



Dissecting Nature and Grotesque Elements in Tunku Halim's *Juriah's Song*

Nur Fatin, S. A. J.* , Wan Roselezam, W. Y. and Hardev Kaur

Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Tunku Halim's novella *Juriah's Song* (2008) revolves around the protagonist, Akri, and his encounter with the ghost of his late girlfriend, Juriah. Categorized as a horror genre, the characters and settings of this novella serve as important ground where elements of nature and the grotesque interweave to enhance the plot. In this paper, we examine the roles and functions of nature and the grotesque through a textual analysis of the chosen text by utilising the notion of 'the relationship between humans and nature' and the concept of the grotesque as proposed by Wolfgang Kayser, Sherwood and Phillip Thomson. Nature is depicted as a mirror that reflects the relationship between humans and nature. The grotesque, on the other hand, refers to various kinds of exaggerated emotions and distorted forms. Our findings demonstrate that both nature and the grotesque take on significant roles and affect the characters' perceptions, judgements and emotions, either positively or negatively. The generic designation of the grotesque applies to both actions and characters in the novel. Apart from functioning independently from each other, nature and the grotesque are also significant when they intertwine. When the two concepts are used together, nature acts as a catalyst to develop grotesque actions.

Keywords: Ghost stories, gothic, the grotesque, horror novels, Malaysian Gothic, nature, Tunku Halim

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 17 October 2014

Accepted: 5 March 2015

E-mail addresses:

fatinjafni@gmail.com (Nur Fatin, S. A. J.),

roselezam@gmail.com (Wan Roselezam, W. Y.),

jshardev@yahoo.com (Hardev Kaur)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

In the novel *Juriah's Song* (2008), the elements of nature and the grotesque serve each other in many ways. The two elements constitute and develop horror in either isolated or reciprocal manner. The first objective of this research is to look at the elements of grotesque in the novel.

The next one is to study the depiction of nature in the text to determine how nature alone can be seen as a conduit for the horror element. In what way can nature be seen as an element that helps to bring out horror in the story? To answer this, we examine the negative elements of nature that can be seen as ghastly and intimidating by people in general. Finally, the main objective of this research is to examine how the grotesque is utilised in the text in relation to nature.

Based on the textual analysis, we extract relevant textual evidence alongside appropriate concepts in order to achieve our aims. This analysis is divided into three sections. The first section is on the concept of the grotesque as it appears in the text. The next section will look at the depiction of nature alone in horror fiction, specifically the depiction of nature in *Juriah's Song*, while the last section will discuss how nature and the grotesque mutually develop horrific factors in the text.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bank of Malaysian Literature in English includes material from Malaysia and Singapore. When it concerns ghost stories, both countries are heavily influenced by Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures. Similar to the beliefs of other Asian people, primitive Malays and Chinese worshipped everything close to them. They embraced an animistic belief, a faith in the spiritual force of the entire natural world and the cosmos (Lim, 2005, p. 9).

In Singapore, the belief in the supernatural is strongly inclined towards the Malay and Chinese traditions. Jonathan Lim illustrates this circumstance in Singapore, as shown below:

Out of all this sharing also emerges a sense of the supernatural that blends the beliefs of several races. There are a few places in the world where you would find grandparents warning children to be equally wary of the Malay pontianak and of Chinese water-ghosts. Where else would banana trees be respectfully revered alongside shrines to half-Malay half-Chinese spirits? Or pilgrims worship both a Chinese temple and a Malay keramat on the same trip? (p. 5)

On the other hand, Malay supernatural and superstitious practices are a blend of Malay/Indian or Muslim/Hindu. The witch doctor or shaman is the all-knowing figure whose main role is to provide talismans and charms to protect against bad spirits, ghosts and other unseen apparitions. Animistic beliefs contribute the most as the basis for shamanic and magic beliefs. The rituals and worshipping of primitive gods, spirits and ghosts and Hindu myths brought the essential elements together and created a special type of magician or *bomoh/dukun* (Winstedt, p. 32). Therefore, much Malay fiction displays the practice of black magic and appearances of the *bomoh*.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an umbrella study, the study of nature is subject to ecocritical study; this research adjusts its reach exclusively to the relationship between humans and nature. Nature in this context includes the weather, forests, rivers, seas and certain animals. In order to understand how the relationship between humans and nature can exactly be established, consider the following excerpt:

