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Mirror of Self and the World: Magical Realism and Power Dynamics in Indonesia Literature

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Abstract: Magical realism in literary art is often only understood in a limited way as an aesthetic element, without taking into account the depth of the symbolic meaning contained in it. In addition, the merger between magical elements and everyday reality is often not fully explored, so the potential for the narrative that can be generated is lost. This research aims to analyze the use of elements of magical realism in contemporary literary art and uncover how these elements enrich literary narratives. This research uses hermeneutic methods to explore the symbolic meanings hidden behind magical elements in literary artworks. Through a hermeneutic approach, the selected works of art are deeply analyzed through literary description, contextual interpretation, and critical reflection, with a focus on how these magical elements are integrated into literary narratives. The results show that the elements of magical realism not only enrich literary narratives, but also create a deeper and more complex experience for the audience, by blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy. The implication of this study is that magical realism can be used effectively in contemporary literary art to create narratives that are not only aesthetically beautiful but also rich in philosophical and symbolic meaning.
Keywords: Magical realism, Novel, Sastra, contemporary literary, literary work.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the art world, magical realism has become an interesting approach for artists to depict the encounter between the real world and magical elements. The style was first popularised by Latin American artists and writers, but has since crossed cultural boundaries and found its place in various contemporary art forms around the world (Cooper, 2012; Danow, 1995; Faris, 2004). Through magical realism, artists can create a world that seems to be real, but inside it are hidden events or objects that are conventionally considered impossible or irrational (Mahfuzh, 2017; Pamungkas *et al.,* 2023). The use of these magical elements is not just to add aesthetic value, but also to depict a deeper and more complex reality, where logic and imagination go hand in hand. For example, the depiction of a woman with her head replaced by a tree not only creates a fantastic atmosphere but also symbolises humans' deep connection to nature. This shows that wonder and strangeness are part of reality that is often overlooked in everyday life.

However, while magical realism offers great potential in enriching narratives, there are still shortcomings in the understanding and interpretation of these elements in the context of contemporary literary art. Many critics and art connoisseurs tend to see magical elements only as aesthetic or decorative additions, without really understanding the depth of symbolic meaning that lies behind them (see, for example, Cooper, 2008; Jain, 2016; Liu & Wang, 2021; Mahfuzh, 2017). This often results in a neglect of the profound message that artists seek to convey through symbolism and metaphor in literature. In addition, the integration between the real world and the magical is sometimes seen as something separate, even though the two can reinforce each other in creating narratives in richer and more meaningful literary works. This misinterpretation can diminish the full potential of the artwork, so further research is needed to understand and explore how these magical elements actually function in enriching contemporary literary artwork.

This research aims to fill this gap by examining more deeply the use of magical realism in contemporary literary art, especially in the context of the merger between magical elements and everyday life, in literary

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works. The goal is to elaborate on how writers use magical elements to create narratives that are not only aesthetically beautiful but also full of philosophical and symbolic meaning. By understanding the use of these elements, we can delve deeper into how art can reflect the complexity of human experience that is often unattainable by ordinary realities. The study also seeks to identify and highlight examples of the integration of magical realism in literary art, as well as its impact on readers' perception and interpretation. As such, this research not only contributes to the field of literary arts studies but also enriches our understanding of how art can be a mirror to a broader and deeper reality.

2. METHODS

This study aims to analyze the use of elements of magical realism in contemporary literary art and how these elements contribute to complex and meaningful literary narratives. The character of this research is qualitative and interpretive, which focuses on a deep understanding of the symbolism and meaning behind the representation of literary texts. For this purpose, the hermeneutic method was chosen as the main approach in analyzing works of art. The hermeneutic method is relevant for this research because it provides a framework for interpreting the hidden meanings behind elements of literary texts (George, 2020; Porter & Robinson, 2011; Ricoeur, 2016), which allows researchers to explore the symbolic layers contained in artworks. The choice of this method is based on the belief that works of art can not only be enjoyed aesthetically but must also be understood as texts rich in meaning, which requires in-depth analysis to unravel the messages contained in them.

