

## Magical Realistic Characteristics in the Novel *the Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store* by Keigo Higashino.

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### Abstract

Novel *The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store* is a literary work that depicts magical realism through its characters and narrative events. The story presents unique characters and magical phenomena that involve the disruption of time, space, and identity, creating a blend of reality and fantasy. This research focuses on the interactions between the characters and the magical events they experience in the grocery store, which serves as a medium for communication across time. This study applies to a sociological approach to literature, using the theory of magical realism. Data were collected through heuristic semiotic reading and analyzed using hermeneutic semiotic reading. The results reveal six main characteristics of magical realism: irreducible elements, a phenomenal world, disturbing doubts, the fusion of realism and magic, the disruption of time and space, and a moral message conveyed through magical events. Magical elements—such as the letter from the past—serve as a subtle yet powerful way to convey moral values such as empathy, hope, forgiveness, and solidarity. This research concludes that magical realism not only enriches the story aesthetically but also deepens its moral impact. This study is expected to support literary learning, inspire further research on local magical traditions, and assist educators in developing materials that enhance students' critical thinking skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to (Firdausy & Dwisusilo, 2023), literature essentially encompasses all elements of literary communication, involving the author, the work itself, the environment, and the reader. Literary works are important to human life because they can influence lifestyles. Literary works can take the form of poetry, prose, and drama, each providing a unique spiritual experience for each reader (Faruk, 2019). Literature can also be related to cultural activities (Fauziyah et al., 2020). Literary works are created by writers to be enjoyed, understood, and utilized by society (Supriyanto, 2021).

This existence can be studied in several disciplines, focusing on piety in humans, including poets and writers who can represent it in their literary works (Prakoso et al., 2023). Thus, literary works convey important messages that can benefit society and thus have relevance in everyday life. In general, a literary work has educational, religious, social, moral, and aesthetic value (Chamalah, 2016).

One literary work that maximizes the use of language, focusing on aesthetics and encompassing multiple meanings, is the novel. Novels depict human stories about life as we interact with others and our surroundings (Putri & Israhayu, 2023).

Literary sociology is an approach to literature that cannot be fully understood if it ignores social aspects (Supriyanto, 2021). With a sociological approach to literature, writers can convey depictions of social reality to readers through language.

In line with this, (Septiana, et al., 2013) stated that the sociology of literature is related to social factors that can be considered and appear in the structure of texts and authors. Literary texts not only present ordinary, rational stories but also contain extraordinary, irrational elements. These elements appear in fantasy, science fiction, and magical realism narratives.

Literary works with magical realism originating from the author's culture in Indonesia, namely the first in the short story *Anjing-Anjing*. *Menyerbang Kuburan* by

Kuntowijoyo which highlights the cultural beliefs of the Javanese people (Windayanto, 2020). Second, in the novel *Puya ke Puya* by Faisal Oddang which highlights the beliefs of the Tanah Toraja people (Sari, 2019). Third, (Dejowati & Wulandari, 2022) with the title *Dayak Culture and Magical Elements in the Novel Kembang Gunung Purei* by Lan Fang.

Magical Realism is an innovative literary narrative concept that combines what is realistic with what is unknown or fantasy, (Abdulrazzaq & Heidarzadegan, 2022). Fourth, (Yudono, 2023) with the title *Magical Realism in the Crime Drama Script Membalas Dendam* by Idrus in 1948.

The magical realism writing style is often found in Japanese literature. One example is Keigo Higashino. Second, (Sukoco, 2023) with the title "Magical Realism in *Kimi No Na Wa (Your Name)* by Makoto Shinkai." Third, (Febryani, et al., 2023) with the title *Elements of Magical Realism in the Novel Funiculi Funicula* by Toshikazu Kawaguchi. Fourth, (Asfahani, 2019) with the title *Magical Realism in Haruki Murakami's After Dark*.