Ecocriticism observes in nature and culture the ubiquity of signs, indicators of value that shape form and meaning. Ecology leads us to recognize that life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity. (Howarth, 1996, p. 163)

The fact is that, in our daily lives, consciously or not, nature is ubiquitous. As its existence is omnipresent, humans seldom take the time to observe what nature really means to them. This scenario occurs in literature as much as in reality. Ecocritical lens serve as a platform to show the relationship between nature and human. In a research on Arabic poetry by Hamoud Yahya Ahmed and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, they utilise ecocritical interpretations because “the poets make vivid interconnections between the human and nonhuman world by utilising nature as a form of human resistance to the occupation of the land” (2015, p. 14).

On the other hand, as aforementioned, the concept of the grotesque is also the main concept underpinning this study. Put colloquially, the grotesque generally means a situation or an object that is extremely horrifying and explicitly gory. Literary glossaries classify the grotesque as an element characterised by bizarre distortions, especially in the exaggerated or abnormal depiction of human body parts and features (Baldick, 1990, p. 93). The literature of the grotesque involves freakish caricatures of people’s appearance and behaviour as seen in the examples in the novels by Charles Dickens, while disturbing, odd fictional characters are also referred to as the grotesque (Baldick, 1990, p. 93). It is within the range of normalcy to have an abundance of grotesque narration in horror novels. However, the selection of grotesque concepts in this research is made carefully in order to materialise the connection between the grotesque and nature. Although, basically, all sub-concepts of the grotesque share the same underlying essence and purpose, not all concepts can be linked and made relevant to one or more other elements outside grotesque studies.

Therefore, to fulfil the purpose of this study, two applicable sub-concepts of the grotesque are chosen. The sub-concepts are generic designations by various scholars and a concept proposed by Wolfgang Kayser. Generic designations will be applied while describing the elements of the grotesque in isolation, whereas Wolfgang Kayser’s concept is applied when describing the relationship between nature and the

grotesque. For a more specific and solid definition of the grotesque, I choose the concept of horrifying and comic forms of the grotesque. In the broadest sense, grotesque elements in a literary piece purport to invoke horror and laughter simultaneously on the reader's part. Whereas the comic is not restricted to being amusing and delightful, it tends to be inclusive of a certain glee in disbelief and the like. In his book, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser highlights the absurdity of grotesque objects.

To merge the two concepts, we propose that the elements of nature and the grotesque can function independently. Nevertheless, the elements of grotesque, comic and horrifying can be further refined and enriched with the help of nature as the agency eliciting the notion of the grotesque in the novel *Juriah's Song*.

TEXT OVERVIEW

Juriah's Song (2008) (henceforth *JS*) is a novel written by a Malaysian author, Tunku Halim, which centres on the protagonist, Akri. Akri is the hottest rock star in town when a song he sang becomes a nationwide hit overnight. However, behind all the glamour and fame, Akri is haunted and cursed by memories of his late girlfriend, Juriah. As teenagers, Akri and Juriah, were a pair of lovebirds who kept seeing each other despite the strong opposition from Juriah's father. During their frequent meetings, Juriah habitually hums certain tunes and this inspired Akri to compose some songs. On one unfortunate night, Akri sneaked into

Juriah's room and they consummated their love. However, they were caught by Juriah's parents when Akri accidentally knocked over a vase in the living room, while trying discreetly to leave the house. Knowing how fierce Juriah's father was, Akri hastened to leave the house with Juriah's father, wielding a sharp blade (*parang*), chasing after him. In the midst of this chaos, Juriah begged her father to stop chasing Akri, but to no avail. With the aim of pacifying the two men she loved the most, Juriah lost control of her car while driving. She hit a tree at speed and the crash killed her instantly.

