

## ***A Reflection of Edgar Allan Poe's The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion on Myth of COVID-19 in Indonesia***

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*Abstract* – The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected discourses in Indonesia. People are pushed not only to work, to study, and to pray at home, but also to face uncertainty of everyday information. Both offline and online are coming in every second but its truth are questionable. In result, there are many myths stated about COVID-19, from heat of sunlight that could cure the symptoms to hospitals that exploit infected patients of the virus. Meanwhile, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* told us another view of myth. Poor information of visible comets at that time are imagined to be the incoming doomsday. Eiros and Charmion are those who live in post-apocalyptic era of the judgment day. From those points, the paper through qualitative method would like to answer the question; how are myths of COVID-19 reflected on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*? By revealing what is under the rug of the myth, society may find better way to find certainty in this era of post-truth. Theory of myth and illusory truth will be asserted to show the reflection of as well as to compare Poe's story in today's condition.

**Keywords** *COVID-19, illusory truth, myth, The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Myths do exist in human life as tradition in culture or merely misinformation of some issues (Barker, 2014 and Grimes, 2020). Those are actions and reactions of an event. As action, myth

is stated without determinable basis of factual explanations. While as reaction, myth is something to explain an event in sophisticated ways. Myth is also found in literature. Many author create, explain, or reveal myth to express their thoughts of such events. Myth could be both part of author's imagination or author's effort to reveal clearer truth (Smith and Riley, 2009). Edgar Allan Poe wrote a short story entitled *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* which tells us about two persons having a dialogue in post-apocalyptic condition (Eapoe, 2012). Poe explained incoming comets at his time to be myth of the apocalypse. He told so since there are less information about the comets that made people confused about the real situations. In real life, COVID-19 pandemic today has made myths resulted from online and offline information. Globalization has made information to be easily accessed by people, yet it makes them experience disinformation (Barker, 2014). Especially in health issues, myths of the virus are full of opaque information

rather than reflection of certain culture. Once the explanation comes, the myths are gone by the light of rationality(Lerik and Damayanti, 2020).

This paper would like to compare conditions of myths in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* and COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The question is; how are myths of COVID-19 reflected on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*? Theory of myth and illusory truth are two important perspectives to unbox the myths in literature and in pandemic condition today. Through qualitative method, this paper is divided into several parts to answer the question; Introduction, Condition of Myth on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*, Variety of Myths of COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia, Reflection of Illusory Truth in The Myths, Conclusion, and References.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses qualitative method to analyze the story of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*. Both description of the findings and the analyses are done by explorative perspectives to show comparison between the story and today's COVID-19 myth in Indonesia. Literature study is also used to enrich analysis of the topic and how it may

get in line with condition of myth in the story and in the outbreak situation.

## III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### A. *Condition of Myth on Edgar Allan Poe's The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*

Edgar Allan Poe is an outstanding author whose literary works based on realities and imaginations. Living around 19<sup>th</sup> century and died at his age of 40, Poe is considered the best in writing detective, horror, and macabre stories(Eapoe, 2012). One of Poe's work is *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*. The story tells about Eiros and Charmion's dialogue in post-apocalyptic condition after incoming comets from outer space into the earth(Eapoe, 2012 and Studniarz, 2018). When Poe wrote the story, it was indeed many comets seen in the sky. Some are seen in 1881, 1833, and the popular Halley's Comet in 1835(Eapoe, 2012). As the popularity of the comet was high at that moment, Poe speculated what if the comets had arrived and brought apocalypse to earth. Astronomers, philosophers, journalists, and even government officials talked a lot about comets at that time(Eapoe, 2012). The most important here is how Poe brilliantly saw the opportunities in bridging realities, imaginations, and speculations of the

comets. He asserted the myth of the comets in sharp thought, asking what if the comets were not just about sceneries of outer space things, but would bring serious destruction to earth (Drost, 2006 and Studniarz, 2018). He did not tell about speculations that shaped myths, alas he stated condition of post-apocalyptic scenes. Moreover, Poe explained Eiros who died because of judgment day. Poe spoke to us from the side of the afterlife (Drost, 2006).

