



Magical Realism in the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang

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Abstract

In the span of 2024, research on magical realism influenced by cultural culture is still not widely done. Meanwhile, research on magical realism influenced by cultural culture is very necessary to explore the relationship between literature and culture in certain societies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relevance of magical realism to local culture, especially in Indonesia. The source of research data is the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang. The research method uses Hermeneutics and Semiotics. The results of the study show that the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang represents the aspect of magical realism. The storyline shows the relationship between realists and surrealists, who blend into one with no clear boundaries. Surrealist elements are influenced by heritage stories from the local culture of the Minangkabau people, Indonesia. Thus, the novel *Jejak Balak* is a commemoration between tradition and imagination that transcends reality. The implication of this research is that magical realism in literature can contribute to the discussion of cultural discourse in a broad context.

Keywords: Novel, Magical Realism, Minangkabau, Jelak Balak Novel, Ayu Welirang

Introduction

Magical realism can be interpreted as a literary genre that brings together the magical with logical reasoning (Mustafidah & Nurmalisa, 2022; Pamungkas et al., 2022; Wulandari & Fitrah, 2024). This means that magical realism always focuses on two things that contradict each other, namely reality and magical things, but are brought together in the storytelling of modern literary works. But every magical thing cannot be categorized as magical realism, it is said, because the condition of magical realism is reality and the magical must be narrated intersecting in modern literary works. Magical Realism is divided into several types, namely 1) *The irreducible* element, a narrative of magical events that are difficult to accept by logic, but described as real events 2) *Phenomenal world*, interpreted as the appearance of the everyday real world, which is

considered an amazing natural event. 2) *Unsettling Doubts*, is interpreted as taking the reader's point of view towards a literary work, which raises doubts about the events in the content of the story or the confusion of ideas about time, space and identity. 3) *Marging realism* can be interpreted as the supernatural world and reality that coexist with each other (Firdausy & Dwisusilo, 2023; Khiyaroh, 2023; Nastikaputri & Ardi, 2022; Yudono et al., 2023).

The problem of the relationship between literature and the magical is very important to study, from the perspective of magical realism. This is because literature can be interpreted as a representation of the community's belief system (Misnawati et al., 2023). This can be proven by several previous studies. As in the research conducted by Ulhaq (2023), with the main focus on describing the form of magical realism as a representation of criticism of the situation in the Batman Short Story by Damhuri Muhammad. The research conducted by Pamungkas (2023), the focus of the research is to explore the destruction of magical realism in Asmaraloka using a psychoanalytic perspective. The research conducted by Hassan & Safei (2023) with the main focus is to outline the elements of magical realism in Hikayat in distant lands. Then the research conducted by Qazi & Mahmood (2023), the main focus of the research is to explore the idea of magical realism behind the issues of the current generation in the fictional stories *Kiss of the Devil* by Sarwat Caddha and *Fireflies in the Darkness* by Shazaf Fatima Haider. Then the research conducted by Suprpto et al (2023), focuses on the presentation of spiritual science in *Iudruk Kebo Kicak* and *Ronggo Boyong* using a magical realism perspective. Based on all of the above research, it can be proven that research on magical realism is very varied. However, in some previous studies, researchers did not find any magical realism research in the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang.

Beliefs about something that cannot be scientifically digested, always occur in societies with diverse cultures (Justine et al., 2021; Meinarno et al., 2024; Mustika & Handani, 2023). Supernatural beliefs are created for the context of teaching. Examples such as the taboo of not going home during Maghrib, because it is believed that it can cause possession or commonly referred to as *kesambet*, the taboo provides a lesson for a person to be disciplined and prepare for worship when it is time (Farohah & Khusniyah, 2023; Sukmawan, 2021). The importance of this research is carried out, in the background of 2024, research on magical realism influenced by cultural culture is still not widely done. It is influenced by the style of magical realism writing that is difficult to understand and often confuses readers. Minangkabau culture is symbolized in a complex way in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, the belief present in the novel is not only to introduce about a certain culture, but also as a form of effort to bring order to society. In this regard, research on magical realism influenced by Minangkabau culture is important to be carried out, because the practice of magical culture in the context of

literature is believed to be able to provide an important source of information in critical discourse discussions, especially about Orientalism culture. Because, in fact, some people in the modern era are believed to have not been able to fully understand the relationship between literature, culture, religion, and magic from the Minangkabau culture. For this reason, it is important to explore the magical realism in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang. For this, this research is expected to be an additional information about the cultural experiences of ancestors, which are important for the life of modern society.