Feeling guilty and miserable, Akri fled to another region and sought solace in a seaside village. While Akri was immersed in self-guilt over the incident, he tried to commit suicide, but he was saved by an old man in the village, Pak Mansor. Pak Mansor later took Akri to his house and they lived together. With Pak Mansor, Akri learned how to play the guitar, and that was how he learned composing and rearranging the humming of Juriah into proper songs. But fame comes at a price, and for Akri, it is a deadly price. Ever since Juriah's song became a massive hit, the spirit of Juriah comes to haunt him. In desperation, Akri ventures out and seeks help from a village shaman, the *bomoh*. With his help, the mystery of Juriah's haunting spirit unravels and Akri learns that Juriah's spirit is roaming with him, wanting to inform him about the existence of a tiny, pulsing life, the new life created by them on the night that Juriah died. Throughout the story, from Akri's reverie in the lonely village to in the bustle of the city,

Akri is always surrounded by the voice of nature and grotesque imagery.

ANALYSIS

Extracting Grotesqueries from Juriah's Song

The meanings and conventions of the grotesque are broad and intricate. Elaborative though it may seem, the grotesque in its simplest form can be defined as mutated versions of humans, animals and/or plants (Thompson, 1972, p.13). Hence, in this section, we will tease out the elements of the grotesque that are present in *JS* by utilising the meaning proposed by Thompson (1972) in *A Glossary of Literary Gothic Terms*. To expand that definition, the grotesque can relate to any form of mutation that is extravagant, exaggerated or abnormal. The purpose of examining rudimentary concepts of the grotesque is to offer an overview or a frame so that the meaning of the grotesque can be confined and serve a general purpose.

In the novel, employment of the grotesque concept is abundant, as it acts as a catalyst to construct an overall horrifying mood. Grotesqueness can be clearly seen in the character Juriah. Her grotesqueness is displayed in two ways: when she possesses a mundane human physique, and when she is in spirit form, which is clearly an atypical entity. Although the two portray different kinds of the grotesque, they still convey an adequate quality as agents of grotesquery in the text.

Now let us first probe the "human" character of Juriah. Although Juriah is a perfectly normal girl in human form, the

moment her car hit the tree on the night of her death, all her mundane beauty left her. When Akri realised that Juriah was trapped in the mangled jeep, he hastened to enter the vehicle in the hope of being together with whatever was left of Juriah. In this situation, Juriah's action could be considered grotesque. Consider the following excerpt:

Through the shattered glass, Akri saw that the airbag hadn't worked. Juriah lay slumped on the steering wheel as though bent hideously in prayer. One hand lay twisted and limp on the dashboard. Her hair covered her face but through the gap in the black veil he could see that her lips were parted as though yearning for a kiss. A cold, cold kiss with a single icy drop of blood like a tear poised on her lower lip.
(*JS*, p. 41)

It is clear that the twisted body of Juriah is a strong agent conveying a grotesque element in the text. It would suffice simply to describe her as badly injured, but her condition – already grotesque enough – is emphasized further by the author to describe the horrifying scene more fully. With this emphasis and exaggeration, the grotesque effect is more powerful. As the description of her pose fits the aforementioned definition of the grotesque, the "essential paradox of grotesque as both liberating and tension-producing" is achieved (Thompson, 1972, p. 61). The above excerpt portrays the grotesque in maimed form. However, Juriah is not just grotesque from the maiming, but

also through her unearthly demeanour after she dies. The first event occurs immediately after her instant death in the car accident. As described in the excerpt above, Juriah is already a confirmed corpse as Akri enters the car. However, to Akri's great surprise, Juriah suddenly "pushed one arm against the steering wheel, slumped back in the car seat and turned to him" (JS, p. 43). The abnormality of the situation made Akri cry out. Silently and almost secretively, Akri found Juriah as scary as the moment, and the situation forced him to think that Juriah was "turning sanity into madness, turning love to fear" (JS, p. 44).

Instead of stopping there, Juriah's action is further described as being beyond normalcy, and her undistorted form clearly represents the grotesque in a definite sense.

Like a corpse impatient with the confines of its coffin, she turned her bloodied head from side to side before stopping it just short of Akri's face ... A two-inch piece of glass poked from one of her eyes, the eye that was closed and puffy. With her other eye, she blinked and stared mournfully at him ... In that one look, with her whiteness of her eye, in the dark world of her eyeball, he saw her pain. (JS, p. 44)

Through her painful eyes, Akri is able to grasp the gist of what Juriah desires from him. She wishes to be with Akri forever and accusingly asks Akri why he wants to run away. The latter question from Juriah causes

Akri to have enormous guilt towards her. Despite her strong desire to be with him, Juriah gradually retreats into a convulsion and speaks of nothing else.

