

# **HUMOR AND HORROR**

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**HUMOR AND HORROR IN LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

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# SUPERNATURALISM IN GOTHIC AND MAGICAL REALISM WORKS

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## Abstract

Supernaturalism may be one of the oldest substance comes along with the literary products. Many opinions and debates have also emerged following every discussion of this term. The undeniable fact is that supernaturalism has always been an interesting substance in literary products composing, from the age of oral literature to the present time, when people has so many styles and genres. It shows that supernaturalism is still an interesting topic to explore in literature. In English speaking world of literature, a certain era had "celebrated" supernaturalism. It was the gothic era, when horror and thrilling fictions are enjoyed so much by the society. However, when the era changed, and gothic faded, supernaturalism has not also faded. In end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when postmodern fictions are the warmest topics of discussions, supernaturalism has also emerged, particularly in magical realism narratives. This research is aimed to compare the supernaturalism in both genre. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* has been chosen as the representation from each era. Poe is acknowledged as one of the most outstanding gothic writer by critics and scholars as pioneers, and so is Tony Morrison as an influencing magical realism novelist in English speaking countries. Both are analyzed using qualitative descriptive approach and viewed from the perspective of narratology. This research finds that supernatural substances exist in both literature genres, but in different narrative mode and used for different functions. Further researches are needed because magical realism has also developed in many kinds of styles and appeared in many languages.

**Keywords:** Supernaturalism, Gothic, Magical Realism, naratology

## Abstrak

Supernaturalisme mungkin merupakan salah satu elemen tertua yang menyertai produk sastra. Banyak pendapat dan perdebatan muncul. Kenyataan yang tak terbantahkan adalah bahwa supernaturalisme selalu menjadi bahan yang menarik dalam produk sastra yang disusun, dari zaman literatur lisan sampai sekarang, ketika orang memiliki begitu banyak gaya dan genre. Ini menunjukkan bahwa supernaturalisme masih menjadi topik yang menarik untuk dijelajahi dalam literatur. Dalam dunia literatur berbahasa Inggris, era supernaturalisme "dirayakan" tertentu. Itu adalah era gothic, saat horor dan fiksi yang mendebarakan dinikmati begitu banyak oleh masyarakat. Namun, ketika era berubah, dan gothic memudar, supernaturalisme pun belum juga memudar. Pada akhir abad ke-20, ketika fiksi postmodern adalah topik diskusi yang paling hangat, supernaturalisme juga muncul, terutama dalam narasi realisme magis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan supernaturalisme pada kedua genre. Puisi Edgar Allan Poe *The Raven* dan Novel Toni Morrison *Beloved* dipilih sebagai representasi setiap era. Poe diakui sebagai salah satu penulis era Gotik yang paling menonjol oleh kritik dan ilmuwan sebagai pelopor, dan begitu pula Tony Morrison sebagai novelis realisme magis



yang mempengaruhi di negara-negara berbahasa Inggris. Keduanya dianalisis dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dan dilihat dari perspektif narratologi. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa elemen supranatural ada pada kedua genre sastra, namun dalam mode narasi yang berbeda dan digunakan untuk fungsi yang berbeda. Diperlukan penelitian lebih lanjut karena realisme magis juga berkembang dalam berbagai jenis gaya dan muncul dalam banyak bahasa.

**Kata Kunci:** Supernaturalisme, Gotik, Realisme Magis, naratologi

## Introduction

Literature is a product of human thought. Since man is inseparable from his real life, everything that becomes a supporting element in the work is considered impossible apart from the aspects that exist in real life. This also occurs within the binary opposition framework of naturality and supernaturality. These two aspects are almost always present in any human cultural entity, so it is possible to appear in various literary works.

In prehistoric times, human are considered to be able to practice things that are not included in the "real" category in their lives. This then takes place from generation to generation in different parts of the world that are believed to be centers of cultural growth. In some aspects, religiosity is also included in the frame of supernaturality. Referring to the definition of supernatural in dictionaries, this term deals with everything that is beyond the natural things. Both *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* point out that supernatural is something unlogic, deals with God or gods, demigod, devil, or spirit.