In Japan, magical realism literary works have emerged since the Heian period (Cahyani 2019). The translated novel "The Miracle of the Namiya Grocery Store" by Keigo Higashino was chosen as the object of study in this research not only because it contains magical realism. Magical realism, according to (Mulia, et al., 2016), is a school of thought that re-presents all images and concepts that are magical, mystical, or irrational in nature, sourced from mythological works, fairy tales, and legends that live traditionally in modern literature.

The idea of magical realism used in this study was introduced by Wendy B. Faris in her book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. In this book, Faris explains five characteristics that will illustrate how the narrative paradigm of realism is viewed in a literary work. Magical realism is not only seen from mystical stories, fairy tales, or legends, but can also be seen from narratives containing magical realism (Firdausy & Dwisusilo, 2023). Faris's theory of magical

realism is relevant to Keigo Higashino's novel *The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store*, because this novel contains a magical realism narrative in the form of presenting belief in magic and presenting magical figures. This is what prompted the researcher to use Wendy B. Faris's concept of magical realism as an analytical tool.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher uses a sociological approach to literature to examine the extent to which the study of magical realism theory in novels *The Miracle of Namiya's Grocery Store* by Keigo Higashino. The sociological approach to literature also focuses on literary works through what is implied in literary works, especially regarding social discussions or problems (Mauliddin, et al., 2017). Sociology can investigate literary works as primary data in the search for meaning with factors that exist in social life can also influence the meaning of literary works and so on (Pratiwi, et al., 2023). This can be based on the assumption that understanding literary works cannot be studied completely if it leaves out its social aspects (Arumndani, et al., 2022).

The methodological approach in this research is a qualitative approach that produces research data in the form of descriptive words or sentences that describe the phenomena being researched. According to (Ahmadi, 2016), a qualitative approach is interpretive and naturalistic, studying phenomena in their natural context and attempting to understand and interpret the meanings people give to them.

The data in this study are text fragments in the form of words, phrases, and sentences deemed to contain characteristics of Wendy B. Faris's magical realism. The research data source is the 400-page novel *"The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store"* by Keigo Higashino, published in 2021 by Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

The data collection technique used in this study was reading. According to Supriyanto (2021), reading is an appropriate technique in literary works, which is then analyzed using heuristic and hermeneutic reading.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Irreducible Elements

According to (Salsabila & Karkono, 2021:50), a magical object is an object that exists in the realm of reality and whose presence can be perceived by the five senses. According to (Mulia, 2016), magical elements can be classified into four main groups based on magical objects (places categorized as magical, places where spirits appear, and places where magical events occur). Keigo Higashino's novel *"The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store"* features various magical objects that are crucial in building a rich and profound narrative.

*Namun, sedetik kemudian, langkahnya terhenti. Saat melihat bangunan di sebelahnya, ia menyadari bahwa ia sudah terlambat. Toko Kelontong Namiya telah berubah total. Aura misterius yang sebelumnya menyelimuti toko ini kini telah lenyap. Orang yang berdiri di sana bukan lagi sekadar pemilik toko kelontong biasa. Harumi memang tidak bisa menjelaskan mengapa ia merasa seperti itu, tetapi ia yakin. (Higashino, 2022:334)*

[However, a second later, her steps stopped. When she looked at the building next to her, she realized she was too late. Namiya Grocery had completely changed. The mysterious aura that had previously enveloped the store was gone. The person standing there was no longer just an ordinary grocery store owner. Harumi couldn't explain why she felt that way, but she was certain.]

This quote contains magical objects within the context of magical realism. While no physical objects are directly identified as "magical," the changes occurring in Namiya Grocery create the impression that the place possesses an aura or extraordinary quality, which is a magical element.

### Phenomenal World

"Namiya Grocery Store" is characterized by seemingly ordinary objects that hold deeper meanings. The phenomenal world can be

perceived as a set of representations that produce a fictional world that looks like a universal world to live in and this is what Faris means as a realistic description but creates a fictional world that resembles the world we live in which extensively uses supporting details (Setyawati, 2020).