Apart from this physical distortion and abnormal grotesquery, as mirrored by Juriah in her humanly being, Juriah also elicits the grotesque through her unearthly form. As is mentioned, in the moment after her death, she pronounces that she will never leave Akri alone. And she does not. In his seclusion in the seaside village, Akri sees Juriah in the form of nature – this topic will be analysed in the next section – but once Akri becomes famous and moves back to the city, Akri is still visited by Juriah in her ghostly form, and this haunting affects Akri greatly. Judging by the frame, Juriah looks the same, but with the evident presence of Juriah around him, Akri realizes that Juriah is relentless in her anger, hatred and spite.

One night, as Akri is resting in his bedroom in his condominium, Akri is startled when he hears Juriah walks across the room towards him. "Her breath drew in as she saw him lying shirtless on the bed. She padded across the room to a hushed rip-rip sound" (JS, p. 83). The idea of Juriah becoming excited at seeing the half-naked Akri on his bed is grotesque by default. Grounding in the definition of the grotesque proposed by Sherwood, in addition to physical distortion, mental distortion and corruption can be seen as acts of grotesquery too, thus explaining why Juriah's actions can be seen as grotesque. Despite her heaving breaths on seeing Akri, she comes closer to him and presses her body against his.

...hands – slippery and drenched in cold blood, moved up his bare shins and across his thighs ... before he could tell, a weight like a disused mattress fell on him ... Breasts squashed his chest. Smooth ankles against his shins. Cheek against his cheek. Dusty hair upon his mouth! Juriah slithered against him. Skin on skin. (JS, p. 84)

In the above excerpt, Juriah's deliberate action can be seen as seductive and longing for physical contact with Akri. Perhaps she is trying to relive the moments when she made love with Akri on the night of her death. She draws her head closer to Akri as though "eager to kiss him with its slithering tongue" (JS, p. 85). The idea of a human having sexual intercourse with a non-human is unthinkable and can be considered gross and abnormal. This depicts what Sherwood proposes to be mentally and spiritually corrupted, and the event helps visualise what Kayser postulates as "exorcising the demonic" (1963, p. 59)

Going back to the physical abnormalities established by Juriah, Akri stiffens when he feels that "something cold and soft like blood-soaked meat held his ankle" (JS, p. 83) and he describes how Juriah's smell reminds him of "a puddle in a steaming alleyway where rotting rodents floated" (JS, p. 84). Although Akri stays firm, with his eyes tight shut, he can visualise Juriah's appearance. He fears that if he opens his eyes he will not see the lovely Juriah of yore but a figure with "a shard of glass poking

from one eye. A decomposed head filled with worms and maggots. A mouth filled with broken teeth and a blackened slug-like tongue" (JS, p. 85). The physical attributes of Juriah have evolved into a more distorted form, enhancing her grotesqueness. If we are to infer anything from thus, we can say that her grotesqueness has been augmented – the more distorted her physical appearance, the more daring and fearful she becomes. In parallel with her changes, Akri senses that Juriah has become more threatening too, so he no longer feels guilt and longing, rather, he recognises his fear of Juriah as he confesses that he can "get so scared" (JS, p. 90).

Although Akri is aware of his deep love for Juriah, and as he shoulders pressure of guilt for her untimely death, this slowly but surely changes into fear and anger towards Juriah's vengeful spirit. The grotesque, as portrayed by the character Juriah, includes physical distortion of her human form and spiritual corruption of her ghostly form.

Locating Nature Elements in Juriah's Song

The narration of nature permeates the text and the element of nature serves two purposes: 1) bringing forth the animalistic value in humans, and 2) a source to deliver oppressing energy against the protagonist.