The steps of this research begin with data collection through the reading of magical realism elements. The research data is an anthology of short stories by Intan Paramadhita, entitled *Sihir Perempuan* (Paramaditha, 2017). The collection of short stories, is focused on Vampire short stories because they are considered the most representative representation of magical realism. The short story Vampire was then analyzed using a hermeneutic approach, which involved a gradual process of interpretation to understand the symbolism and meaning behind the magical elements used. The first stage of the analysis is the literary description. For this, each element in the artwork is described in detail to identify its main characteristics. Furthermore, contextual interpretation is carried out by considering the cultural, historical, and social background of the artwork. The final stage is critical reflection. In this case, the researcher relates the findings of the analysis to theories of magical realism and the context of contemporary literary art, to produce a broader understanding of the role of magical elements in enriching literary narratives. The results of this research are expected to provide new insights into the representation of magical realism so that it can be used

effectively in literary art to create deep and meaningful narratives.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

This section will present the main findings of this study. The results presented include not only a description of the observed literary elements, but also a symbolic interpretation based on the reading of the short story, including the meaning of the illustrations. These findings will help identify how elements of magical realism are integrated in contemporary literary works of art. The exposure of these results is expected to provide valuable new insights in understanding the role and potential of magical realism in enriching modern literary art.

a. Image Symbolism: Integration of the Real and Magical Worlds

The short story *Vampire* begins with an image that represents magical realism. The cover image of the short story Vampire, which is depicted in image 1, depicts two figures sitting in a bar with bottle shelves in the background. In Figure 1, what is interesting is the depiction of a woman's head replaced by a tree with branches and leaves sticking out in all directions. This use of literary elements presents a magical atmosphere that blends with the real world, creating a strong sense of magical realism.

Figure 1: Representation of magical realism

Figure 1 is a classic example of magical realism, where supernatural elements are presented side by side with everyday life without any attempt to explain them rationally. The presence of the tree that replaced the woman's head is not only a visual anomaly, but also an artistic statement that enriches the literary narrative with

magic. In the world of magical realism, this encounter between reality and fantasy is accepted as part of reality itself, creating an immersive experience for the reader (Asayesh & Arargüç, 2017; Fiorucci, 2015). In addition, the depiction of a tree growing from a woman's head carries a deep symbolic meaning of man's connection to nature. In the context of magical realism, this transformation is not only a metaphor but a reality lived by the character. This element describes how the forces of nature not only affect but also merge with human existence. This confrontation, which is so real and inevitable, invites the reader to reflect on the inseparable relationship between human life and the forces of nature. Because of this, magical realism often blurs the boundaries between time and space (Bowers, 2018; Faris, 2004).

Then, the bar as a contemporary social space is presented along with trees that represent ancient nature and primordial power. This integration creates a blend of the present and the past, between the modern world and the magical world, all of which exist in one frame. This incorporation not only adds layers of meaning but also strengthens the magical atmosphere inherent in magical realism. The use of visualizations of trees growing from women's heads transforms the narrative into something more than a story; This is a powerful visual statement. In the tradition of magical realism, narratives are conveyed not only through words but also through images and symbols (Warnes, 2009; Zamora & Faris, 1995). The

tree, with its deep roots and towering branches, depicts the depth and height of the human experience. This creates a rich literary narrative, where each magical element enriches the story with a new dimension. Thus, through the use of elements of magical realism, vampire short stories create complex and captivating literary narratives. The integration of magical elements into a realistic setting creates a world where magic is a part of everyday life. It not only blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy but also invites the audience to reflect on the deeper meaning of the relationship between man and nature, between the present and the past, as well as between life and primordial forces. As such, these images offer a rich and profound example of how magical realism can be used to enrich literary narratives and invite deeper reflection.

b. Narrative Structure: Magical, Feminist, and Postcolonial Realism

Magical realism is a narrative style that combines elements of everyday reality with magical or fantastical elements that are presented in a way that is natural and as if it were part of the real world. In the context of this short story, elements such as blood symbolism and vampirism not only depict Saras' inner struggle and dual identity, but also serve as a metaphor for women's experiences in patriarchal society. This table is an overview of the representation of magical realism, symbolism, and feminist and postcolonial perspectives.

