



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***NATURE AND THE GROTESQUE IN TUNKU HALIM'S DARK DEMON
RISING AND JURIAH'S SONG***

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By

NUR FATIN SYUHADA BT AHMAD JAFNI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

December 2015

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DEDICATION

To my parents,
Ahmad Jafni bin Abdul Ghani
and
Kasma bt Abdul Khalid



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

NATURE AND THE GROTESQUE IN TUNKU HALIM'S *DARK DEMON RISING* AND *JURIAH'S SONG*

By

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December 2015

Chair: Associate Prof. Wan Roselezam binti Wan Yahya, PhD
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Horror novels often celebrate gore, darkness, madness and emotional repression as the central themes to invoke terror and horror in readers. In novels written by Malaysian author Tunku Halim, *Dark Demon Rising* (1997) and *Juriah's Song* (2008) the elements of grotesque and nature provide the impetus and the plot, thus invoking horror. Throughout both novels, grotesque elements and imagery are woven into narrative to provide the motif of horror. Apart from the evident elements of grotesque, nature as a backdrop is also significant, as both novels are set in rural villages in the east coast of Malaysia and the metropolis of Kuala Lumpur. The grotesque and nature are juxtaposed as main elements in these novels. Both elements are omnipresent and pivotal in developing the plot. Noting the relationship between the two elements, this research first highlight the relationship between the grotesque and nature as an aesthetical mode in the selected novels; and secondly, explore the relationship between the grotesque and nature through the portrayal of the human-nature interconnectedness in the selected novels. This research applies the concepts of ecocriticism and grotesque. Ecocriticism provides sufficient explanation on the relationship between human and the natural world. The concept of grotesque by Wolfgang Kayser provides a solid framework in highlighting and exploring the texts. The application of these concepts will then demonstrate that apart from imagery, the role of nature is also evident in the relationship between human and nature. With the establishment of the grotesque and nature as an aesthetical mode, the relationship between the two is depicted through Kayser's notion of the grotesque as a creative process. It has been revealed that the aesthetical grotesque is portrayed through the monstrous form and the transgression and disharmony. Apart from that, the interrelationship between nature and the grotesque is also portrayed under Kayser's notion of the grotesque reception. Pertaining to this notion, the interconnectedness is unveiled through the comic/horror and attractive/repulsive dualities. The finding concludes that the element of nature depicts the grotesque process and reception via the characters' demeanor, especially the protagonists' emotions, perceptions and attitude.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**ALAM SEMULAJADI DAN GROTESQUE DALAM DARK DEMON RISING
DAN JURIAH'S SONG OLEH TUNKU HALIM**

Oleh

NUR FATIN SYUHADA BT AHMAD JAFNI

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Novel cerita seram seringkali menampilkan elemen – elemen mengerikan, kegelapan, kegilaan, dan tekanan emosi sebagai tema utama bagi menyerlahkan lagi unsur – unsur seram dan menakutkan. Dalam dua novel yang dikarang oleh penulis Malaysia, *Dark Demon Rising* (1997) dan *Juriah's Song* (2008), elemen – elemen *grotesque* dan alam semulajadi adalah faktor utama menyumbang kepada perkembangan plot dan mencetuskan elemen seram. Dalam novel – novel tersebut, terdapat banyak naratif yang mengandungi elemen *grotesque* dimana penggunaan elemen tersebut telah menjadi sumber utama dalam menyampaikan unsur seram. Selain daripada penggunaan elemen *grotesque* yang nyata, kehadiran unsur – unsur alam semulajadi juga nyata dalam novel – novel tersebut. Khususnya apabila novel – novel tersebut berlatarbelakangkan kawasan luar bandar seperti di Pantai Timur Malaysia dan juga bandar besar Kuala Lumpur. Elemen *grotesque* dan alam semulajadi juga ditampilkan sebagai unsur penting didalam novel – novel tersebut. Kehadiran unsur – unsur *grotesque* dan alam semulajadi yang nyata telah membangunkan naratif secara berasingan dan juga secara bersama. Disebabkan terdapat hubungkait antara keduanya, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara *grotesque* dan alam semulajadi melalui mod estetik. Selain itu, kajian ini juga mengkaji hubungan antara *grotesque* dan alam semulajadi melalui kesalingan perhubungan antara manusia dan alam semulajadi. Teori *ecocriticism* digunakan bagi menyediakan penjelasan yang lengkap dalam menerangkan hubungan antara manusia dan alam sekelilingnya. Manakala, konsep *grotesque* oleh Wolfgang Kayser digunakan bagi tujuan menyediakan rangka yang padat dalam menerangkan konsep yang digunakan dalam analisis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa peranan alam semulajadi bukanlah hanya sebagai komponen sastera, tetapi mempamerkan hubungan yang lebih jitu dalam interaksi antara manusia dan alam semulajadi. Elemen *grotesque* sebagai komik dan yang menyeramkan dan yang menarik dan menjelikkan juga terpamer dalam proses penerimaan *grotesque*. Hasil dapatan dari kajian ini membuktikan bahawa melalui elemen alam semulajadi, proses *grotesque* dan penerimaannya dizahirkan melalui perilaku watak – watak didalam novel – novel tersebut, khasnya melalui emosi, penerimaan dan sikap protagonis.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I introduce the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study. I also describe the structure of this thesis and introduce the texts used for the analysis. Some key terms that are frequently used throughout the thesis are briefly defined in the definition of key terms section.