Although Akri and Juriah acknowledged Juriah's father's objection to their relationship, the two youngsters could not break it off. One night, they met at Juriah's house, believing that her parents were asleep in the next room. As Akri was about to leave the house, he knocked over a vase causing

Juriah's parents to wake up. Furious at the situation, Juriah's father chased after Akri. Throughout this scenario, Juriah's father was described as a beast. Driven by his innermost anger and instinct, Juriah's father was seen as retreating from his human self and taking on a beastly demeanour. The moment he saw Akri standing in his house at the darkest time of night, his expression changed and he became "a man-eating beast in a human body" (*JS*, p. 36). His further actions and movements were also equated with those of an animal, "He thumped down the stairs, legs splayed wide, muscles taunt. Eyes burning" (*JS*, p. 36). In the next few pages, Juriah's father is called a "beast" countless times (pp. 36–40). The emphasis on the word "beast" intends to describe his abnormal human being attributes. As narrated earlier in the story, Juriah's father is a man of high position in society – a civilised human, with a calm wise conduct. However, enraged this domestic situation, his instinct forced him to display beastly traits, which shows that there is human-nature (in this case, human-animal) interconnectedness. Forced by circumstances, humans can act like animals – triggered by certain elements, the beast in a human can materialise.

In other research, a character is proved to be getting along well with nature. For example, in Atwood's *Surfacing*, it can be seen that the protagonist interacts with nature, and as it progresses, the more she comes to terms with her feelings and grief. (Sedehi & Yahya, 2015, p. 251). However in this research, nature can be seen as a cloud of negative force for humans in the

text. In his attempt to forget Juriah, Akri flees to a rural village. In a small fishing town, Akri often wandered by the sea's edge, in the hope of seeking solace and relief from nature. However, instead of placating his unresolved guilt over Juriah's death, Akri found that the forces of nature, too, opposed him. It started on the very night he left Juriah, when her father was in pursuit wanting to kill him. A banyan tree is described as an ally of Juriah's father (the beast), as the tree is deemed to fail him with "its tentacle-like roots to snare his feet" (*JS*, p. 38). When Akri reminisced about the days when he was happy with Juriah, he vented his loneliness and guilt by strumming his guitar and sharing it with nature, with the "running crabs and scattered shells", asking "How could he play it to anyone but sea and sky?" (*JS*, p. 4). As if loathing Akri's idea of feeling 'soft' and soppy about Juriah, the weather suddenly changed from clear to murky. The "black clouds swallowed the sunrise and now swelled over the coconut trees" (4), which can be seen as a protest from nature. The cloud that ingests the sunlight is a sign that what little comfort he has will be diminished effortlessly by his surroundings.

Also, the sea especially affected Akri in a negative way. The sea is seen as an agent to make Akri feel guilty and prompts him to try to commit suicide. On the first occasion, the sea is seen by Akri as ferocious, "the sea crashed like hideous mouth-foaming stallions" (*JS*, p. 3). The sea is especially terrifying when Akri believes that the reason why he is trying to drown himself in the sea

is because the spirit of Juriah merges with the sea, luring him into it. It is Juriah that “came leaping from the sea, fist clenched, screaming at him with fire in her eyes and the water boiled with her fury” (*JS*, p. 29). Similar to the previous paragraphs, the relationship between humans and nature is apparent. Where the previous example underlines the relationship between humans and animals, in this paragraph, we are sure of the relationship between humans and nature. As much as nature is natural and omnipresent, the effects that nature has and how it can be seen as omnipresent are there as well. This is why Akri can visualise certain elements (clouds, tree and sea) as animate and affecting him.

Interweaving Nature and Grotesque in Juriah's Song

So far, we have demonstrated the depiction of nature and grotesque characters in *JS*. The explications of the two topics are a precursor to lead in to the analysis in this section. The previous analyses serve as a general overview. Although the roles of nature and grotesque can stand in isolation and do not depend on each other to function, it is interesting to note that, in many parts of the text, the two support each other and impute the horror of the story.

Although in the previous section, we based our analysis on the definition of the grotesque based on a glossary meaning provided by Thompson (1972), and an American take on the grotesque by Sherwood, in order to illustrate the relationship between the grotesque and

nature, we now consider the definition of the grotesque proposed by Wolfgang Kayser. He defines it thus, “grotesqueness is constituted by a clashing contrast between form and content, the unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical, which is both ridiculous and terrifying” (qtd. in Thompson, 1972, p.16).

The grotesque generally proposes two meanings. First is the notion of abnormality and the distortion of humans, animals and plants, and second is anything that invokes horror and comic simultaneously. We have, concurrently, highlighted that the grotesque boasts diverging definitions. Thus, to utilise only one definition or concept in one analysis would restrict elaborate exploration of the usage of the grotesque.

