

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Life is a chain of events that happens to human beings. Many believe that everything in life happens for a reason, while others may believe that life holds a significant purpose for each individual. Philosophers and scientists have long discussed and attempted to find the meaning of life. The very question of life's meaning has been chosen as a central topic in various fields of study. Although some have claimed that the meaning of life lies within the realm of linguistics—its interpretation depending solely on the medium of the language used—life continues to spark curiosity among philosophers, linguists, and scientists alike, driving them to seek understanding. On the other hand, authors and writers often express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions about life in a more creative and fulfilling way. This has led to the production of literary works through a more creative and often emotionally resonant approach, in which articulated of ideas, beliefs, and reflections about life.

Literature has been embedded in a succinct definition as a body of written works or a work of one's imagination. Taylor (1981) insightfully describes literature is “an act of the writer's imagination in selecting, ordering, and interpreting life-experience” (p. 1). literature serves as a unique and powerful medium through which human experiences, thoughts, and realities are not only represented but reinterpreted. It becomes a lens through which life, in all its complexity and nuance, is viewed, questioned, and understood.

Furthermore, literature, classified as “fictional and imaginative writings,” has evolved into and been produced in different genres, namely: drama, poetry, and prose fiction (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 199). Each genre contributes differently to the understanding of life's intricacies, allowing for diverse modes of storytelling and expression that continue to enrich the intellectual and emotional fabric of human culture.

A novel is broadly defined as an extended work of prose fiction, distinguished from shorter literary forms such as the short story and the novella (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 199). One of the defining characteristics of the novel lies in its substantial length and narrative complexity, which allow for more elaborate development of characters, plotlines, and thematic elements compared to other literary genres. As Taylor (1981) notes, the novel attempts “to reflect and express something of the quality or value of human experience or conduct. Its subject matter may be taken from patterns of life as we know it, or set in an exotic and imaginative time or place” (p. 46). Through the novel, authors have a medium through which they can explore and express a wide range of human experiences. In this sense, the novel becomes more than just a fictional account. It is a crafted representation of the realities, dilemmas, and emotional landscapes that individuals encounter throughout life.

Before The Coffee Gets Cold is an English-translated novel written by Toshikazu Kawaguchi. It was first published in 2015. Beginning as a play that was later adapted into a novel, *Before The Coffee Gets Cold* has sold over a million copies in its original language, Japanese. The success of Kawaguchi’s first novel was later adapted into a movie entitled *Café Funiculi Funicula* in 2018. Likewise, within five years, the success of *Before The Coffee Gets Cold* was followed by two sequels: *Before The Coffee Gets Cold: Tales from The Café*, and *Before Your Memory Fades*. Although, these three novels feature different characters, the stories revolve around the same central idea—time travel.

“If you could go back, who would you want to meet?” is the first intriguing line in Kawaguchi’s *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*. This is fairly expressed by Kawaguchi in terms of the central idea of this novel. To bring his idea to life, Kawaguchi presents a story about a peculiar café offering an unusual service: the ability for customers to travel through time. Within this narrative, Kawaguchi divides four time-travelers into four interconnected stories. Each of these time-travelers meets the others and is united through the shared experience of time travel.

Situated on a small street in Tokyo, the café becomes the thread that ties all the chapters together. Each chapter tells the story of four different time-travellers. The

first chapter follows, the first time-traveller, a woman who wishes to express her true feelings to her boyfriend one last time. The second chapter tells the story of a nurse whose husband, a regular customer, has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She hopes to meet him in the past and ask about a letter he once wrote to her. The third chapter is about a bar owner, also a regular, who wants to apologize to her deceased sister. The fourth and final chapter follows the wife of the café's owner, born with a heart defect, who longs to speak to her future daughter for the first and last time.

These four time-travelers face life-altering challenges. Each of them tries to rebuild their present by journeying through time. However, the café offers more than just the chance to visit the past or future. To succeed, each traveler must obey one peculiar rule: they must drink the coffee served to them—before it gets cold.

Before The Coffee Gets Cold has been reviewed by a couple of authors. One of the reviews states that this novel is categorized into a genre of fantasy or science fiction (Kelly, 2020). However, considering the peculiar service that this café gives and time-travelling events that take place in present-day Tokyo, the present writer hypothesizes that *Before The Coffee Gets Cold* is neither of that genre, but a novel of magical realism.

Based on the hypothesis mentioned above, the present writer is interested in analyzing the elements of magical realism in *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*. It is also the purpose of the present writer to explore the significance of using magical realism in the story. Therefore, *Magical Realism in Toshikazu Kawaguchi's Before The Coffee Gets Cold* is chosen as the title for this study.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

Based on the background of the study provided, problems in which will be discussed are as follows:

1. How are the characteristics of magical realism depicted in *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*?
2. What are the significances of magical realism used to present the story in *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

According to the questions formed above, the purposes of this study are in the following:

1. To describe how each characteristic of magical realism is depicted in the novel.
2. To explain the significances of utilizing magical realism in presenting the story of *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The present writer conducts this study on the analysis of magical realism in the selected novel *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*. The results presented in this *skripsi* are hoped to introduce readers to magical realism, its characteristics in fiction, and the significance of utilizing magical realism in storytelling. It is also hoped by the present writer that this study will contribute to, and be further discussed in, future academic discussions at Faculty of Letters and Languages, Universitas Kristen Indonesia.