This, thus, can also be seen as reflected through the literary products from time to time. English literature, for instance, still had strong influence of paganistic views in Shakespearean era. Elizabethan era is known for the great influence of rationalism, but many of their literary works still have strong influence from medieval era.

Even when the rationalism and empiricism dominated the thought, supernaturalism still had influence. The rationalism and empiricism might have dominated the philosophical stream, which then influenced the rise of realism (and then the emergence of naturalism), but supernaturalism had not been completely faded. It was proven by the emergence of gothic literature during the Victorian era.

The development of supernaturalism continued, but then faded as the emergence of modernists. During the world war and post-world war era, writers, especially British and Americans tend to write in the same way as the realists. Although, this era is actually considered as the "dawn" of literature in general by many literary scholars.

Supernaturalism began to rise again in the end of 21<sup>st</sup> century, when new streams emerged in literature. The most influential stream that came along with the supernaturalism was magical realism, which is still considered as a world-wide influential genre and is still debatable.

The existence of these two influential genres and their distinctive features closely related to supernaturalism makes them interesting to discuss. The existence of time differences and differences in contextual aspects between Gothic literature and Magical Realism enable the difference between the supernaturalism present in each "stream" to occur. This is the problem in this research. Both genres may have the same definition of supernaturalism, but the way they represent the supernaturalism in the works of arts is definitely different. Thus, the question of the research is how is the supernaturalism represented in each works.

Two literary works have been selected as representatives of each genres. Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* was chosen as the representative of Gothic Literature, while Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was selected as the sample of magical realism work. Both are chosen because both are admitted as influential works in each genres.

The objects were then analyzed in descriptive method, using the perspective of narratology. It is applied because both objects are in the different genres. The first (Poe's *The Raven*) is a gothic poem, while Morrison's *Beloved* is a magical realism novel.

Either university students or beginner writers, especially in Indonesia, are sometimes confused of defining the supernatural aspects in fantasy, horror, and magical realism. It is hoped that the research will be beneficial to make a clearer distinction of supernaturalism in different genres. Besides, Indonesian culture is rich of myth and supernaturalism, so it is also expected that this research can be beneficial for writers to extract supernaturalism in the society into a work of literature/ arts.

### **Methodology**

This research is a descriptive one, because in a literary research quantitative method is seldom applicable. Data, both primary and secondary was obtained from the novel and related books. Besides, this research is made to answer the question of "what, why, and how".

Based on the data collection method, it also considered as a library research because, close-reading technique is the most dominant method. However,

There has not been a certain definition or genre for the term supernatural in literature, so it is simply understood that supernaturalism in this research refers to its literal meaning, as stated in the previous chapter. Supernaturalism is defined as the believe on power beyond natural power.

### *Supernaturalism*

However, it is need to be defined in a narrower perspective because the supernaturalism term may become very subjective because emotionally as human tend to be affraid or curious of something beyond their knowledge. The term natural and supernatural maybe different from one another because it deals with frame of thinking and emotion. As Lovecraft (2013:2) underlined, supernatural aspect of a literary



work is identical to human emotion and the unknown. He said that the appeal of the spectrally macabre is actually narrow since the reader needs to have an imagination which the capacity is relative, according to their capacity to detach from their everyday life.

In more detail, the fear of supernatural things may have different forms. In psychology, we recognize fear, anxiety, and phobia, suggesting that a person may have a fear of a different level than another, and to a different object. For example, a person has a fear of ghosts, but someone else may possess a different fear of aliens, and God or gods in the concept of religion.

Clery (1995:5) viewed the supernaturalism in literature deals with the consumer taste. Almost the same as Lovecraft, the emergence of supernaturalism in literature can not be separated from the reader. However, if Lovecraft highlights in terms of fear and horror, Clery considers that the supernaturalism that appears in the literary world has more to do with consumerism, which in other words shows that things that are detached from one's natural life are something that people like in the 18th to 19th century.

Based on the two perspectives, it can be concluded that the supernaturalism in literary works deals with the emotional feeling and thinking about subjects and objects outside the logical empirical aspect of life, and its parameter is subjective. Supernatural not only can trigger fear, but it may also can cause joy.

In defining which are caused by the naturalism, literary technique is needed. In this term, this research applied narratology.