Looking at the definition proposed by Kayser, it is important to note that the grotesque should treat both horror and comic at the same time. In building a frame for a definition of the grotesque, Philip Thompson emphasises that the assortment of the two elements is not necessarily proportionate, as in some stories, a comic text with a touch of horror, or vice versa, can still be called grotesque (Thompson, 1972, p. 21). Putting this frame onto the text, we can state that the grotesque in *JS* is a type of horror text with a touch of comedy.

What does it mean to invoke both terror and the comic at the same time? Hopkins suggests that in a written discourse, some elements are written in a gruesome ghastly way, purportedly to bring out the “funny” side of the story (1969, p.163). To put it in

other words, the grotesque should deliver both horrifying and terrifying elements, but the readers should also detect the ridiculousness of the situation and find themselves laughing because they are flustered, scared or nervous. Thompson explains the purpose and impact of the grotesque as follows:

..the possibility that our laughter at some kinds of the grotesque and the opposite response – disgust, horror, etc. – mixed with it, are both reactions to the physically cruel, abnormal or obscene: the possibility, in other words, that alongside our civilized response something deep within us, some area of our unconscious, some hidden but very much alive sadistic impulse makes us react to such things with unholy glee and barbaric delight [emphasis added]. Just how far one can legitimately pursue this aspect of the grotesque is doubtful, but we may note that, at the very least, the grotesque has a strong affinity with the physically abnormal [author's emphasis].(pp. 8-9)

The excerpt above explains how the grotesque induces both horror and comedy at the same time. In *JS*, Halim applies this concept of the grotesque through the element of nature. Although the application is made metaphorically, it serves as a unique and interesting approach to analysing the text. Halim utilises the elements of nature in

order to convey the grotesque in his novel. In this sense, nature acts as a catalyst to transport the horrifying and comedy.

On the night of their secret rendezvous in Juriah's house, they stirred from their sleep when they heard noises coming from Juriah's parents' room. Shocked and terrified, the two jump straight out of bed. They stood opposite each other at the end of the room, with Juriah crouching on the floor near the bed while Akri froze behind the door. In the awkward tense stillness, Akri found the atmosphere "unnaturally hollow and loud, like chickens on a chopping board, being beheaded" (*JS*, p. 20). Although the idea of seeing Juriah's father roaring and snarling at them is horrifying to both Akri and the readers, the metaphor used by Halim to describe Akri's observation is both horrifying and comical at the same time, thus wonderfully befitting the notion of the grotesque. And note that, Halim uses an animal – a chicken – in his metaphor. Although the whole picture is nerve-racking, whether by force or naturally, at least the crease of a smile – if not a chuckle or nervous laughter – will appear on their lips. In the midst of the chaos, equating the whole atmosphere to a beheaded chicken portrays goriness and elicits laughter at the same time.

To clarify further, we might say that the act of beheading a chicken does not stand as a funny thing. Rather it is ghastly, as blood will be spilt and the chicken will be limp and dead. Truly, there is nothing comical or funny about beheading a chicken, but to associate it with such an intense situation

is nonetheless ridiculous. It is mentioned in the text that it is “hollow and loud”. Imagine a chicken howling for survival on its deathbed in the absolute stillness of the night. It might arouse sympathy in some people but to most, an imaginary chicken struggling and bellicose is undoubtedly a funny image. Therefore, in this situation, we claim that should the readers be sensitive to the narration, they could not avoid at least drawing a nervous laugh on reading this particular section. From this perspective, the textual evidence befits the framework of the grotesque proposed by Kayser, who expounds that animals and plants are abundantly manipulated in enhancing the grotesque. Other than the symbolic appearance of an animal, real animals also appear recurrently in the grotesque:

...points to unnatural fusion of organic realms concretized in this ghostly creature [Kayser exemplifies a bat]. And strange habits complement its strange appearance ... The plant would, too, furnish numerous motifs, and not only for the ornamental grotesque. The inextricable tangle of the jungle with its ominous vitality, in which nature itself seems to have erased the difference between plants and animals, is so grotesque that no explanation is needed. The enlarging microscope or a glance into otherwise hidden organic realms reveals grotesque sceneries as well (Kayser, 1963, p. 183).