Methods

This research is to interpret *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang which is based on the perspective of magical realism. The paradigm of this study is qualitative, because in its characteristics it tends to analyze texts and symbols in literature which are then interpreted. Hermeneutic and semiotic qualitative methods are very relevant to be used in this study. The statement is based on a hermeneutic definition which is a method of analyzing literary texts based on the researcher's interpretation. Semiotics can be interpreted as the interpretation of symbolization in literature (Britannica, 2024; Gillo, 2021; Lantowa et al., 2017).

The focus of the study in this study is the elements of magical realism influenced by Minangkabau culture. The data source is in the form of the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang. Data collection techniques using reading and recording techniques. This means that the researcher reads the entire content of the novel and notes the parts that are included in the categorization of the five elements of magical realism in the novel, which will then be deciphered. The data analysis technique uses the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of three stages including data reduction, by focusing on the study of magical realism elements, data presentation, after all data is collected, it will be sorted and categorized related to the study of magical realism elements. Drawing conclusions, based on the results of the data that has been presented (Huberman & Miles, 1983).

Results

Magical Realism in the Cover of the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang

In the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, the aspect of magical realism can be identified from its appearance, which interferes with logical reasoning. However, the cover of the novel *Jejak Balak* also implies certain meanings and can be understood from every aspect of the cover of the novel including coloring, and portraits of each character element. Broadly speaking, the cover of the novel *Jejak Balak* shows a portrait of two young men in the forest, watched by various pairs of eyes, mysterious humans, and make-up tigers. The things mentioned have interrelated meanings. The following is an explanation of the meaning of magical realism behind the cover of the novel *Jejak Balak*

by Ayu Welirang.



Figure 1: Cover of the novel *Jejak Balak*

In Figure 1, the appearance of the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, has several character elements. It is intended to represent each theme of the outline of the problem narrated, so all the elements of the character give different meanings. Humans have always been identified with power and helplessness, a pair of eyes has a meaning about the act of highlighting something, mysterious characters have a connection with important characters in novels, the fictional tiger is always associated with the superiority of a certain power, and the black crow is always synonymous with the message of death (Effendi, 2023; Fiska & Pesulima, 2024; Lestari et al., 2023; Nesti & Pendri, 2023; Saifudin & Noviana, 2023).

In line with this, the novel *Jejak Balak* shows elements that represent a certain meaning, such as two young men in the forest, giving the meaning that humans are creatures full of limitations and always inquiring. A pair of watching eyes represents the attention paid to the ancestors of the forest who observed human movements. The mysterious man gives meaning about the involvement of humans who are the main perpetrators in the novel *Jejak Balak*, then the tiger is a representation of the ruler and ancestor of the forest who is responsible for supervising all human movements, then the black crow is a symbol of death.

When viewed from the aspect of magical realism, all elements in the cover of the novel *Jejak Balak*, raise doubts that cannot be explained by science, leading the reader to the intersection between the wilderness and other dimensions, humans and ancestral creatures in the forest (Mulyadi et al., 2022; Utami & Oue, 2021; Zamora & Faris, 1995). The tiger that was silent like a shadow with yellow eyes and stared intently at the two youths, followed by various pairs of eyes that were also watching displayed the indistinctness of the number of *Inyiak* ancestors who inhabited the forest, if observed

more deeply, from the way *Inyiak* looked at humans, it showed a greater difference in strength and position than humans. In Minang culture, *Inyiak* is a magical creature that is respected and is also an ancestor who is responsible for the sustainability of the forest, in other words, every human movement in the forest, will always be supervised.

On the cover of the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, the colors chosen are dominated by red and black. The choice of red is the embodiment of courage, encouragement, and violence while black represents death (Karja, 2021; Thejahanjaya & Yulianto, 2022). The red color between the black shadows is meant to represent the message that the forest is a dangerous place. Red in the form of human footprints and black crows covered in red gives meaning about humans who are never separated from the fate of death and tragedy, red on the side of the tree on the right, referring to the meaning that damaged forests always show anger through disasters, red on the left shoulder side of mysterious humans represents human anger.

Realism in Stories

The elements of realism have a wide variety. The categories of magical realism elements in Ayu Welirang's *Jejak Balak* Novel include *Irreducible Element*, *Unsettling Doubt*, and *Marging Realism*. The following is a presentation of data from the findings of magical realism research in the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang.