*Shizuko membawa Harumi ke depan sebuah toko kecil dan tua. Papan namanya bertuliskan "Namiya". "Toko Kelontong". Pintu gulung itu tertutup, entah karena sudah jam tutup atau karena sudah tidak ada yang berjualan di sana lagi. (Higashino, 2022:314)*

[Shizuko led Harumi to a small, old shop. The sign read "Namiya." "Convenience Store." The roll-up door was closed, either because it was closing time or because no one was selling anything there anymore.]

Namiya Grocery Store, as the sign says, remains the center of attention even when its roll-up doors are closed, suggesting that the store possesses an appeal beyond mere description. This raises the question of why the store remains a symbolic presence, despite its physical inactivity.

*Semua ini terjadi berkat bantuan dari Toko Kelontong Namiya. Sebenarnya aku sangat ingin mengungkapkan rasa terima kasih dan cinta, tapi cinta tak tahu bagaimana caranya. Karena itulah aku sangat senang bisa mendapat kesempatan untuk menulis surat ini. (Higashino, 2022:172)*

[This all happened thanks to the help of Namiya Grocery. I really wanted to express my gratitude and love, but love didn't know how. That's why I'm so happy to have the opportunity to write this letter.]

Namiya, who, in the context of the story, is known to possess magical abilities that provide solutions through time-traveling letters. However, this gratitude is expressed in a very casual manner, as if this extraordinary phenomenon were something normal.

### The Nagging Doubt

One important aspect of magical realism is nagging doubt, where the reader is confronted with situations that raise questions and uncertainty. In "The Miracle of Namiya

Grocery," this doubt arises through the interactions between the characters and unexplained phenomena. In "The Miracle of Namiya Grocery," the nagging doubt arises through seemingly ordinary objects that hold mysteries. For example, letters written by shop visitors often raise doubts about the veracity and authenticity of their experiences. These objects raise questions about reality and how we understand lived experiences. Faris notes that this doubt is a crucial element of magical realism, where the line between reality and imagination becomes blurred (Faris, 2004). In the novel, one of the letter writers says,

*Kosuke masuk ke kamar dan mengambil kertas polos yang digunakan untuk menulis laporan sekolah. Karena ia tidak begitu pandai menyusun kalimat, ia membutuhkan waktu setengah jam untuk menyelesaikan surat yang berisi sebagai berikut: Orangutan kedua akan membawaku pulang dari rumah pada malam hari. Kudengar mereka terjerat hutang bea cukai dan tidak bisa melunasinya. Akibatnya, perusahaan Ayah terancam bangkrut. ... Apa yang harus kulakukan? (Higashino, 2022:225)*

*.... Tentu saja, melarikan diri sendiri bukanlah pilihan yang tepat, tetapi selama Anda adalah keluarga dan berada di perahu yang sama, masih ada kemungkinan untuk kembali ke jalan yang benar. (Higashino, 2022:225)*

[Kosuke entered his room and took out the plain paper he used for writing school reports. Because he wasn't very good at composing sentences, it took him half an hour to complete the letter, which read as follows: "The second orangutan will take me home from home at night. I heard they're in debt with customs and can't pay it off. As a result, Dad's company is in danger of going bankrupt. ... What should I do?"

.... Of course, running away alone is not the right choice, but as long as you are family and in the same boat, there is still a possibility of getting back on the right path.]

Kosuke wrote a letter detailing the realistic problems he faced: his family being in debt and his plans for the house being in limbo. This situation occurred in the real world, without any magical or miraculous elements.

However, this letter then receives answers in a way that cannot be explained logically, and interactions with supernatural elements occur. Namiya Grocery operates in a magical way to provide solutions at different times.