1.1 Background of the study

Horror story is a notable example of popular and most celebrated genre in fiction writing. Horror encompasses various themes such as ghost stories, supernatural fictions, crime fictions, and many more. Dating back to the Romantic and Victorian period, the implementation of the horror in fictions is massive. It is worth noting from *Dracula*, "The Cask of Amontillado", "The Fall of the House of Usher", *Sherlock Holmes*, *Wuthering Heights*, to *A Christmas Carol*, these dark tales invoke horror effects through themes of the bizarre, blood and gore propagated by the concept known as the grotesque. The grotesque is the impetus and undoubtedly a prominent feature in horror fictions. Though the grotesque itself is a concept that recently burst into prominence in art and literature, it seems appropriate to briefly explain how the grotesque became a solid genre of its own in literature.

As the history of the grotesque covers the duration of a few hundred years back, I would like to briefly touch on how the grotesque was strongly related to gothic literature. Looking back at the traditional conventions and common features in gothic fictions, the most centralized themes in gothic novels are darkness, gore and grotesque elements, and the presence of the Undead¹ creatures or supernatural entities. The gothic-ness is brought to light in order to convey the horror faced by the characters in such works or to portray the horror itself. The earlier Gothic fictions specifically refer to a period of time where Gothic motifs allied to architecture and arts. Nonetheless, as Gothicism expands, it can be traced to the tropes of fiction and literature. Thompson lists out seven recurrent themes that often dwell within Gothic works; 1) the appearance of the supernatural, 2) the psychology of horror and/or terror, 3) the poetics of the sublime, 4) a sense of mystery and dread, 5) the appealing hero/villain, 6) the distressed heroine, and 7) strong moral closure (13).

Points 1), 2), and 4), share similar characteristics to the grotesque. For example, in portraying the supernatural, the horror and terror and the dreadful, grotesque characters like monsters and beasts are used in fiction. In this sense, the grotesque is said to be a mode of gothic writing. However, as the grotesque itself has evolved into something bigger and more prominent, studies could solely focus on the grotesque elements, which would enable the grotesque to represent a concept and genre by itself. Gothic fiction is not restricted to only those novels set in the Romantic and Victorian era. It

has now lent itself to contemporary novels and popular fictions as well. As long as the style of narration in novels evokes resemblance to Gothic convention or has the same effect on readers as does Gothic fiction, it will be considered as one. Therefore, scholars have pointed out that these Gothic tropes are not only found in Western contemporary novels, but in Asian texts as well. In Asian texts, Gothicism is embodied in the supernatural elements. While Western Gothic is a heady mix of madness, the horrifying, and monsters, Asian Gothic slants on primitive animism beliefs. The supernatural materializes in monstrous form or spirit form or both. That is where the role of nature in Asian Gothic novels arises.

As mentioned earlier, Asian societies have held strongly to animism beliefs for centuries. They believe that the earth and all elements of nature possess spirits. Thus, onto those spirits they submit themselves since they believe that humans should not upset the forests, the animals and other unseen entities. Hence the use of spirits, black magic and so forth is common in Asian Gothic novels. The affiliation between nature and Gothic fiction has therefore prompted this research. The physical world and everything around it that is not made by man, and exclusive of human is what constitutes nature: hence these elements of nature and spiritual entities are all pervasive. Thus, the portrayal of nature is ubiquitous in dramas, theatre, novels, short stories and poems.

Nature writing was foregrounded in the 18th to the 19th centuries, with Henry David Thoreau dubbed as the forefather of nature writing. Including Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Burroughs and Edward Abbey are among the prominent American writers of nature. Although nature writing initially concerned environmental issues and non-fictional prose, modern writers like Margaret Atwood, employ the concepts of nature, environment and landscape into fiction writing.