#### *Narratology*

The main difference between literary and non-literary writing is that literary writing deals with story, which is composed based on events. It may deal with fiction and non-fiction, but literary products is based on something arranged by the imagination. The combination of events, is then known as narrative. One of the most influential theory applied to analyze narrative is narratology.

Bal (1997: 5) explained that narratology not only analyze narratives, but also narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; and cultural artifacts. The main thing is that they have to 'tell a story.' She added that a theory is a systematic set of generalized statements about a particular segment of reality. That segment of reality, the corpus, about which narratology attempts to make its pronouncements consists of 'narrative texts' of all kinds, made for a variety of purposes and serving many different functions.

Furthermore, Bal (1997: 221) explains that narratology is not meant to apply only to prosaic fiction works, but it can be applied on any cultural objects. She said, as well as semiotics, narratology can be applied to all forms of cultural products. Though it does not mean that everything can be regarded as a narrative, but everything in context has a narrative aspect, or at least, can be felt, interpreted as a narrative.

On the other hand, Chatman (2005: 18) sees from different perspective. He delivered that literary theory is the study of the nature or nature of literature, not the evaluation and description of particular literary works for literary works themselves. The appropriate method for that is a deductive method that can be

tested in the presence of concrete literary works. Poetics should construct "a theory of the structure and function of literary discourse, a theory that presents a set of possible literary objects, so that a particular literary work is only one of its cases.

Moving on to structuralist theory, there are two elements that must arise from the narrative, the story and discourse elements. The story is the content consisting of (a) a series of events or actions, and (b) those in the form of characters and background, while discourse is the expression or ways of communicating the contents above.

The elements are structures because they meet the structural requirements as defined by Jean Piaget. He suggests that the key to the structure and survival of a structure is the existence of (a) the whole, (b) self-regulation, and (c) transformation.

With reference to this, a conclusion can be drawn that the narrative structure as expressed by Chatman is a semiotic structure. This is due to the elements of expression and content that can be crossed with the concept of substance and form as described by Louis Hjelmslev.

In this latter sense, the narrative semiotic structure can be illustrated by the following diagram.

Expression		Content
Substance	Media as far as can communicate the stories (some media is a semiotic system with its own right)	Representations of objects and actions in the real world and imaginative that can be imitated in a narrative medium, as filtered through the codes of the author's society.
Form	Narrative Discourse (Narrative Transmission Structure) which consists of elements that are shared with various narratives in any medium.	Components of narrative stories: events, creatures, and their relationships with one another.

Narrative, thus, can be understood as a meaningful structure. It means that the point of attention should not be on the meaning of the story, but the meaning of the narrative itself. Therefore, the issue is not the substance, but the narrative form, both in the form of expression and content. Substance will only be discussed if it facilitates an understanding of a narrative form.

However, this postulate will be combined with the narratology designed by Wendy Faris (2004). It is because magical realism is considered as a postmodern genre, which is of course can not guarantee to be match with any of structural mainstream theory.



## Finding And Discussion

The raven is a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Although this falls into the category of poetry, but by its narrative nature, The Raven can be categorized as a narrative. In addition, this poem is one of the representations of influential Gothic works. The poem is written in a narrative style. It also can be said that it has a plot.

The following two stanza of the poem shows the beginning of the anxiety shown by Poe to the reader. The tense is growing, not directly comes in sudden.

*Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless here for evermore.  
And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is and nothing more.”*

The growing intense of horror is an important aspect in this poem, because it is how Poe give the exact pleasure to the reader. By playing the flow of emotion, the horror can be delivered to the reader's mind. As Chatman (2005) explained, the content and the form work together to arouse horror, by using the combination of events, creatures, and their relationships with one another.

The events in the poem can be described as the following events diagram.

- a dreary night in December—sits reading
- forgetting the death of his beloved Lenore
- A tapping at chamber door → reveals nothing, but excites his soul to "burning".
- Tapping is repeated, slightly louder, and he realizes it is coming from his window.
- A raven flutters into his chamber
- The man asks that the bird tell him its name, The Raven answer "Nevermore".
- The narrator conclude that the bird learned the word "Nevermore" from some "unhappy master" and it is the only word the bird knows.
- After several sequence, the atmosphere is rising, the narrator becomes angry, calling the raven a "thing of evil" and a "prophet".