*Sepertinya fajar kembali menyingsing. Atsuya menatap surat kertas kosong itu. "Hei, apakah ini benar-benar mungkin?" "Apa maksudnya?" tanya Shita dengan 'benar-benar mungkin'. "Mungkin?" "Begini," kata Atsuya, " ternyata rumah ini dapat menghubungkan masa lalu dengan masa kini. Surat-surat yang dikirim dari masa lalu dapat membawa kita kembali ke masa lalu, begitu pula balasan kita yang dimasukkan ke dalam kotak penyimpanan botol susu akan membawa kita kembali ke masa lalu. " ( Higashino , 2022:383)*

*[It seemed like dawn was breaking again. Atsuya stared at the blank piece of paper. "Hey, is this really possible?" "What does that mean?" Shita asked, "really possible." "Maybe?" "Well," Atsuya said, "it turns out this house can connect the past with the present. Letters sent from the past can take us back in time, and our replies placed in the milk bottle box will take us back in time."]*

In this section, Atsuya questions the possibility that the house they live in can connect the past and present, and that letters sent from the future or the past can reach different times. This doubt creates a tension between rational logic and fantastical elements that cannot be explained by normal methods.

### **A combination of the magical and the real**

Keigo Higashino's "Namiya Convenience Store" is a fascinating combination of magical elements and everyday reality. The novel not only offers a captivating storyline but also introduces objects and events imbued with meaning. One of the most prominent objects in the story is the convenience store itself, which serves as the center of various magical events. The store is not just a place to shop, but also acts as a portal connecting the past to the present, where characters can interact with letters left by previous visitors. In this context, Higashino demonstrates how objects in magical realism

often have double meanings that go beyond their physical function, as Wendy B. Faris explains in her book "Ordinary Enchantments."

For example, when the main character finds a house that has been uninhabited for years. In one quote, a character states,

*"Coba kulihat . " Atsuya mengulurkan tangannya. Ia mengambil majalah itu. Ia mengibaskan debu yang menempel sebelum mengamati foto seorang gadis yang tersenyum di sampul depannya . Seorang artis? Wajah gadis itu tampak tidak asing. Setelah mengamatinya dengan saksama, akhirnya ia menyadari bahwa gadis itu adalah seorang aktris yang sekarang sering muncul di TV sebagai pemeran ibu. Saat ini usianya tidak lebih dari enam puluh lima tahun. Atsuya membalik majalah itu untuk memeriksa tanggal penerbitannya. Tertera di sana tanggal yang menandai terbitnya majalah itu sekitar tahun empat puluhan . Atsuya dan Shota sama-sama terkejut melihatnya . ( Higashino , 2020:12)*

*["Let me see." Atsuya reached out. He took the magazine. He brushed off the dust before examining the photo of a smiling girl on the front cover. An actress? The girl's face looked familiar. After examining her closely, he finally realized that the girl was an actress who now often appeared on TV as a mother. Currently, she was no more than sixty-five years old. Atsuya turned the magazine over to check the publication date. It was printed there, indicating that the magazine was published around the forties. Atsuya and Shota were both surprised to see it.]*

The girl's face in the photo, which resembles a famous actress, and the fact that the magazine was published forty years ago, are both plausible and acceptable in the real world. These are things that can happen in everyday life: a magazine published long ago with an actress on the cover.

### **Disturbance between Time, Space, and Identity**

An excerpt from the novel "The Miracle of Namiya Grocery" by Keigo Higashino, which is illustrated in several narratives in the novel.

*Saat Takayuki meninggalkan rumah, kondisi di luar masih gelap. Aneh sekali, pikirnya . Padahal*

*rasanya aku menghabiskan waktu cukup lama di dalam rumah. (Higashino, 2020:184)*

*[When Takayuki left the house, it was still dark outside. How strange, he thought. It feels like I've spent quite a while inside.]*

Takayuki felt like he had spent quite a while inside, but when he went outside, it was still dark. This created a sense of time passing in an abnormal way, different from the everyday linear experience of time.