However, the subject of nature is not exclusive to nature/environment-devoted texts. Since nature is omnipresent, the widespread narrations of nature and environment are available in all kinds of prose genres. Most commonly, nature writing abounds in fiction concerning environmental issues, ecological concern, dystopian/utopian society and travel writing. Nature is narrated in ways which express, either destruction unleashed by humans or ways to preserve mother earth (science fiction such as Claire Datnow's *The Lone Tree*, 2009), to show humane values through man's relationship with animals (E.B White's *Charlotte Web*, 1952), or displaying how the living lives in harmony in the presence of scenic surroundings (J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, 1937). Although it is easier to determine the presence of nature in such novels, nature can be found in other types of fiction as well. The presence of nature is equally important in horror fiction, be it as a mere backdrop or as an impetus to instil horror/terror in the minds of readers.

It has been mentioned earlier (page 3) that in Asian Gothic texts, the presence of supernatural elements is the contributing factor in establishing the connection between nature and gothic. This connection is most obvious in the novels by Tunku Halim (more on the author in page 14). In the novels, Gothic motifs and the grotesque elements are prominent and striking. Perhaps, the grotesque concept is manipulated by

the author as a mode in conveying the dark Gothic atmosphere in his novels, but in this research, I explicate the grotesque elements in the novels without associating it with the Gothic. The definitions of grotesque, its application and its relationship with nature in the selected texts will be explained in the later section in this thesis.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Studies on Gothic in an Asian context are scarce. This subject is in need of more research and analysis for further scholarship. However, there is a growing interest in the study of Asian Gothic, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of research papers on this subject. Nonetheless, previous research focuses mainly on Gothic traditions in Japanese, Korean and Chinese cultures through anime and films (Kroger & Anderson, 2013; Ng, 2008). In Malaysian texts, the term Asian Gothic² is coined when the Gothic trope is traceable. Although the number of studies on Asian Gothic is growing, the grotesque concept in Asian texts is still a relatively unexplored area. This proves that there is a huge gap in the study of Asian Gothic and the grotesque.

In studies pertaining to Malaysian Literature in English, researchers' attentions are mainly concentrated on the works by renowned Malaysian authors such as K.S Maniam, Shirley Lim, Huzir Sulaiman, and Che Husna Azhari. However, in the recent years, the field of Malaysian literature in English has welcomed more writers, especially since the establishment of the Fixi Novo Books (a label under Buku Fixi publishing house). Fixi Novo publishes fictions centralised on the urban and contemporary issues in Malaysian settings such as political turmoil, family disputes, crime thriller, noirs, black magic and many more. Noted authors include Rozlan Mohd Noor, Hadi M. Nor, Megat Ishak, Brian Gomez and Tunku Halim. Among this later generation of writers, Tunku Halim is famous for his narratives of the horror, supernatural, and haunting tales. Although dubbed as Malaysia's Stephen King³, very few studies have been done on Tunku Halim's work. The complete oeuvre of Tunku Halim, comprising novels, novella and short stories centralizing on horror themes, social issues, customs, and love, calls for critical and creative analysis and study.

On the other hand, ecocriticism has been gaining a steady and growing magnitude in literary works. Glotfelty comments in the prologue of the book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, that interdisciplinary studies among literary, ecological, and other fields such as art history, philosophy, and history, among others, are interrelated (xvii - xix). Ecocriticism is a relatively fresh field of study, one that is not restricted to a rigid set of rules. Therefore, aspiring researchers should exercise flexibility by applying ecocriticism to other genres apart from environment-based studies. Scott Slovic also emphasises that the application of ecocriticism theory should not be solely restricted to environment-based texts. Any plausible style of scholarship becomes a form of ecocriticism if it is functional to certain kinds of literary works (Slovic 160). A close and critical reading of other genres would reveal traces of ecocritical elements in them. In accordance to what Glotfelty says, there is room for creative exploitation of studies on ecocriticism. Therefore this research can be looked at as an attempt to study the relationship between nature and the grotesque.

This would require the merging of ecocriticism with the horror fiction by Malaysian author, Tunku Halim in order to study the hybrid of nature and the grotesque. There has been a general lack in the application of ecocriticism in Asian/Malaysian texts. Previous research on ecocriticism in Malaysian texts yields nature imagery in Malaysian poems and postcolonial novels (Zainor Izat Zainal and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, 2012; Hamoud Yahya Ahmad and Ruzy Suliza Ibrahim, 2013); or other concepts such as ‘sense of belonging’ and ‘notions of home’ (Mohammad Ewan Awang and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, 2010). It is befitting to study the relationship of nature and grotesque in horror novels, since apart from the constant imagery and active involvement of nature, the element of grotesque is also prominent and ubiquitous.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Nature plays a big role in Tunku Halim’s novels; it is omnipresent, and its constituents play varied roles to invoke horror. Hence, this research aims to study the interplay between nature and horror. The importance of nature and the grotesque and their roles in the unfolding of events in both the selected novels, need to be analysed through what Kayser coined as the ‘creative processes’ of grotesque. These ‘creative processes’ and the concept of ‘grotesque reception’ will be introduced in detail in subchapter 3.2.1 (page 51) and subchapter 3.2.2 (page 53) respectively. The analysis also involves highlighting the impact of nature on the character’s (especially the protagonist’s) perception towards his surroundings, emotions and attitude. Principally I aim to achieve the following objectives through this research:

1. To highlight the relationship between the grotesque and nature as an aesthetical mode in the selected novels; and
2. To explore the relationship between the grotesque and nature through the portrayal of the human-nature interconnectedness in the selected novels

This research will then seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How are grotesque and nature depicted in the selected novels as an aesthetical mode?
2. How are grotesque and nature represented in the selected novels through the portrayal of the human-nature interconnectedness?

1.4 Conceptual framework

For the purpose of analysing the selected texts, the role and presence of nature are highlighted specifically within its connection to the grotesque. The relationship between the grotesque and nature is represented as follows:

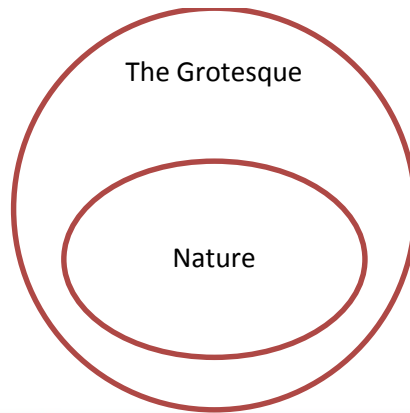


Figure 1 : The Grotesque and Nature

The grotesque in literature has been made popular through its appearance in Gothic fictions. There are many elements and themes that fall under Gothicism. Gothic celebrates works in which both terror and horror is its major elements (Northey, qtd. in Ferns 185). The grotesque therefore, turns out to be one of the most complex and celebrated modes of Gothicism and has gradually, spawned its own genre in twentieth-century literature (Northey, qtd. in Ferns 185). In defining the grotesque in gothic, Novak identified two problems: 1) the fact that most gothic pieces are purely fiction, and 2) whether the purpose of grotesque is to instil fear by means of supernatural creatures or is the centralizing theme of fear itself (53).

The concept of grotesque, historically and generally, is defined as consisting of elements that provide a “gruesome or horrifying content and the comic manner in which it is presented.” (Thomson 2). However, since it has been decades since the first study of the grotesque was introduced, its concept and definition have now expanded. In *A Glossary of Literary Gothic Terms*, the term grotesque applies to mutated characters, plants and/or animals. This mutation transforms the normal features and/or behaviours into veritable extremes that are meant to be frightening and/or disturbingly comic. Tracing its meaning back to its origins, the grotesque refers to the oddly shaped ornaments found within Roman dwellings, or grottoes, during the first century (Thompson 13).

From the standpoint of art and literature, the grotesque is celebrated in the dimension of intense and exaggerated emotions and intense and exaggerated forms (Fingesten 419). The utilization of the grotesque, as an exaggerated emotion and form, acts as a symbol, and is conducive to evoke “the numinous, the uncanny or the horrible” (Fingesten 419). Fingesten also claimed that in the strictest sense, “one may say classic, sense, imaginary hybrid creatures were called grotesque, some of which were fearful and dangerous, some destructive, others benign creations of the fantasy” (420). In the arts, the grotesque is expressed through the explicit imagery of distortion and monstrosity whereas in text or literature, the grotesque evokes feelings of horror and disgust, shock, revulsion and terror (Baker 125).

This thesis also employs a sub concept of ecocriticism alongside the aforementioned grotesque concept. Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty xvii). Ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, thereby affecting it and is affected by it. With its establishment, ecocriticism was expected to commence literature to take an effort in connecting the literary pieces to the issues of today's environmental crisis (Oppermann 31).

Although ecocriticism is defined as the study of the relationship between human and nature or ecology and responds to global ecological issues which highlight important environmental crises, this alone, cannot possibly be the sole underlying concept in ecocriticism (Oppermann 31). Instead, it concerns the relationship between nature (natural landscape) and the environment (landscape both natural and urban) (Oppermann 31). In summation, ecocriticism analyses how literature interacts with the entire ecosphere (Oppermann 31).