1.5 Methodology of The Study

This study seeks to find and understand the significance of the characteristics of magical realism in *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*. The method applied is qualitative research. This method helps the present writer to analyze, interpret, and draw conclusions from the experiences and phenomena found in the selected novel (Ary et al., 2010). The novel consists of four sub-chapters, all of which are used as both the object and source of data. Additionally, the present writer conducted an analysis using a descriptive technique, in which words, phrases, and dialogues were analyzed and interpreted.

To fulfill this, several stages were carried out by the present writer. First, a close reading of the selected novel was conducted, followed by studying the theory of magical realism proposed by Wendy B. Faris. To deepen the understanding of the concept of magical realism, the present writer also examined some of the

intrinsic elements of the novel. This was then followed by identifying the characteristics of magical realism and categorizing the data accordingly. After categorizing and collecting the data in the form of phrases and dialogues, the present writer interpreted the data to draw a conclusion about its significance in the selected novel.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of The Study

This study will focus on the characteristics of magical realism. It aims to explore how these characteristics are portrayed within the story *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* by Toshikazu Kawaguchi. By closely examining the narrative, this study will highlight how elements of magical realism influence both the structure and emotional depth of the story. Lastly, it will consider the significance of magical realism in shaping the overall narrative.

1.7 Status of The Study

The present writer has found several related studies on magical realism in Japanese literature and beyond, each with different focuses and outcomes. The first study, *Dreaming in Isolation: Magical Realism in Modern Japanese Literature* by Mayer (2018), explores how Murakami and Yoshimoto use magical realism to portray emotional isolation. Dreams are shown as a bridge between public and private worlds, offering healing and a sense of connection. Mayer presents magic in everyday moments as a hopeful metaphor for overcoming social disconnection. The next article, titled *The House of the Japanese Spirits: Orientalism and Magical Realism in Isabel Allende's El amante japonés*, was written by Carlsen (2018), who, through the lens of magical realism and orientalism, analyzes how “the novel presents Japanese Americans in a positive light, yet resorts to various stereotypes in its portrayal,” along with the mystical beliefs embedded in the story (p. 104). The third research, entitled *Magical Realism in Riggs' Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* by Wati and Ayu (2019), focuses on revealing the presence of magical realism experienced by the main character, Jacob Portman, in this young

adult novel. Following that, *Magical Realism in Audrey Niffenegger's The Time Traveler's Wife*, written by Asmida (2020), centers on exploring the characteristics of magical realism and the cultural history conveyed in the text. The final one is a study titled *Magical Realism in Neil Gaiman's The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Hasanah, Kuncara, and Astuti (2021), which discusses the characteristics of magical realism, the literary techniques used, and its role within the novel. However, based on the present writer's research at Fakultas Sastra dan Bahasa, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, no previous study has been found that specifically analyzes the selected novel *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* or explores magical realism in this particular context.

1.8 Organization of The Study

In this *skripsi*, the present writer organizes the discussion into four chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in developing the overall analysis.

In Chapter II, it provides the theoretical framework necessary for analyzing the text. The present writer discusses key literary concepts including character and characterization, which are used to examine the psychological and emotional development of the main characters. The concept of setting is also discussed, as it plays a crucial role in shaping the fantastical yet grounded world of the novel. Furthermore, the present writer explores symbolism, focusing on how certain objects, actions, and characters carry deeper meanings beyond their literal function in the narrative. The concept of theme is also included to examine the underlying messages conveyed in the novel. A central focus of this chapter is the discussion on magical realism, both as a literary mode and a narrative strategy. The present writer elaborates on the characteristics of magical realism, as identified by scholars such as Wendy Faris and others, to create a solid foundation for textual analysis in the next chapter.

In Chapter III, the findings and discussion are presented. In this chapter, the present writer identifies and analyzes the characteristics of magical realism found in *Before The Coffee Gets Cold*. Each characteristic is discussed in relation to the intrinsic elements of the selected novel. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the

intentions conveyed through these magical elements, which help to answer the significance of magical realism utilized in the story.

In Chapter IV, it presents the conclusion and suggestion. The conclusion is drawn from the analysis in Chapter III. The present writer summarizes the main findings and reaffirms the significance of magical realism in the context of the story. This chapter also briefly reflects on the potential for further research, suggesting other possible angles from which *Before The Coffee Gets Cold* may be studied in the future.