Poe tried to tell us about the comets, the judgment day, and the afterlife which were framed through myths. Eiros and Charmion are not their real names. Those names are given to them in the afterlife, in a place called Aidenn (Eapoe, 2012). Charmion died ten years earlier than Eiros who just came at that time. They now live in a place where no one suffers pain but the passage to there is the darkness of death (Studniarz, 2018). Eiros then speaks how holy writings may have predicted about final destruction. The comets which are said by astronomers to be around Jupiter actually have come to the earth and brought in fiery destruction (Eapoe, 2012). At first, the comets are said to be hollow and made of gas, but then those became larger in sight and has brought in certainty of fears. Nitrogen of the comets fulfilled earth then complicated combustion as predicted by Holy Book (Drost, 2006). Eiros ended

his story by saying that people got suffocated as intense flame surrounded earth. No one could escape from the death that has come from the gigantic comets.

The story of Eiros and Charmion is Poe's favorite perspectives; discovery and destruction (Studniarz, 2018). Discovery is seen in new life that both persons have in afterlife. Poe stated that darkness of death has been passed and Aidenn has resurfaced as a place where peace is found (Drost, 2006). Destruction is also there, related to the comets and doomsday that Poe asserted in the story. Poe stated not only infernal time, but also eternal one, so he stated about things that has not been imagined by humans (Studniarz, 2018). Poe states the comets, doomsday, and afterlife as myths that were departed from real truths. About the comets, he imagined them differently from what scientists said about them (Eapoe, 2012). The gas that was inside the comets actually brings in suffocation as fiery flame to the earth. The doomsday was told by Poe by referring to what Holy Book said about it. The fiery flames are everywhere burning people to the pain of death. The afterlife is meant as a peaceful place where people could stay in harmony with each other. The eternal is not similar with profane life as seen in Charmion's experience of Aidenn 9 (Studniarz, 2018). As listed above, speculations and imaginations are how

Poe improved senses of the myths. He did not stop in the factual truths, but he developed a story out of human's senses. He spoke in the sense of the mystic of the myths; something that could only be experienced as illuminations(Studniarz, 2018). Poe's interest in mystery is reflected as humans cannot control themselves but held by superior entities like comets, doomsday, and afterlife. The mystic myths start when people give up their intellects to bring in revelations that actually are foreign to them but so close in experience (Studniarz, 2018).

#### *B. Variety of Myths of COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia*

The pandemic condition of Indonesia has brought many information about the virus in Indonesia(Lerik and Damayanti, 2020). The information is both clear and unclear, making people confused what is really going on in real life on health and social issues(Grimes, 2020). No one is really justifiable to tell such information. Government may have sovereignty of power to say certain information, but it is never enough. People then find other information from social media(Grimes, 2020). Era of information makes people not just consume given information, but also push them to find more and more. People are getting unsatisfied with given information and

rather than suffering from less of it, they crave for more(Roozenbeek, 2020). They try to produce information too to satisfy their need of truths behind this pandemic situations.

Incoming information about the virus in Indonesia has built such myths among people(Lerik and Damayanti, 2020). The myths are there since even there are some legitimate institutions that may state true things about the virus, some information from them are still unclear(Roozenbeek, 2020). To fill the gaps from the uncertain information, people try to mix and match some knowledge to understand the real situations. The myth condition is related to intentions and interpretations of the people. People intends to find better information, and if they did not find it, they try to connect it with other things or even their own experience(Roozenbeek, 2020; Smith and Riley, 2009). Truth about information that actually needs to be objective then becomes subjective through individual and societal experience. The intentions stop when they find answers as they do not want to dig more truths of them. They only stop at the relative points of information(Ting, 2017). Meanwhile, interpretations are related to aspects behind information. Some myths are shaped because of totality of truths that ignores other sides. It is exactly the

fixations of things that made the myths (Iswidayati, 2007; Smith and Riley, 2009).

The writer has listed some examples of COVID-19 myths in Indonesia. Some of them do still exist until now, some are already banished by the clarity of scientific knowledge, and some of them are still in questions (Kemkes, 2020). The myths stated in grey area of scientific and common knowledge (Smith and Riley, 2009; Ting, 2017) are really interesting here, since it could not be eroded by science and may be just left as it is in future days.