Ecocriticism as a field of study has been gaining steady momentum in the last 30 years. Even its various concepts and applications have expanded accordingly. The word ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978 – and he defined it as the appliance of “ecology and ecological concepts” to the literary fields (qtd. in Glotfelty, xx). Glotfelty however emphasised that Rueckert's definition is “more restrictive than the one proposed in this anthology, which includes all possible relations between literature and physical world” (xx). Which means, ecocriticism ought to be “suggestive and open” (Glotfelty xxii).

Nevertheless, in order to prevent any confusion, Glotfelty refers to Elaine Showalter's 'model of development stages of feminist criticism' as an effort to illustrate the analogous phases in ecocriticism.

The first stage...[analogous] efforts in ecocriticism study how nature is represented in literature. Again, consciousness raising results when stereotypes are identified....and when absences are noticed: where is the natural world in this text?...Showalter's second stage. In ecocriticism, similar efforts are being made to recuperate the hitherto neglected genre of nature writing... Nature writing boasts a rich past, a vibrant present, and a promising future, and ecocritics draw from any number of existing critical theories – psychoanalytic, new critical, feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive – in the interests of understanding and promoting this body of literature...Another effort to promulgate environmentally enlightened works examines mainstream genres, identifying fiction and poetry writers whose works manifests ecological awareness.... But the horizon of possibilities remains suggestively open. (Glotfelty xxii)

By closely following the structure suggested by Glotfelty, the selected texts will be analysed using the ecocriticism concept illustrated by her, as per the following guidelines: 1) how nature is represented in literature, and 2) how ecocriticism will provide a different reading of literature.

1.5 Working Definition

Figure 2 below is a summary of the definitions of the grotesque proposed by different theorists as previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. To summarise, the grotesque materialises when an action or character embodies extreme unnaturalness and distortion while inducing ambivalent reactions of disgust/glee, horror/comic, and/or ugly/pretty.

The Grotesque	Wolfgang Kayser: the estranged world, a play with the absurd, and the attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world
	Mikhail Bakhtin: Excessive bodily excess and the carnival
	Geoffrey Galt Harpham: a constant clash between the attractive/repulsive
	Frances K. Barasch: The disgusting undertoned by the comedy and humour
	Michael Steig: Provocative characters that aggravate the regressive and progressive
	Arthur Clayborough: depends on the deliberative intentions and involuntary reactions to the conjured situations
	Philip Thomson: The comic and monstrous, invoking offensive glee and having strong connection to the physically abnormal

Figure 2 : Summary of the definition of the Grotesque

For this research, the grotesque revolves around any action or character defined by exaggerated or unnatural motifs which prompts simultaneous reactions of amusement/disgust, horror/comic, and repulsion/attraction. As this concept adjoins nature, the grotesque elements intertwine with the elements of nature. As the two concepts are bridged, the analysis will partake and explore the relationship between the grotesque and nature as proposed in the research objectives. Therefore, the working definition of the grotesque is the unification of an action or character with nature elements which are emblazoned by exaggeration or unnaturalness, and which prompt simultaneous reactions of amusement/disgust, horror/comic, and repulsion/attraction.