Irreducible Element in Ayu's Jejak Balak Novel

The *Irreducible Element*, which is identified in the novel *Jejak Balak* with regard to the beliefs of the Minangkabau tribe that are traditionally narrated in modern society. *Irreducible Element*, can be interpreted as something that cannot be explained in scientific reasoning. Irreducible Elements are often closely related to magical objects, magical sounds, and places where magical events occur (Pamungkas et al., 2023). The unredacted part contained in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang includes characters who experience events, and myths from indigenous peoples. The following are the parts that cannot be reduced in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang.

Table 1: Irreducible element in Ayu Welirang's novel *Jejak Balak*

No	Quotation	Culture	Category	Data Code
1	Instantly his strength fought against the tense throat muscles, screaming " <i>Inyiak!</i> "	Animism	Belief	JB/D1/9
2	"Are there still tigers around here?" "Pamali said that," Teti replied	Animism	Myths	JB/D2/32
3	There are elders who say, this is their fault, forest ancestors do not agree that their land is seized and turned into an oil palm plantation	Animism	Pantangan	JB/D3/120

Information

JB: *Jejak Balak*

D1-D3: Finding data

In Table 1 is an indication of the element of magical realism, in the novel *Jejak Balak*, a child who has just returned from reciting, meets the figure of a tiger, namely *Inyiak* with bright yellow eyes, and moves quickly. A reality that cannot be understood from the side of logic, shows that legendary creatures like *Inyiak* are impossible to exist in modern life today. With the advent of mythical creatures, the emergence of mythical creatures seems to be influenced by ancestral stories that have been passed down from generation to generation (Abimanyu, 2021; Sandiana et al., 2024).

Myths or community beliefs, enforced in the Minangkabau region, and strictly followed by every immigrant and local resident, are influenced by animism, which is a belief in creatures that are considered sacred (Mutaqin, 2023). In the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, animism tends to be influenced by the cultural aspects of the Minangkabau Tribe. In this case, *Inyiak* has a role as a forest guardian or ancestor who is responsible for the sustainability of the forest. In other words, in this context, the culture of the Minangkabau tribe, which is closely related to the ancestors of the forest or *Inyiak*, influences the element of magical realism in the *Irreducible Element* in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang.

Unsetting Doubts in Ayu's Jejak Balak Novel

The part that raises doubts or unsettling doubts in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu

Welirang is related to tigers as magical creatures for the Minang people. The definition of Unsetting Doubt is unresolved doubt, the emergence of doubt always triggers questions about the reality or not of something narrated in a novel. Spiritual experiences, dreams, and abstinence are examples of concepts whose existence is doubtful, yet they still grow and are maintained today, putting aside the fact that doubts born from the beliefs of ancestors, have always been contrary to scientific thought in the current era.

Unresolved doubts or *unsettling doubts*, caused by the clash between logical and non-logical things. Doubts also arise over the cultural system traditionally narrated in the novel *Jejak Balak* without excluding the concept of modern reality, thus making the two side by side show different understandings at one time (Wulandari & Fitrah, 2024). In other words, the encounter of reality and the magical can create doubts about the reader of what he or she understands in the novel. Related to that, in Table 2 is a description of unsettling doubts found in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang.

Table 2: Unsettling doubt in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang

No	Quotation	Culture	Category	Data Code
1	This must be the ancestor <i>Inyiak</i> who punished them	Animism	Belief	JB/D1/94
2	The eyes of this cat are orange, somewhat different like the figure of a made-up tiger that has been told from generation to generation.	Animism	Myths	JB/D2/373
3	The resident suddenly whispered, "Forgive us, <i>Inyiak</i> , God willing, we will protect the country"	Animism	Belief	JB/D3/373

Information

JB: Jejak Balak

D1-D3: Finding data

In Table 2, a new identity emerges about tigers. In the Minangkabau culture, *Inyiak* is a magical creature that coexists with humans, its place of residence is known to be in the forest, has variable body characteristics, resembles a human with a tiger's head as depicted in the JB/D3/373 data. The role of *Inyiak* as a punishment for forest destroyers, as narrated in the JB/D1/94 data, is proof that tigers or *Inyiak* are not just wild animals, but magical creatures that behave like humans. It provides a new concept of the physical biological form and personality of the tiger. The identity of the tiger in the novel *Jejak Balak* is more dominantly influenced by Minangkabau culture.

