

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

People seem to always be attracted to the stories of the unknown, namely to everything that is connected to the world of supernaturalism. Ghosts, ghouls, demons, angels or even werewolves have very often haunted the pages of many sensational novels or short stories. It appears that these kinds of stories find their existence on the thin line between human's fear and fascination. It induces fear because people are unconsciously and continuously on the quest for the rational explanation about life and, subsequently, life beyond death. This, combined with the fact that most people believe in the existence of beings beyond their sensory perception, creates the persistent awe and curiosity within their mind.

According to E. F. Bleiler in his introduction to *Supernatural Fiction Writers Volume I*, supernaturalism (especially in literature) deals with our preference to clutter our mind with things unknown to our rational thoughts, mostly having to do with things related to death, spirits, and life beyond death. He goes on mentioning that, while a materialist would say that death is final, a writer of supernatural fiction can suggest other possibilities: ghosts that walk; heavens or hells rejoice or sweat in; second chances via reincarnation; or flights of the soul through the universe (xiii).

The writer believes that deep inside everyone's consciousness (or sub consciousness) lies the longing for the answers of the nature of life and, perhaps, life beyond our mortal existence. The questions of the ultimate good versus evil, of God and devil, and of what are morally right or wrong have driven many creative minds to express their curiosity and inquiry in the forms of literary works. We have

seen poetry or novels or short stories that deal with these kinds of subject matter, the supernaturalism. It seems that a lot of people fascinate as well as terrify themselves in consequence, yet supernaturalism remains one of the most sought-after topic or genre or even style that clicks with most people's psyche. Nevertheless, whether this comes as being realized deliberately or not, the writer notices that nowadays there are numerous works of supernatural nature being blended with touches morality values, or sometimes it is the other way around, a morality tale infused with the spices of supernaturalism.

As it happens to be closely related, supernaturalism usually comes up with a hybrid of spiritualism to further the notion of good and evil. Therefore, the discussion will also touch on spiritual overtones that follow the supernatural theme of the story. The manifestation of spiritual representation might provide a stronger impression of the supernatural overtones.

It is this trend that encourages the writer to examine *The Green Mile* within the viewpoint of modern readings. Despite the fact that the story is set in the past, it was written just recently (1996), therefore it is appropriate for the writer to make the analysis sets its footings on the modern perspective.

American author Stephen King has long been known for his stories on modern horror and suspense thriller aimed towards the more broadly segmented audience of popular culture. A prominent figure in the twentieth century American literary community, King's appeal touches on the darker psyche of people's imagination. Stephen King began his career through the highly popular novel *Carrie* in 1973 and continued his fledgling years in authorship with such successful horror novels as *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Christine*, *Cujo*, *Pet Sematary*, and *Misery*, as well as several others. *The Green Mile*, which embodies the values of morality and

supernaturalism in one package, represents King's attempt on steering his literary course into a new territory. No longer relying on gore and fantastical creatures from beyond the grave, *The Green Mile* exploits King's different and gentler side, namely his notion of the good and evil in the physical world and within man itself.

The morality points that the writer highlights in the novel play a major role in creating the message that Stephen King has moved into a new territory of storytelling. It is a refreshing turning point in which King prioritizes the humanity over sensation, character depth rather than thrilling effects. It is always an interesting observation to inspect the transition made by a writer in an experimental sort of way. The moral values implied in the story itself are diverse, ranging from racism, guilt, social unjust, conscience, to self-responsibility.

Why is it necessary for the writer to dissect the story in order to find out its morality values? Because obviously the story cannot be just another pointless horror story designed by King only to evoke terror towards the reader. The historical context, conscience, and the spiritual contemplation are not there just for no reasons. Those elements are crafted with the purpose of delivering something. That 'something' is what the writer tries to observe in this thesis.

As it is written in a stream of consciousness mode, *The Green Mile* is particularly one-sided because the author positions himself in the place of the main character. This technique will ultimately lead the reader to sympathize with the narrator and befriend him. The effect achieved will be the intimacy and closeness between the reader and the narrator. It is the writer's attempt to try to explore the effects of the supernatural 'wrapping' that King spins around this morality tale.