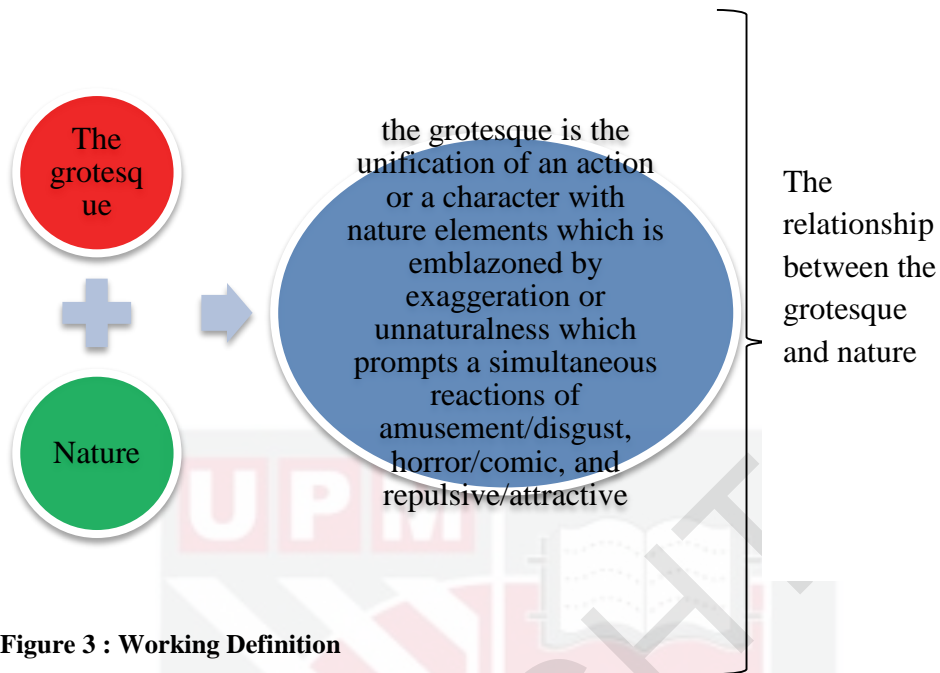
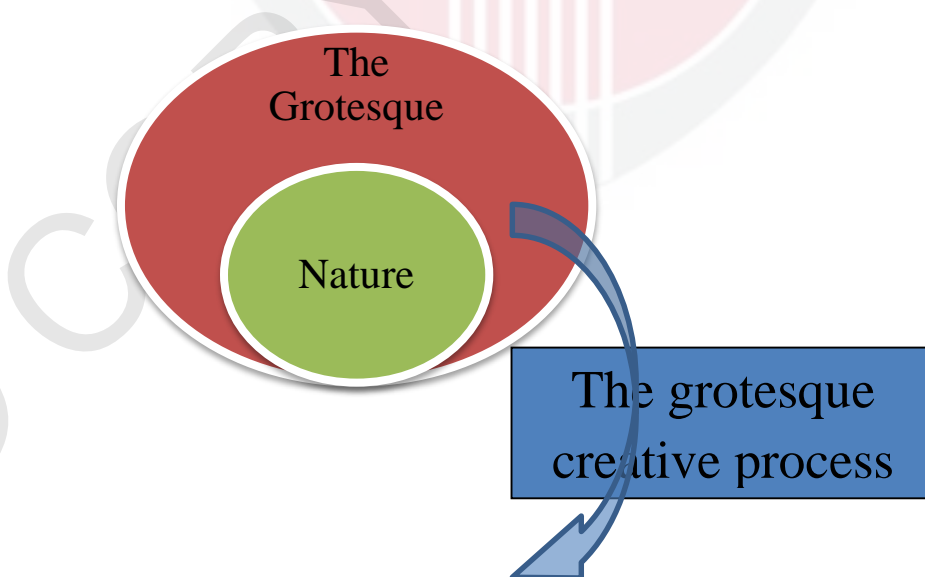


Figure 3 : Working Definition

The objectives of the research, seek to 1) highlight the relationship between the grotesque and nature as an aesthetical mode in the selected novels, and 2) to explore the relationship between the grotesque and nature through the portrayal of the human-nature interconnectedness in the selected novels. Based on the grotesque realms highlighted by Kayser, which are the creative process and the reception, the analysis of this research is twofold; each to undertake each realm and provide the answers to the research questions. The conceptual framework of this research can be summarized as follows:



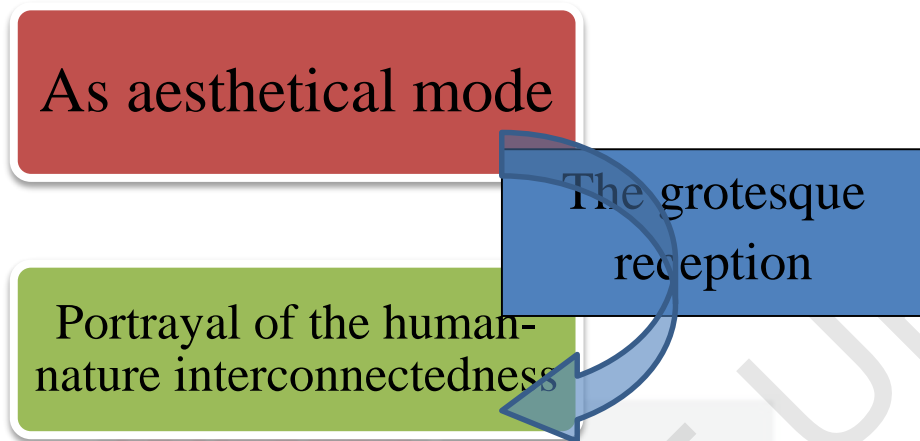


Figure 4 : Summary of Conceptual Framework

1.6 Significance of the study

Over the decades, Gothic had been strongly associated with western cultures to the extent that it had almost become exclusively western. In the book *“Modern Art and The Grotesque”*, Frances S. Connelly emphasises that the grotesque is “a peculiarly western term” as historically the word could be traced back to the Renaissance. During the Renaissance the grotesque simply meant “estranged world”, whereas in the modern era, it is used to portray the so-called “primitive” imagery (6). However, with the literary world ever expanding, we see the growth of fresh ideas. Although Connelly further explained that the application of the grotesque to western arts came about because its meanings are culturally specific to the West (6), the definition of grotesque is wide, generous and flexible.