Table 1: Representation of Magical, Feminist, and Postcolonial Realism

Narrative Elements	Description and Quotes	Magis Realism	Feminist	Postkolonial
Saras's Character Background	Saras is described as someone who aspires to be a doctor, but is directed to become a secretary by her mother: "My mother said, 'You're better suited to be a secretary than a doctor."	Magical realism shows Saras's daily life that seems ordinary but has a deep layer of meaning. Restricted aspirations depict a magical world where hope and reality often collide.	Cursive social expectations reflect how patriarchal structures seek to control women's life choices, forcing them to accept traditional roles.	Saras's life direction that was limited by his mother can also be seen as a manifestation of colonial control that regulates and restricts individual freedom in a postcolonial context.
Metaphor Vampirism	"I was bloodthirsty. I am a black butterfly with velvet wings flying in the alleys and being dragged into the vortex of night."	Vampirism is a magical element that represents the repressed inner power of Saras, as well as the conflict between real and latent identities. It reflects a world of duality in which Saras lives between light and darkness.	Vampirism describes how women often have to hide their desires behind identities shaped by social norms. It is a symbol of the squeeze of women's energy and autonomy by patriarchy.	Vampirism can also be interpreted as the embodiment of postcolonial trauma that continues to haunt and 'suck' into the lives of individuals, creating unintegrated dual identities.
Exploitation in the Workplace	Saras was manipulated by Irwan, her boss, who gave me tasks outside of her job: "Irwan often gave me tasks outside of what I	This element adds complexity to the world of Saras's magical realism, where patriarchal power creates a one-sided and	Feminist analysis reveals power dynamics in the workplace as a mirror of deep-rooted gender	This exploitation can also be seen as a reflection of colonial power relations that continue to affect the postcolonial social and

Narrative Elements	Description and Quotes	Magis Realism	Feminist	Postkolonial
	should have done, such as asking me to make application letters for his side projects outside of the office."	ambiguous reality. This exploitation becomes part of a dark magical world, where injustice is often hidden behind a mask of normality.	inequality, with women often being subjected to manipulation and exploitation.	economic structure, where individuals from subordinate groups are exploited for the benefit of those in power.
Self-Awareness and Resistance	Saras is aware of the power dynamics around him and tries to put an end to it: "I have to put an end to all this. It was looking for a victim. Me too. Is anyone willing to give up their souls?"	Magical realism allows for a merger between inner consciousness and the outside world, where Saras' attempt to end exploitation becomes an inner journey full of symbolism and moral antagonism.	Saras's self-awareness is a form of resistance to patriarchal structures, showing that despite being oppressed, women have the ability to recognize and fight against the injustices they face.	This awareness can also be seen as a form of resistance to colonial forces that still affect the identity and life of postcolonial society. It is an attempt to reclaim autonomy and freedom.

In the short story *Vampire* by Intan Paramaditha, Saras as the main character is described as a woman trapped in a patriarchal power net, where her aspirations and identity are limited by social expectations and external forces. It reflects the theme of magical realism depicted through symbolic elements such as vampirism and the dense caves of the night, which portrays Saras' inner reality full of tension and identity conflict. Magical realism allows for the fusion of everyday reality and the imaginative world, where women's life experiences are no longer just linear narratives, but full of intertwined layers of meaning. Thus, the metaphor of vampirism becomes not only a fantastic element, but also a symbol of how Saras is 'sucked in' by the social demands that curb her inner and bodily freedom. This concept challenges traditional understandings of women's identity, emphasizing that identity is not something static, but always in the process of negotiation, fragmented by external forces trying to govern her life (Cooper, 2008; Gradziel-Wójcik, 2018; Ogunyemi, 2022).

