Mutiara, & Asrifan, 2020).

Moreover, another problem of stigma arises as otherness is not kind of mutuality in reciprocal levels. Implicitly stated in The Masque of The Red Death, saying that others are in lower levels is in line with how they could not return the goodness that someone gives (Sova, 2007, pp. 110-111). Therefore, it might be useless to take care of them, so neglecting and ignoring them become such common senses. Why someone helps others from the self's point of view is because it is such a realization of the totality of the self. Self is sitting on the throne in the state of own total determinations and dominations as well. In this stigma, people think that they have reached such totality while others are useless as parts to realize their selves (Elfi, 2018, pp. 29-30). Others remain meaningless so that they should be left alone. Others will never be mutual of self as they stay in lower level.

Besides term of mutuality, stigma also involves how the self reduces the others into the perspective of sameness. Since the others are not the same as the self, they remain out of the common circle (Elfi, 2018, pp. 29-30). Otherness is completely other from self; the differences are inevitable as seen in stigma. At this point, otherness is only considered to exist as its existence stays under the dictation of self. How self sees others are undermining. Otherness does not remain in its own form but any idea is never the same with the totality of the self. In Poe's writing, those who are not close to Prince Prospero are left alone suffering from death (Popescu, 2012, pp. 3-4). Self is seen having party inside while the others outside must face the horrifying blood coming out of pores. In today's COVID-19 condition, the infected ones are objects of the healthy ones' eyes. The sick are measured from the values of the healthy (Abudi,

Mokodompis, & Magulili, 2020). Being total is being healthy in this aspect while being others is being unwell because of the virus.

However, the epiphany of the face opposes all those propositions of self. Self is not stated in totality yet it could not determine all of his or her surroundings (Fawaid, 2013, pp. 134-135). If self is totality then it needs an infinite place to contain all of the things, but it does not have that enormous capacity. Self is limited yet becomes so arrogant that it must be able to understand all things. In reverse, it is an otherness that is stated in infinity who stays in the spectrum of differences. Otherness's diversities are unlimited, it could never be captured by the mere totality of self (Soebagia, 2020, pp. 150-151). Self is actually part of otherness in which someone must live with others to fulfill the determination of self. Self could only move because of terms and conditions of otherness. Self could never fulfill itself by acquiring otherness, in fact, otherness is how self may accentuate itself. The main center is no more totality of self as one. It has been plural in the sense that otherness remains in differences of many (Eeden, 2019, pp. 2-3).

The stigma of others could be eradicated by shifting the main focus from self into others. The source of action is not the goodwill of own self but abundant opportunities for the goodness of others (Fangidae, 2020, pp. 162-163). By seeing other's faces, the self could have a better chance to do the best for other people. The idea shifts from how self indicates "it is my freedom of will to do good deeds to others" into "others are to whom I have to give myself in". Self is still important but only seen from opportunities given by otherness (Fawaid, 2013, pp. 136-137). Yet self could not claim that his or her ethical deeds come from the source of nice willingness. Self does good deeds but its possessions are impossible. All good deeds are sourced and given to the others which will fulfill goodness for self too.

Changing focal points from self to others brings consequences in undermining self and praising otherness more. This is what Levinas truly emphasizes on ethics. Otherness invites self to be responsible to them. It is never self's fulfillment ego that works, but infinite spectrums of otherness that give chances. Otherness is not a tool for self, yet the self is not either in reverse (Simon, 2018, pp. 143-144). Objectification will only eradicate and never appreciate both of them. Subjectification will only acquire self in totality by stating otherness at a lower level. Both aspects are important but Levinas himself says that otherness remains at a higher level far beyond self (Eeden, 2019, pp. 5-6). Self could do abundant great deeds to others because the others invite him or her. This invitation always exists once the self sees others' faces instantly. Epiphany of the face is not limited to only in specific time like in plague or pandemic, but also anytime other's face shows up to self. Self must respond to otherness in good as well as concrete actions as it is such responsibility towards the otherness (Simon, 2018, pp. 143-144).

Comparing Levinas' explanation, Poe's story, and today's pandemic situation could bring in better insight into how the infected ones should be treated better. They must not be excluded, but they need our ethical compassion in answering their presence to us (Susanta, Yordaniputra, & Christian, 2020, pp. 172-173). That reflection indicates that any help should always be given to the victims and the infected ones. The virus has unable them to do many things so that it is always our responsibility to do what we could for them (Abudi, Mokodompis, & Magulili, 2020). Otherness's inability is such invitation from the others to be responded by self. No matter how foreign or strange the virus is, taking care of others is a must as the actualization of

self-being an infinite spectrum of otherness. At this certain issue, 'being in self' has been shifted to 'being otherwise'; from limited self to infinite otherness (Eeden, 2019, p. 4).

Instead of having such mutuality in reciprocal action, being responsible to the others is about understanding other's condition as if we feel it (Simon, 2018, pp. 146-147). It is like putting ourselves in others' shoes. It does not mean that we become others as it is impossible to happen. It means trying to understand things from others' perspectives (Abudi, Mokodompis, & Magulili, 2020). If they feel pain, we know how to help them. If they lost a member of their family because of the pandemic situation, we may feel sorry for them too. If they lost their jobs, we may support them with daily goods. More than just words, helping others in many things could help them to survive (Soebagia, 2020, pp. 152-153). Quarantine conditions must never restrict our help to them. For instance, giving nutritious foods could be given by paying attention to health protocols. Donating blood to those who need it could help others to live. Religious support and sharing could still be embraced by having online meetings.

In simple words, the infected ones are not different from the healthy ones. They are just in unwell condition and it must not omit our humanity and theirs too. So, stigma could be eradicated time by time by minimizing distrust and maximizing assistance. We could not just stay inside and waiting while other people suffer like what Prince Prospero and his acquaintances do. It is our responsibility to help others who need helps. The help reflects more than mutuality, but an indication of togetherness as part of society. It does not pain that matters, but the response to the other's pain that should be paid for attention (Fangidae, 2020, pp. 162-163). Disease, virus, and ultimately today's pandemic situations must not stop flowing of good ethical deeds to others. Any disease must be responded with more various help so that invitation from others really well answered. Neglect and ignorance are part of self that believes him or herself as a totality. That action is just the selfishness of the ego and not the reflection of the real self. The real reflection of self is that it is part of an infinite spectrum of otherness (Doren, 2020, pp. 244-245). Response and total participation are how the self nicely responds to the condition of otherness shown in the epiphany of the face of the others. By doing that, the humanity of humans is fulfilled and the humane condition of otherness is preserved better (Soebagia, 2020, pp. 152-153).

## Conclusion

Poe's story shows how the victims of the plague are left alone by its ruler. COVID-19 pandemic situation indicates how such stigma of the infected ones is still prolonged until now. Those two conditions are a reflection of how self neglects and ignore the presence of otherness. Otherness is only seen as a tool for self that could be abandoned anytime. In reverse, Levinas thinks that the presence of otherness is actually such an invitation for self to be responsible to others. Self is not the main center in the totality of its determination. Self is only part of an infinite spectrum of otherness. Self will never fulfill itself if it never responds to the invitation of otherness. This Levinas' perspective may bring better understanding in treating the victims and the infected ones better. Self must never ignore and neglect the presence of otherness as seen in The Masque of The Red Death and today's pandemic situation. The higher the problems are, the invitations to be responsible to the others are wide open. Therefore, opportunities to actualize self in the presence of otherness is getting vaster. Epiphany of the face of the others will eliminate the totality of self and will embrace the infinite

spectrum of otherness. The epiphany would also increase the humanity of both self and others.

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