Thus, the attempts to apply the concept of grotesque in Asian texts can be seen as an innovative and unique way to universalise its. In tandem with the growing research on Global gothic⁴ (past researches on postcolonial Asian gothic literature by Wagner (2008), Thompson (2008); Asian American gothic literature by Soler (2008); Mejia-LaPerle (2008)), this study attempts to add more literature into the field of the study. As pointed out earlier, the study on the grotesque in an Asian context is relatively unexplored. By approaching the grotesque from the perspective of ecocriticism, this research will thus provide a different reading on Malaysian literature. Therefore, as the study on ecocriticism gains momentum, research on Asian Gothic will help to contribute towards broadening research on various Malaysian texts. Additionally, this research will provide a stable foundation for other interdisciplinary studies involving ecocriticism. Glotfelty (xvii – xix) encourages the sprouting “hybrid” researches relating to ecocriticism and other fields of literary studies (qtd. in Dobrin & Kidd 2). Therefore, the combination of ecocriticism and the grotesque, the two pillars on which this research is based, will be a unique reading. In concordance to research objectives, this research will prove useful to future researchers, teachers and students who are

interested in studying ecocriticism through a different lens, and are keen on applying an acclaimed Western concept into Eastern literature studies.

1.7 Scope and limitations

Although this research attempts to apply the concept of grotesque in the Asian context, this study will focus only on texts written by Malaysian author, Tunku Halim. Although Asian nations are rich in culture and tradition, the scope of this study will only encompass Malaysian Malay culture. In the pool of Malaysian writers, this research studies the novels written by a horror fictions writer, Tunku Halim. While all of Tunku Halim's short stories and novels are horror based, this study analyses only two of his works: *Dark Demon Rising* (1997) and *Juriah's Song* (2008).

While the aim of this study is to delve into the nature/grotesque relationship, it should be noted that the grotesque is a much older and intricate concept than ecocriticism, hence, it would naturally entail more in-depth study and clarification. In defining the term grotesque, luminaries in the fields of art and literature, from Baudelaire, Ruskin, Bakhtin, to Freud and Kristeva, have all reinterpreted and redefined the grotesque tradition respectively (Connelly 1). Here again, this study will utilise the grotesque definition by Wolfgang Kayser with supporting definitions, where applicable, by Thomson, Steig and Harpham. In its most traditional convention, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glottfely xvii). However, for analysis purposes, I will utilise the concept of nature's relationship with her surroundings. In this aspect, I will bridge the role of nature to the grotesque to show how they support and drive the plot of the stories.

1.8 Justification of selected texts

Tunku Halim is a Malaysian who has authored over 19 books: some of his non-fiction works include *Tunku Abdullah: A Passion for Life* (1998), *The New Golf Paradigm* (2001), and his children book series *A Children History of Malaysia* (2003) and *History of Malaysia: A Children's Encyclopedia* (2009). Although he has written several other genres, he is mostly known as a horror writer. His recent novels *Horror Stories* (2014), *Last Breath* (2015) and *A Malaysian Restaurant in London* (2015) are listed under local bestsellers throughout the year. His horror writings have received international recognition: *Dark Demon Rising* (1997) was nominated for International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and the short story "This Page is Left Intentionally Blank" from his collection of short stories *BloodHaze: 15 Chilling Tales* (1999) won the Fellowship of Australian Writers prize. In addition to that, *Vermillion Eye* (2000) was used as a study text in National University of Singapore's Language and Literature course and his writing has also been included in a collection of stories of horror, fantasy, gothic and thriller. "Keramat" is featured as the horror story from Asia in the anthology *Exotic Gothic 3: Strange Visitation* (2009) by Daniel Olson.

Among Malaysian writers, Tunku Halim is known as the author of horror stories. It is thus befitting that two of his chosen novels will provide the text towards analysing the elements of nature and the grotesque in Malaysian horror stories. Among his oeuvre, I choose *Dark Demon Rising* and *Juriah's Song* as these two novels centralises on the practice of witch doctor, the appearance of female demons/ghosts and the novels have the same demographic settings; the rural village of the east coast Malaysia and the urban city of Kuala Lumpur. *Dark Demon Rising* has been recognised globally through the growing body of gothic studies known as Global Gothic. Glennis Byron specifies that *Dark Demon Rising* embodies the process of globalization when “demons of folklore are revived by the breakdown of traditional customs and belief and take on horrific contemporary form” (372). Tunku Halim is a renowned Malaysian author of horror stories that incorporate gothic into local contexts and display the social and political horrors, abuse of power, discrimination and others (Ancuta 430). As the gothic elements in Tunku Halim’s writings commensurate with local folklore, the elements of the supernatural and suspense are evident.