#### The Examples of COVID-19 Myths in Indonesia

(Chalimah, 2020; detik.com, 2020; Kemkes, 2020; Lerik and Damayanti, 2020)

| No. | Myths  | Explanations   |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.  | Sunlight may kill COVID-19 since it contains ultraviolet       | Ultraviolet cannot kill virus, but Vitamin D in sunlight may improve immunity to fight virus |
| 2.  | Hand dryer may kill the virus                                  | The heat from hand dryer cannot kill the virus   |
| 3.  | The spray of disinfectant cannot harm human body               | The using of disinfectant for a long time may cause harm to human's body                     |
| 4.  | Those who pass the temperature check must be free of the virus | Temperature check is only one measurement for existence of the virus. Swab test is needed.   |
| 5.  | Drinking alcoholic beverages may eliminate the                 | Alcohol is only used for hand sanitizer, not to be drunk as                                  |

|     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
|     | virus  | consumption to kill the virus  |
| 6.  | Pets may transmit the virus                                | No research has been found about this  |
| 7.  | Antibiotics effective for virus                            | Antibiotics for bacteria, not virus  |
| 8.  | The virus could transmit through cellular phone signal     | The virus is transmitted through droplets, not electronic signal                           |
| 9.  | Vitamin C could kill the virus                             | Vitamin C may increase immune of the body to fight the virus, but not killing it instantly |
| 10. | Drinking herbal drink could kill the virus inside the body | Herbal drink could improve white blood to fight the virus, but not eliminating it at ease  |

From the above explanations, myths do not stand alone, but are related to health and social knowledge (Lerik and Damayanti, 2020). Myths are structures of language of people in the era of pandemic. They are not to blame since there are not enough certainty of information. People are pushed to shape their own knowledge. It is myth that is structured, rooted, and experienced in people's everyday language (Mia, 2015 and (Smith and Riley, 2009). Once a myth is clarified, another may come since the pandemic is still going on (Kemkes, 2020). In one hand, myth is not logic at all since it is not based on any objective knowledge. Structure of knowledge has to be rigid about the truths, but it could not be find clearly today (Angeline, 2015 and Barker, 2014).

In the other hand, people has to live everyday and walk together with virus that they do not know what and how it may affect life, so myth is also logical. Myths are how language is stated as *parole*, since *langue* is not clearly stated or no longer enough anymore (Angeline, 2015; Smith and Riley, 2009). Health and social issues of the pandemic are updated every second yet those do not give any chance for a structure to be built. People need to shape their own structure of knowledge, it is myth, that even though it may be wrong but the stories of it still embraced by them (Angeline, 2015).

The myth may also be diachronic rather than synchronic. Myth is active doings of people in seeking the true knowledge (Smith and Riley, 2009; Urfan, 2018). It is indeed negative but somehow it is enough to explain what really happen in the pandemic era. The diachronic condition has become such staple food for people (Urfan, 2018). They may still be synchronic with the usual information of the mass media, but the interpretations may always be diachronic. People do not just believe what people say about pandemic issues, and this situation is getting normalized today (Kemkes, 2020). The sign and signified aspects of the pandemic is no longer synchronic as a thing may not be exact causality of another thing. People do not believe in the

power of others, even the legitimate ones (Urfan, 2018), and they try to have power by themselves through seeking knowledge as shaped in myths of the pandemic.

### *C. Reflection of Illusory Truth in Myths*

Myths on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* are stated in the forms of combination among imaginations, factual realities, and speculations. Poe tells us that the comets are not just outer space things, but he imagined that those could be incoming doomsday that brings in afterlife sooner to people of the world. What he said about those three aspects above are how cultural aspects of people see things that are foreign to them. People tried to name it, discuss about it, and imagine it, and even speculate about it (Barker, 2014 and Grimes, 2020). Myths in Poe's terms are how people tried to tame those foreign object by their own knowledge. It does not matter whether it was true or wrong as long as the knowledge may explain the objects (Cagno, 2018). Somehow the knowledge is not clear too since images of the doomsday, the comets, and the afterlife are still so opaque to them. However, myths could represent about them than ignoring the phenomenon (Barker, 2014; Iswidayati, 2007).