In Minang culture, *Inyiak* is the main guide for humans in maintaining flora and fauna in the forest (Hasmira et al., 2021; Utami & Oue, 2021). The appearance of *Inyiak*

in front of an ustadz described in the JB/D4/373 data creates a new dimension that disrupts daily routines, thus raising doubts for modern society that upholds logical reasoning. Thus, the identity in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang gives readers an understanding that an identity can be created from ancestral beliefs with different interpretations.

Marging Realism in Ayu's Jejak Balak Novel

In the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, part of the *realism marginal* tends to be influenced by the cultural aspects of the Minangkabau Tribe, regarding the wilderness which is considered a sacred place for ancestors. Ancestors or *Inyiak* have a role in protecting the entire Minang region for generations. Marging realism is two different worlds that intersect or merge into the reality of modern society (Warohmah, 2023).

Table 3: *Marging Realism* in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang

No	Quotation	Culture	Category	Kode Data
1	Sometimes they descend into the Human Realm to become guardians	Animism	Belief	JB/D1/38
2	The community says the killer is a forest ancestor, a kind of tiger demon	Animism	Belief	JB/D2/277
3	The owner of the old house is a senior hunter, believed to be missing kidnapped by <i>Inyiak</i>	Animism	Myths	JB/D3/302

Information

JB: Jejak Balak

D1-D3: Finding data

In Table 3, *Inyiak* appears in the human area to fulfill his duties as a guard and judge. That is, *Inyiak* as a guard refers to his responsibility to ensure that humans do not destroy forests, and *Inyiak* as a judge is intended so that humans who destroy forests must be punished. This shows that reality and the magical world in the novel *Jejak Balak* are told to coexist, without disturbing the overall storyline. The setting taken in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang is the Minangkabau area with a place that gets a lot of attention is the wilderness, because it is considered a sacred place by the local community, as well as the residence of the *Inyiak*.

The sacredness between *Inyiak* and the forest has a positive impact on forest conservation. All characters in the novel *Jejak Balak* have a strong belief in the existence of *Inyiak*, so that it becomes a guide or guideline for the community to behave well in accordance with the norms applied in Minang culture. In other words, the entire *marginal*

aspect of realism in the novel *Jejak Balak* is mostly influenced by the Minangkabau culture which has been believed and used as a vehicle for the spirituality of the local community for generations.

Discussion

The novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang is one of the literary works that represents in a complex sense of reality and magical events. This breaks the concept of the paradigm of modern society, which tends to prioritize thinking based on logic. The analysis of the novel *Jejak Balak*, gives a new impetus to the infinite imagination, so that it is able to describe conflicting dimensions into an acceptable unity (Handoko et al., 2024; Syahrul et al., 2022; Wulandari & Muliati, 2024). In the novel *Jejak Balak*, Ayu Welirang creates two different constructions in the structure of her text, namely narrative and non-narrative. It is intended to convey events or issues that represent problems about the connection of magical events and beliefs. At the same time, the novel *Jejak Balak* provides a new view that the presence of the magical among modern society is always influenced by certain cultural cultures. *Inyiak*, which is narrated in the novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang, is influenced by animism from Minang culture. The embodiment of *Inyiak* in the perspective of Minang culture is considered a sacred figure who maintains the greenery of the forest and it allows the community to apply noble cultural experiences in treating the forest well

The origin of *Inyiak* has various versions outside the Minang area, such as in the Kerinci area of Jambi province better known as *Niniak*, the story of *Niniak* began from the hostility of brothers between the descendants of tigers and ordinary humans, so that from that the father of the two brothers, made a pact to take care of each other and coexist, if the agreement is violated, then the tiger in the forest will attack the villagers. In different areas outside the Minang area, namely in Aceh, *Inyiak* or tiger is better known as *Ramueng* tiger story in the perspective of Acehnese culture, is a figure of the bodyguard who guards the tomb of his master, namely *Teungku Chik Paloh*, in the agreement that if there is a human who steals around the grave of *Teungku Chik Paloh*, then the *Rameung* will attack humans, while in the perspective of Minang culture, tigers are called *Inyiak*, *Nyak*, and grandfather, the origin of *Inyiak* began when a group of tigers attacked the village, as an attempt to take revenge because the residents had turned the land, which was the residence of the tigers, into a plantation, due to the chaos created by *Inyiak*, the villagers make a pact with the tiger, so that the two can coexist with each other and take care of each other. Although the stories about the origin of the tiger are varied, in the end all stories of the tiger always start from the agreement between humans and tigers that are meant to coexist, protect each other, and respect (Mahsa et al., 2022; May & Suryadarma, 2023; Sinanda, 2023).