1.9 Definition of key terms

Gothic novels or Gothic romance are stories of terror or suspense that are usually set against the backdrop of old, dark and gloomy castles or monasteries (hence the term ‘Gothic’ was initially associated with medieval architecture and in the 18th Century it was related to superstition). With the emergence of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764), the number of Gothic novels had swelled in Britain between the period 1790 to 1820. Ann Radcliff’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) not only shot her to fame, but had set the path for many others to write in like fashion. While Ann Radcliff was careful in her usage of supernatural occurrences in her novels, other writers like M.G Lewis utilized the appearance of ghosts and demons alongside cruelty and horror in *The Monk* (1796) (Baldick 92). However, Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) ridiculed such conventions and set the vogue for historical novels, which contributed to the new emotional climate of Romanticism. Many emerging novels have since deviated from medieval settings, but the usage of the comparably sinister, grotesque, claustrophobic atmosphere is classified as Gothic. Example of famous works include Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and several important American pieces by Poe and Faulkner. A popular, modern variety of women’s romance that portray troubled heroines such as in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938) are also referred to as Gothic (Baldick, 92).

Horror fiction became popular with the publication of Stephen King’s *Carrie* (1974). However, classics like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories, Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) have long been considered as horror novels too. The Horror Writers Association (HWA) claims that there are no clear boundaries outlining the classification of horror fiction. Novels like Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones* (2002) can invoke as much horror as Stephen King’s *Salem’s Lot* (1975). Instead of categorizing horror as fiction, Douglas Winter (1982) claims that “horror is not a genre, like the mystery or science fiction or the western. It is not a kind of fiction, meant to be confined to the ghetto of a special shelf in libraries or bookstores. Horror is an emotion.” Robert McCammon (1986) explains that “horror fiction can be a guide through a nightmare world, entered freely and by the reader’s

will. And since horror can be many, many things and go in many, many directions, which guided nightmare ride can shock, educate, illuminate, threaten, shriek, and whisper before it lets the readers loose.”

Monstrosity is defined as the state of being abnormal and generally unsightly, unpleasantly wrong, or physically gross fusion of animal and distorted human (Oxford dictionary).

Aesthetics is a discipline concerning nature and appreciation of beauty (Oxford dictionary).

Nature is defined as the **phenomena** of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the **landscape**, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to **humans** or human **creations** (Oxford dictionary). With regards to this thesis, I shall also include the weather, insects, sea, river, human, and more.

1.10 Conclusion

As the ecocritical approach is flexible in the sense that it accepts various innovative concepts, its application is not restricted solely to environment or nature writing; the interdisciplinary studies between ecocriticism and other fields, have influenced this research. This researcher aspires to contribute more knowledge into the study of nature and grotesque, by studying how nature is depicted through its relationship with grotesque elements in horror novels.

¹ Undead creatures refer to immortal creatures such as vampire and werewolf (Thompson 1).

² In the book *Asian Gothic*, editor Andrew Ng asserts that Asian gothic acknowledges the rich Gothic tradition in Asian narratives that deal with themes of the fantastic, the macabre, and the spectral.

³ Tunku Halim is dubbed as Malaysia's Stephen King by renowned Malaysian writer and filmmaker Amir Muhammad (source The Star article dated April 29, 2007 by Daphne Lee)

⁴ Global gothic: Glennis Byron (The Global Gothic Group) defines that the studies on Global Gothic covers but is not limited to 1) the national and cultural forms and contexts of gothic, and 2) global or transnational or transcultural forms and contexts of Gothic

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Nur Fatin Syuhada Ahmad Jafni completed her Bachelor of Arts in English Language from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia in July 2013. Her B.A. project paper was entitled “The Influence of Context on the Understanding of Gradable Adjectives among Malay-English Bilingual Adults and Children”. She is currently doing her Masters of Arts in English Literature in UPM. She also went for a research attachment program in Plymouth University, Devon, United Kingdom from March to April 2015. Her major interests are in the studies on the literature of the grotesque, Asian literature, Gothic literature, Literature and Environment, and Children’s literature in English.



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Jafni, Nur Fatin Syuhada Ahmad, and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya. "Exploring the Sense of Belonging and the Notion of Home in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*." *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 27 (2014): 41-50.

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Conference Attended:

1. "Home is Where the Heart is: Exploring the Sense of Belonging in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eyes*" at 8th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MICOLLAC 2014), Penang, Malaysia. August 2014.
2. "Dissecting the Elements of Nature and Grotesque in Tunku Halim's *Juriah's Song*" at National Research & Innovation Conference for Graduate Students in Social Sciences 2014 (GS-NRIC2014), Port Dickson, Malaysia. November 2014.



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