In addition, feminist and postcolonial perspectives deepen the reader's understanding of the complexity experienced by Saras. From a feminist point of view, this short story is a sharp critique of the patriarchal power dynamics that deprive women of their autonomy, making them objects of exploitation and manipulation (Alkali & Talif, 2016; Mardani *et al.,* 2018; Rorty, 2020). Saras, who was forced to become a secretary instead of a doctor, is a symbol of how the patriarchal system limits women's potential and leads them to traditional roles that are considered 'appropriate'. Exploitation in the workplace shows a real inequality of power, where women are often used as tools for masculine interests. The postcolonial perspective adds layers of interpretation by looking at how colonial trauma is still deeply rooted in the social and psychological structure of postcolonial society. Vampirism, in this case, can be seen as the embodiment of such trauma, which constantly 'sucks' into the individual's life and creates an unintegrated dual identity. Saras tried to resist these forces, but the resistance was fraught with moral ambiguity, reflecting the complexity of the effort to redefine identity in a world still shaped by traces of colonialism and patriarchy.

4. DISCUSSION

Intan Paramaditha's short story *Vampire* combines elements of magical realism to deepen the narrative of women's identity conflicts. The image depicting a woman with her head replaced by a tree illustrates the complex symbolism of connection to nature and inner struggle. The tree that replaces the woman's head not only creates a fantastic atmosphere but also symbolizes how Saras' identity is divided between her social expectations and personal desires. This element highlights how magical realism allows for a deeper exploration of the internal conflicts and dual identities that women face. Short story images reflect the reality that women often have to navigate limiting expectations, face exploitation and harassment, and find ways to redefine their identities. This symbolism enriched the narrative by combining fantasy and reality, creating a powerful literary picture of Saras's unequal power dynamics and inner struggles.

The short story *Vampire* depicts how complex and multidimensional the struggle for women's identity is in the midst of patriarchal power and traces of colonialism. Saras, as the main character, serves as a reflection of the collective experience of women who struggle for freedom in spaces dominated by restrictive social norms. The magical realism in this story, through the metaphor of vampirism and the symbolism of darkness, becomes an effective narrative tool for depicting the duality of identity that is divided between the real world and the distressed mind. The feminist perspective highlights the exploitation and marginalization of women symbolized by Saras' role as

secretary, while the postcolonial analysis shows how colonial trauma continues to lurk and influence social dynamics, creating unintegrated dual identities. The two, through the lens of magical realism, unite the narrative into a sharp critique of the power structure that redefines the meaning of women's freedom and autonomy, in which Saras's struggle to break free from the grip of patriarchy and colonialism depicts a resistance full of moral ambiguity, but still rooted in a desire for human freedom.

5. CONCLUSION

Intan Paramaditha's short story Vampire effectively combines elements of magical realism and feminist themes to depict the complexity of women's identity conflicts. The analysis of the images and indicators in this short story shows how women are often trapped in roles shaped by conservative and patriarchal social expectations. Through the symbolism of the tree that replaces the woman's head, this short story depicts Saras's inner struggle between her social expectations and personal desires. The use of elements of magical realism allows for a more profound and symbolic narrative, creating a powerful literary picture of the unequal power dynamics and internal conflicts that women face. By combining fantasy and reality, the short story highlights how women navigate limiting expectations, confront exploitation, and struggle to redefine their identities.

The implications of this analysis suggest that magical realism can be an effective tool in uncovering and exploring themes of feminism and women's identity conflicts. However, there are limitations in this analysis, namely limited access to the broader cultural and social context that may affect the interpretation of symbolism in the short story. Suggestions for further research are to deepen the analysis by considering a broader cultural and social perspective and explore other works of Intan Paramaditha to further understand the use of magical realism in depicting feminist themes. The research can also be expanded by comparing similar works from other authors to gain richer insights into how magical realism is used in feminist literature in a variety of cultural contexts.

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