Animism implied in literary works, encourages people to respect nature, while at the same time providing teaching without judging moral boundaries so that humans always behave well in places that are considered sacred (Rahmaddani & Rahmawati, 2023; Swancutt, 2023; Yogantara, 2023). The animism in *Jejak Balak*, told in a subtle and not exaggerated way, so that any doubts or something that cannot be explained by common sense, can still be interpreted as a lesson. In other words, in the novel *Jejak Balak*, the element of magical realism influenced by the animism of the Minang culture, is always related to the forest and tigers. These two aspects indicate that the behavior of the people in the novel *Jejak Balak*, is always guided by the existence of *Inyiak* and respect for the forest as a place for ancestors. The animism aspect in the novel *Jejak Balak* has penetrated the poles of logic in modern society. Even so, as a literature, it can be said that *Jejak Balak* is a literary work that prioritizes moral considerations, without ignoring the explorations of themes and ideas that are constructed, based on the culture around the author. Ayu Welirang interprets culture that is related to magical things, has changed the paradigm about the blending of magical things in reality, into something that can still be understood and accepted by readers, although, the topic of problems raised in the novel *Jejak Balak*, is more dominantly narrated in the intersection of magical elements and reality in the modern era. Thus, it is a characteristic of Ayu Welirang's writing style which is based on the magical flow.

On the one hand, the novel *Jejak Balak* represents magical realism influenced by cultural culture, but on the other hand, it also shows the thoughts of modern people when placed in a society that is thick with beliefs about mystical things. The first attitude that modern society shows when faced with magical events, is skepticism, which can be called an attitude of doubting something caused by disbelief. The emergence of various easily accessible information, as well as the development of technology and the way of thinking of modern society, of course, are the most likely factors for the emergence of skepticism. Modern society believes more in something that is clearly mechanical, than in prejudices that are not clear about cause and effect (Enstedt & Moberg, 2023; Khumairani et al., 2023; Rosadi et al., 2023). The novel *Jejak Balak* subtly takes advantage of the contradiction between the magical and the modern mind, to erase the ambiguity and create a new view, namely that the belief in myth becomes the limitation of behavior and the modern mind becomes the basis of thinking. Thus, the novel *Jejak Balak* not only depicts elements of magical realism influenced by Minang culture, but also becomes a vehicle for comparing thoughts between beliefs about mystical matters and the minds of modern society, to be united into a new view that includes the discourse of spirituality, morality, and culture, as well as inviting readers to objectively assess from two opposing views.

Conclusion

The magical realism in the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang has a tendency to be influenced by the Animism aspect of the Minangkabau culture in relation to *Inyiak* or tiger humans who have the role of forest guards and judges. The elements of magical realism found include *the Irreducible Element* referring to the belief in the ancestors of the forest, namely *Inyiak* and the wilderness as a sacred place. *Unsetting Doubts* contained in the Novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang is mostly influenced by the existence of animism, causing chaos of great doubt for readers about the interpretation of tigers based on the perspective of Minang culture. And finally, elements of *Marging Realism* were found, such as a child's meeting with *Inyiak* and *Inyiak's* appearance in front of an Ustadz. Two contradictory views between belief in mysticism and modern thought can create a new view that can be compared.

The implication of the research that has been carried out is that it can involve other literary fields, namely literary anthropology, literary sociology and literary ecology. This shows that the novel *Jejak Balak* cannot be interpreted in one perspective alone. Diverse interpretations can increase the potential of the novel *Jejak Balak* to be used as a research subject studied in various literary studies, the more diverse research on the same subject can be used as a comparative study in comparing various different views. The novel *Jejak Balak* by Ayu Welirang can be used as a medium for introducing the culture and traditions of ancestors, as well as the practice of morals and norms in interpreting myths and beliefs, which are related to magical things. For this reason, the next research is expected to focus on the study of the essence of magical realism that can affect social class, environmental awareness, and community behaviour. This needs to be done in the context of expanding the potential for theoretical development and creating a connection between magical realism and other literary fields. The weakness of this study is the limited data sources presented and the limited literature on the origin of *Inyiak*, so that the results of the study are still not completely accurate and do not interpret it in its entirety.

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