*A cardboard box was placed just behind the door. Examining its contents, Takayuki found a folded piece of paper that looked like a letter. "Someone sent it," he said. Yuji unfolded the folded paper. His expression was one of surprises. "What's wrong?" he asked.*

*Takayuki. With his mouth tightly shut, Yuji held out the paper to him. "Eh?" Without Takayuki realizing it, Yuji shouted. There was no writing on the paper. (Higashino, 2022:183)*

The presence of a letter arriving in the present, but with no content, creates temporal tension. This letter is not only a symbol of communication but also refers to an ambiguous time: does this letter originate from the past, the future, or does it have no connection to any clear time?

*Atsuya menunjuk pintu kembali. "Hanya lima menit kemudian Anda masuk. Surat itu ada di dalam kotak susu." Benar kan? Tapi surat yang sudah hilang itu, saya cek. Kalau memang benar surat itu diambil oleh seorang wanita dengan nama samaran 'Rabbit', dia masih butuh waktu untuk menulis balasan. Tapi kenyataannya, surat kedua darinya datang dalam sekejap. Bagaimanapun, ini sangat aneh. " (Higashino, 2022:33)*

*[Atsuya pointed at the door again. "You came in just five minutes later. The letter was in the milk carton." Right? But I checked the missing letter. If it had really been taken by a woman under the pseudonym 'Rabbit', she would still have needed time to write a reply. But in fact, a second letter from her arrived in an instant. Either way, this is very strange.]*

The rapid correspondence violates the logic of time. Letters from the past and replies

from the present involve a non-linear or logical flow of time, creating the time distortion that is a hallmark of magical realism.

## **Contribution to Moral Messages**

### **1.2.1 Forgiveness and Regret**

Through magical phenomena such as letters from the past suddenly appearing and being answered in the present, readers are encouraged to recognize the importance of forgiveness. One story in the novel depicts a character who regrets a past mistake, and through a reply letter from Namiya's shop, he gains enlightenment and the courage to forgive himself. The magical element acts as a bridge that enables a process of deep inner reflection.

### **1.2.2 Hope in the Midst of Adversity**

The letters that arrive at Namiya's shop often come from people in desperate situations. However, the shop's answers, though simple and sometimes illogical, actually provide new direction and hope for the letter senders. Here, magical realism serves as a symbol that even in the harsh realities of life, there is always room for hope.

### **1.2.3 Solidarity and Social Concern**

The magical realism in this novel reinforces the moral message of the importance of mutual assistance. The characters who respond to letters from the past, though initially "ordinary people" with criminal backgrounds, transform into empathetic individuals. This demonstrates that miracles can arise from the actions of ordinary people who choose to care for and help others. The miracle lies not in strange events, but in the change of heart that occurs through empathy.

### **1.2.4 Delivering Morals Without Patronizing**

Another advantage of using magical realism to convey moral values is its non-patronizing approach. Values such as honesty, responsibility, and compassion are conveyed not directly by the narrator, but through the experiences of characters facing magical events. This makes the moral message more touching

and easily accepted by readers because it emerges naturally within the storyline.

### 1.2.5 Miracles in Everyday Life

Through a blend of magic and real life, *The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store* conveys a moral message in a gentle yet powerful way. Its magical realism is not only a narrative tool, but also a means of conveying noble human values, such as forgiveness, hope, and solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

With these five characteristics, it can be said that Keigo Higashino's novel *The Miracle of Namiya Grocery Store* tends to convey magical or mystical elements. This tendency is evident in the presence of magical objects, characters, and magical events, such as events that evoke emotions, as well as disruptions of time, space, and identity. This novel not only offers a compelling story but also invites readers to reflect on deeper themes about life, hope, and human relationships. By using elements of magical realism, Higashino succeeds in creating a rich and immersive reading experience, one that can inspire and provoke readers' thoughts. This novel, with all its complexity and beauty, demonstrates that literature can be a bridge connecting the real world with the magical world, providing deeper meaning for each individual who reads it. The presence of magical events in the story is an effective way to reinforce moral messages. The miracle in the form of a letter that crosses time, for example, opens up space for moral reflection for both characters and readers, that simple acts such as listening to and helping others can bring their own miracles into life.

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