- When he asked whether he will be reunited with Lenore in Heaven, the raven responds with "Nevermore", then the narrator is enraged, and, calling it a liar, told the bird to go back to the "Plutonian shore", yet the bird did not move.
- The narrator's final admission is that his soul is trapped beneath the raven's shadow and shall be lifted "Nevermore"

The stanza below show the more intense emotions being aroused by the plot of the poem. The difference is that in this section, Poe used stronger dictions.

*"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."  
"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—  
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."*

Lovecraft (2013) classifies Poe's story into several classes.

1. Pure Spiritual. According to him, some of Poe's stories contain the essence of a purer spiritual horror than others.
2. Stories of logic and ratiocination, the pioneer of modern detective stories, should not be included at all in the odd literature.
3. Some others, perhaps heavily influenced by Hoffmann, have things that may be exaggerated, which divert them to a strange (uncanny<sup>4</sup>) boundary. It also sometimes deals with abnormal psychology and monomania in such a way as to express terror but not an oddity.

This poem is closer to the third class because it is not completely uncanny, yet it is not a detective story which create their thrillig episodes through curiosity and tensions. .

However, an important element of this poem is the element of mystery. This focuses on the secrecy of the identity of the character symbolized by "The Raven". This aspect is then the result of the cohesion between events, characters, and the resulting storyline.

<sup>4</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, in Faris (2004) classified fantasy into two categories, the marvellous and the uncanny. In a reader's story may be hesitant between something uncanny, that is, when an event can be explained by the laws of the universe that we know, and marvellous, that is when an event is only in the explanation of the change in The laws of nature.



In this poem, supernaturalism is somehow does not occur as the direct opposition. It is more likely to be opposite with the logic of western empiricism, evidence based on visibility, something that is not visible and cannot be touched is considered non-existent. Suriasumantri (2009) stated that the emphasis is on the inexperience of empiricism, which is connected through the reception of the sensory organ or more, which cause reactions in the brain.

The supernatural evidence of *The Raven* can be seen from the its characters. Ravens are believed as supernatural bird in many culture entities. The poem showed that the bird is a supernatural being because it speaks. The use of the bird as a figure that deals with death.

Based on these analyzes, some points that can be inferred from the poem is to take the element of mystery, fear, and curiosity are arranged in united to form a whole structure in order to achieve the unity of the story. The mystery element becomes the most focused point related to the story's tale.

Generally, it can be concluded that the supernaturalism in the poem is used to support the story. It also can be said that the supernaturals is clearly confirmed, and structurally patterned in the story, because the supernatural itself cannot be separated from the life of the narrator.

This is different from *Beloved*. The Pulitzer award-winning novel has one character in the supernatural category, the ghost of Sethe's daughter. This is also supported by some events that enter the story as a supporter of the supernatural event.

Characters that fall into this category are the baby ghosts present in the house, and the figure of the white shirt present appears next to Sethe. A baby ghost is a magical object that has an Irreducible element. The object is magical because it can not be explained in western empiricism, as mentioned by Faris (2004: 1), as an accepted but not explained phenomenon. The proof of existence of the ghost is described in more real terms in the following incident, as a form of the incident in the house.

*The pulse of red light hadn't come back and Paul D had not trembled since 1856 and then for eighty-three days in a row. Locked up and chained down, his hands shook so bad he couldn't smoke or even scratch properly. Now he was trembling again but in the legs this time. It took him a while to realize that his legs were not shaking because of worry, but because the floorboards were and the grinding, shoving floor was only part of it. The house itself was pitching. Sethe slid to the floor and struggled to get back into her dress. ... A table rushed toward him and he grabbed its leg. Somehow he managed to stand at an angle and, holding the table by two legs, he bashed it about, wrecking everything, screaming back at the screaming house. (Morrison, 1987: 18).*

The story is then followed by a narrative felt by a character named Paul D when he begins to feel the strange thing from House 124, the home of the main character, Sethe and his son. The man compares what he feels when he slaves the house with the things he's been through in the past. The strange thing

Paul D inferred from his tremor affirmed that when he did feel something that he rarely felt, to ~~dramatize~~ the effect he felt, which was also a realistic representation of the presence of the ghost.