Myths of COVID-19 are related to fake news and misinformation. The era of post truth today has biased many information among society. Legitimate and accurate sources are so questionable now that giving chances for non-expert people to talk about things that they do not really know. Old knowledge also got mix-matched with current situation. As long as there is resemblance, people say that it is the same, apparently it is not(Cagno, 2018). It is true that today's COVID-19 information are not quite sure since health experts are still going on it. The experts are still trying to dig what could cure the virus. In everyday life, people could not wait much longer to consume information. The myths then become answers, even those are temporary, to solve the puzzles of the virus.

Both Edgar Allan Poe's *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* and COVID-19 myths are asserted through illusory truth. It is not quite the truth but knowledge that is understood easily(Cagno, 2018). Once it is said, and others said it too, and it is got repeated again and again, then it became truth. It is the truth that live by illusion of knowledge. The knowledge is not mature enough to be analyzed consistently since it is just merely knowing the known without further confirmation from conceptual and empirical aspects(Iswidayati, 2007).

People are getting satisfied by consuming illusions, saying it as truths, and sometimes wanting to stay on it. The opposite of the illusory truth is the truth itself which is revealed by debunking the misinformation by following the logics, anticipating overlapped information, and seeking confirmation from the experts(Syaripulloh, 2017).

The illusory truth can be seen in two unseparated aspects like two faces on a coin. One aspect says that illusory truth is reflection of a lie with no truth at all. It is totally an illusion being repeated or interpreted again and again to be such knowledge of truth. In Poe's story, his saying of afterlife is non-sense since no one could tell how afterlife seems. Death is the end, just as the doomsday coming without any epilogue thereafter. The comets are just passing through earth, not invading it. In COVID-19 information, heat of sunlight and hand dryer will never destroy the virus. The heat is touching the skin while the virus is inside the blood. The virus also cannot be transported though cellular phone signal although it may be airborne. The myths of them are totally lies, they are out of logics and could not be confirmed by science at all.

Another aspect may be different and bring in plural views to be asserted. Here, the myths could always be possible (Urfan, 2018)since those are not living by

truth, but lived by the dark side of the moon. The incoming comets are said not harmful to earth only by further studying around 1900s. What Poe explained is myth of unknown—not wrong—knowledge. It is similar with afterlife and doomsday that Poe did not tame, instead he says it in terms of mystery. The afterlife and doomsday are still foreign to human world. Naming the life after living and ending of the world do not erode the mysteries contained in them. They are still in distance to people although people are always trying to understand it again and again. Those are uncontrollable as they are myths in nature. In COVID-19, the myths are positioned between the right and the wrong. Once scientific knowledge may confirm them, those become clear in position, but may not leave ‘other’ side of it. For instance, saying that temperature check confirms one is free of the virus is wrong, since it must be proven through swab test (Chalimah, 2020). However, high temperature is one symptom of the virus and even many institutions and public places still do temperature checks. So, the myth is not false or true at all. The illusory truth is not wrong, but illusion of it takes the culprit. Another example is saying that pet may emit the virus (Chalimah, 2020). Animals may bring such harm to humans, such as rabies and anthrax. So, the myth is not *ex nihilo*, but from scientific

knowledge. Stating that myth does not make people afraid of having pets, but shape anticipations to them. The myth somehow is not meant to be clarified (Syaripulloh, 2017) since the content is automatically cleared by the people. Those who consider pets as families bring them to veterinarians to be checked. The illusion contained in the myth is enlightened by itself (Barker, 2014). Since the myths of Poe’s story and COVID-19 are related to only cultural aspects of people and not political propaganda of government, people will try to sort which one is illusion, truth, and potential yet non-potential of both.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Myths of COVID-19 reflected on Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* through resemblances on illusory truth. By revealing structure of myths, Poe’s short story is combination between imaginations, speculations, and factual realities. He stated the incoming comets, the existence of doomsday, and the situations of afterlife through dialogue between Eiros and Charmion. COVID-19 is related to misinformation and fake news that also happened at Poe’s timeline. Myths on COVID-19 are mostly about unspecified health knowledge that could not be logics at all. The cultural aspects of

people will always make myths possible to arise, since people are needy for information but the news are never enough.

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