Like other Stephen King's novels, *The Green Mile* abounds in supernatural atmosphere. Yet, it also differs in somewhat the supernatural elements are here not

as the backbone of the story but rather as a 'flavoring' to the morality contents that King emphasizes upon. The effects works like a sugar coating to the true essence of the story. As Bleiler notes, "Supernaturalism has been defined as a certain subject matter, and not the way in which this subject matter is used. Supernatural motifs and story patterns can be used in many different ways without altering their essential quality. A ghost may be simply a story mechanism designed to shout boo at the reader at the proper moment; such an approach is common enough in the lower-level horror stories" (xiv).

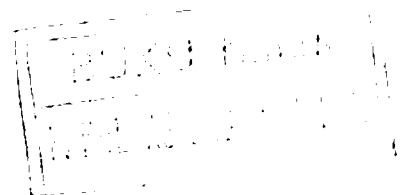
It is true that *The Green Mile* also displays some references to a historical setting, namely the Depression of the 1930's, yet the focus of attention that the writer will spotlight on is the certain consciousness imposed by the author on this work, namely the use of supernatural and spiritual elements such as miracles, healing powers, resurrection, and immortality within the moral value structuring on which the story relies. This is in conjunction with the hermeneutics stance endorsed by P. D. Juhl which states that we can only begin to interpret a text if we assume that it was created as a result of human intentionality. It is therefore absurd to interpret texts as if they were authorless (Newton 104).

There are three aspects that the writer will discuss in this thesis regarding the effects of supernaturalism on the morality values set in *The Green Mile*. The first will be the personification of good and virtue in the characterization of John Coffey, whose miraculous powers evoke the sense of otherworldly interference to the otherwise normal situation on *The Green Mile*. The second part will deal with the establishment of moral values subtly imposed into the story through the stream of consciousness narrative told in flashback by Paul Edgecombe. The third and the last aspect will examine the effects that the supernatural and spiritual overtones

bring to the moral values contained within the story as well as it is apparent that the mixture of the two genres results in the ambiguity of the classification of the story itself.

Consciousness is a major issue here; as stated by Edmund Husserl, the proper object of philosophical investigation is the contents of our consciousness and not objects of the world (Selden & Widowson 51). It is arguable that the reality set inside a work of literature is mostly constructed within the mind of the reader. An author may describe quite in detail what a character might look like or how a certain setting would appear in a sophisticated set of word, yet it is ultimately the reader who has to construct all these images or 'concretization' within his own consciousness through the words conceived by the author. That is why the writer tries to observe *The Green Mile* through the messages that the writer receives in relation to the contextual references related to the work in question and its author.

There is a certain point in why Stephen King writes a morality tale like *The Green Mile* in the vein of supernatural touches. Readers might ask whether King can write a single story without the burden of otherworldly things in mind. The author might perhaps feel that this is not too easy to be done. The answer to this might simply be the genre in which an author feels more familiar or at home with. It might even have something to do with style. It is believed that every author favors certain genre over the others. Just like every other form of art, be it painting, music, poetry, or prose, an author/artist is free to choose whatever style or genre in which he or she can express his or her creative thoughts into concrete forms. Just why Stephen King still feels the urge to embellish his story with elements of supernaturalism will be one of the things that the writer tries to uncover in this thesis.



B. Statement of the Problem

In light of the reasons stated in the background on the study, the writer has formulated the following questions as the problems that will be analyzed:

1. What supernatural and spiritual overtones can be inferred from the story through the personification of John Coffey?
2. What moral values can be inferred from the story according to the narrative told in flashback by Paul Edgecombe?
3. What effects do the supernatural and spiritual overtones bring to the moral values contained within the story?

C. Objective of the Study

Based on the problem statements stated above, there are three objectives that the writer intends to analyze in this thesis:

1. To find out what supernatural and spiritual overtones can be inferred from the story through the personification of John Coffey?
2. To discover what moral values can be inferred from the story according to the narrative told in flashback by Paul Edgecombe.
3. To observe the effects that the supernatural and spiritual overtones bring to the moral values contained within the story.

Overall, the aim of this study is to explore the effects of supernatural and spiritual overtones to the moral values set in *The Green Mile*.

D. Significance of the Study

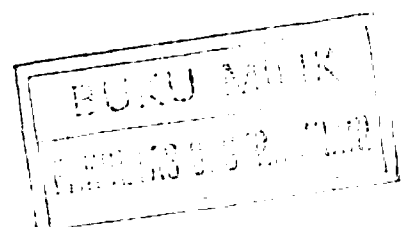
This thesis will attempt to dissect the popularity of themes related with supernaturalism and its juxtaposition with the moral values embedded within the

story. The study herein is by and large intended to contribute to the understanding of the choices made by an author as to why he or she prefers a certain genre to the others. For the students and scholars of English literature, this thesis is expected to give the impression of the importance of moral values found in literature. Thus, the writer hopes that in many ways it will open up our horizon of thinking that an author, similar to an artist or a composer, sometimes feels the urge to experiment on other genres of his or her artistic field.