To give another example, consider this sentence: “He fell like a tree cut down” (*JS*, p. 55). During his sojourn in the seaside village, Akri lived in a humble house with Pak Mansor and Mak Lijah (the couple have lived in the village for many years). One afternoon, Akri followed Pak Mansur to prayer in the village mosque. It is one of their regular visits to the mosque, except that it was an unfortunate day. As the village men were preparing for the prayers, a crazy man barged into the mosque with a *parang* held firmly in his hand. As he was running amok, the man lashed out randomly with his weapon, and Pak Mansur tried his best to save his fellow villagers from being killed, unaware of the crazy man’s sudden attack that was directed at him. It was already too late when he realized that the *parang* was now implanted in his head. The slashing produced a loud dull cracking sound, and to Akri’s horror, he witnessed Pak Mansur’s death. He watched how Pak Mansur stopped breathing as he “fell down like a tree cut down” (*JS*, p. 55). In this context, the word “fell” indicates to fall down dead.

Although the event evokes horror, shock, sadness and sympathy in the reader, since Pak Mansur died unexpectedly and shockingly, the metaphor used once again induces both horror and comedy in its usage of nature. In this case, it is a tree. The scenario in which Pak Mansur was attacked with an axe should only be gruesome and fearful, but because it happened so suddenly and unexpectedly, it left the readers in a shocking aftermath. As the crazy man attacked Pak Mansur swiftly and casually,

he was equated with a tree being felled. Consider an inanimate tree, stiff and still and accepting its demise with little to do but fall down helplessly. This grotesque effect demonstrates what Thompson validates as the grotesque “shock-effect”, which is used to “bewilder and disorient”, jolt the reader out of his “accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective” (1972, p.58).

CONCLUSION

The elements of the grotesque and nature are abundant and evident in *JS*. For the grotesque concept, Thompson’s general definition is first applied to provide an overview of the topic of the grotesque. As we delved further into the notion of the grotesque, the definition proposed by Wolfgang Kayser is closely referred to. In general, the grotesque is an element that celebrates the bizarreness and abnormality of a thing, a strange situation and physical deformity, and Kayser’s notion of the grotesque is inclusive of the idea of grotesque as both comic and horrifying. The role, presence and effects of the grotesque are displayed through the character of Juriah in *JS* (2008).

As for nature, it is undoubtedly important in enhancing the horror elements and enlivening the mood of the story. On the one hand, the role and presence of nature are more apparent through the eyes of another character, the protagonist, Akri. Although Akri fled to a rural spot in the hope of finding tranquillity, he found that the elements of nature surround him as

mocking and despising him. Therefore, Akri’s perception was that he only received negative vibes from the nature. Hence, the elements of nature, such as trees, sea and waves, and other animals, are seen as oppressive to him.

Neither element is independent of the other, the two can be seen mutually helping each other to enrich the narration. The grotesque depicts “the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response” (Thompson, 1972, p. 27), and with nature as a working agent, we postulate that a grotesque effect is optimally achieved, “In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation” (Kayser, p. 188). In this context, the application of the grotesque and nature are almost equal; however, when the two elements are combined, the grotesque overrules nature. However, nature acts as a facilitator, delivering a more complicated definition of the grotesque as the element that evokes both the horrifying and the comic.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, H. Y., & Hashim, R. S. (2015). Greening of Resistance in Arabic Poetry: An Ecocritical Interpretation of Selected Arabic Poems. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 21(1), 13-22.
- Baldick, C. (1990). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hopkins, R. (1969). The Function of Grotesque in “Humphry Clinker”. *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 32(2), 163-177.

- Howarth, W. (1996). Some Principles of Ecocriticism. In H. Fromm & C. Glotfelty (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 69–91). Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Kayser, W. (1963). *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (U. Weisstein Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lim, J. (2005). *Our Supernatural Skyline between Gods and Ghosts*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited.
- Sedehi, K. T., & Yahya, W. R. W. (2015). Journey through Nature and Self: The Melancholic Narrator in Atwood's *Surfacing*. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 23(1), 247-252.
- Thompson, P. (1972). *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.
- Tunku Halim. (1997). *Dark Demon Rising*. Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications.
- Windstedt, R. (1982). *The Malay Magician*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