The narrative voice appears in the next section, when the narrator starts off with a later red light wave. There is no clarity about the red light. Narrator then explains that there is a mysterious movement, but it is mentioned by the narrator that the berberak is not only the floor of the house, but the whole house that has moved. This then continued when he explained the process of Paul D slamming the table that attacked him.

The description of what Paul D felt when he felt the presence of the ghost was poured in great detail, which was then called by the term. Irreducible element by Faris (2004). These are concrete, detailed descriptions of phenomena that are not articulated in detail or completely united in the daily reality of other narrative traditions, such as myth, folklore, or religious stories.

The existence of supernaturalism, which cannot be explained by western empiricism, Beloved (the ghost) gives rise to events referring to this criterion. The novel describes an event when Beloved suddenly questioned something unclear. The thing Beloved knows and is unknown to Denver is the irreducible element. There is no explanation as to how Beloved knew about Sethe's past. This is similar to the part when Sethe was surprised because Beloved suddenly hummed a song that only Sethe sung to her children when they were babies

*"Leaning forward a little, Beloved was humming softly . . . 'I made that song up,' said Sethe. 'I made it up and sang it to my children. Nobody knows that song but me and my children.' / Beloved turned to look at Sethe. 'I know it,' she said."*(Morrison, 1987: 175-176)

The sentence uses direct dialogue. If further scrutiny, it can be assumed as an affirmation of the existence of supernatural objects in the novel. Sethe declared the recognition that Beloved was his dead daughter. This section also shows no explanation about the unreasonable event, namely how Beloved knew the song. In addition, there are no comments or objections from the characters or narrators.

However, the novel then raises some questions through dialogue of characters, who seem to question the true identity of Beloved. These are the questions which then lead to hesitation because other parts seem to argue that Beloved is the incarnation of the child that Sethe killed.

In the central part of the novel, a character named Stamp Paid expressed an allegation that suggests the possibility that Beloved may not be a supernatural figure. He points out that Beloved is likely just a slave who fled after killing a white man.

*Was a girl locked up in the house with a whiteman over by Deer Creek. Found him dead last summer and the girl gone. Maybe that's her. Folks say he had her in there since she was a pup.*(Morrison, 1987: 235).



Another fundamental point of the novel is that the sermon about the ghost seems to be made only as one frame that has no apparent connection to its central story. The appearance of these supernatural figures is not mentioned too much in the novel, and is not even explained further.

The second thing to note is that events and supernatural figures are then as doubtful or even unrecognized presence in the story. This is the main difference between supernaturalism in *Beloved* when compared to Poe's *The Raven*.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the supernaturalism does exist both in the Gothic and Magical Realism. It also proves that supernaturalism has been one of the most influential theme in English-American Literature.

However, there are similarities and differences in both genres, that came from different era. The similarities are as follows:

- a. Both supernaturalism in the Gothic and Magical Realism work has the same frame, which is the opposite of empiricism/ rationalism, and modernism.
- b. Both are taken from cultural, religious, or mythical aspect in the existing culture. They are not merely imaginations, but more like an adaptation from the previous existing story in the society, but then re-told by the writers.

Since they came from different era, where philosophical stream and readers' tastes are different one another, the supernaturalism occurred in each works is different. The differences are as follows.

- a. *The Raven* uses supernaturalism in order to support/ strengthen the story of the connection of life and death. In this poem, the supernatural creature is clearly described and is essential to the plot flows. On the contrary, *Beloved* used the ghost story only as a detached frame, and it is made as a confusing element because the narrator seem not to admit the existence.
- b. The supernaturalism in *The Raven* is used as a main attraction, because the reader is really dragged into the supernatural circumstance, while in *Beloved*, the supernaturalism is figured like as symbol of criticism toward historical event.

This research is still a descriptive one, and is very limited since it only analyzed works from the English-speaking country. Further research is required in a bigger scope and in more intense analysis, especially dealing with comparative literature with Indonesian literary works because Indonesia is rich of supernatural aspects and stories that are potential to write in a literary work.

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