This study is also intended to show that a story of supernatural nature does not necessarily mean that it cannot have a psychological depth. Readers might also be given the impression that supernaturalism can help a story into a level of popularity of its own. Often associated with popular culture in general, supernatural oriented stories are commonly loved by mass audience yet underestimated by high culture society. Hopefully this study will also be able to knock down that prejudiced notion. This study also intends to examine the significance of reader receptive research in literature.

E. Scope and Limitation

It is necessary to point out that the study is limited to the discussion of the supernatural overtones imposed by the character of (mainly) John Coffey. They are directly involved with the supernatural/morality theme which the writer considers significant to the analysis. However, it should be noted that the characters will be touched on not as the main concern of the analysis but merely as the medium to comprehend the discussion of the effects of supernatural and spiritual overtones to the moral values in *The Green Mile*.



The writer will only relate to factors dealing with the effects of supernatural overtones to the core morality essence in *The Green Mile*. Author Stephen King will be examined only as additional information regarding the recurrent theme of supernaturalism in his works.

Since the writer employs the theory of phenomenology, it should be noted that the analysis would present the immediate impression received by the writer, excluding the many outside factors that may discuss other facts about the work. In other words, the analysis of the work will be in many respects tends to be subjective and fully based on the judgment of the writer.

F. Theoretical Background

The philosophical school of phenomenology will be the basis of literary theory applied by the writer to analyze the work. As one of the types of intellectual movement with the quality of a reader oriented theory, meaning that what the reader absorbs from a certain work of literature is what really matters to the analysis. It stresses on the perceiver's central role in determining meaning.

As the approach to help distinguish between meaning and significance, the writer will employ the hermeneutics approach. As both phenomenology and hermeneutics focus on the reader's interpretation of meaning, the writer argues that these two tools will assist a great deal in understanding the subject matter of this thesis.

G. Method of the Study

The philosophical tendency known as phenomenology requires the analysis of the meaning of a literary work to be derived from the writer's conscious

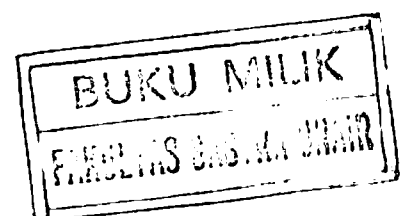
impression of it. Therefore it is appropriate to mention that every result that may sprout out from this study correspond with what the writer captures through his understanding.

This thesis is conducted through extensive library research as well as internet research to gather the data, which the writer considers relevant-directly or indirectly- to the data collecting. Library research constitutes of processes of finding information that is useful to help the writer solve the questions posed in relation to the subject matter. The writer intends to broaden his knowledge on previous studies that have been conducted on similar subject before the writer's own. With this library research the writer plans to gather related information on Stephen King's *The Green Mile*. In addition, the writer feels that the involvement of internet in this research is essential and inevitable because internet has now become a widespread tool of gathering information, especially if an observer tries to obtain the latest and most up-to-date information of a certain subject.

The writer intends to employ an in-depth interpretative method in the data analysis to find deep understanding of the supernaturalism & morality mixture in the work. This also means that the interpretation is not done word by word, but rather through its contextual meaning. Based on those findings, the writer will be able to infer his interpretation and understanding about the meanings carried by the work in question.

H. Definition of Key Terms

- Green Mile: (in the story) the stretch of green linoleum flooring that took convicts from their jail cells to the electric chair.



- **Moral Values:** norms or values, which concern character, behavior, or actions, considered or judged as being good or evil, right or wrong.
- **Overtones:** things that are suggested but not shown or stated clearly.
- **Penitentiary:** a prison, especially a state or national prison in the U. S.
- **Stream of Consciousness:** the technique employed especially in literature in which the thoughts, feelings, etc., in a person's mind in a continuous flow during his waking time.
- **Spiritualism:** the tendency or state of fondness for religious things, worship, prayer, etc.
- **Supernaturalism:** all things that are not explained by natural laws but, especially, by the powers of spirits, gods, magic; matters and experiences connected with the unknown forces and spirits.



CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK