

**Magical Realism and Its Influence on the Main Characters' Environmental Awareness
in Helen Dunmore's *Ingo***

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Abstrak

Ingo karya Helen Dunmore merupakan sebuah novel yang menggunakan unsur-unsur realisme magis untuk mengeksplorasi isu-isu lingkungan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada *Ingo* karena aspek-aspek fantastis dalam novel ini mencerminkan karakteristik realisme magis dan tampaknya memengaruhi kesadaran lingkungan para tokoh utamanya. Penelitian ini memiliki dua tujuan utama: untuk mengkaji bagaimana realisme magis digambarkan dalam novel dan untuk menyelidiki pengaruhnya terhadap kesadaran para tokoh utama terhadap lingkungan. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan lima ciri utama realisme magis menurut Wendy B. Faris, yaitu: keberadaan keajaiban yang tidak dapat dijelaskan secara logis, dunia yang luar biasa, keraguan yang mengguncang, perpaduan antara dua dunia yang berbeda, serta gangguan terhadap konsep waktu, identitas, dan ruang. Sumber data utama berasal dari *Ingo* edisi *e-book* terbitan tahun 2009 oleh HarperCollins, dengan data yang dikumpulkan berasal dari narasi dan dialog yang melibatkan tiga tokoh utama, yaitu Sapphire, Conor, dan Faro. Analisis disusun menggunakan struktur TEEL (Topik, Evidensi, Eksplanasi, Link) dan didukung oleh studi-studi sebelumnya yang relevan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Ingo* memuat kelima unsur realisme magis menurut Wendy B. Faris, dan elemen-elemen luar biasa dalam novel ini secara efektif menyoroti isu-isu lingkungan yang pada akhirnya membentuk kesadaran lingkungan para tokoh utamanya.

Kata Kunci: realisme magis, kesadaran, lingkungan, identitas

Abstract

Helen Dunmore's *Ingo* is a novel that employs the elements of magical realism to explore environmental issues. This study focuses on *Ingo* because its fantastical aspects reflect characteristics of magical realism and appear to impact the environmental awareness of its main characters. This study has two main aims: to examine how magical realism is depicted in the novel and to investigate its influence on the main characters' awareness of the environment. To accomplish this, the study applies Wendy B. Faris's five key features of magical realism: the presence of irreducible magic, the extraordinary world, unsettling doubts, the fusion of two different worlds, and the disruption of time, identity, and space. The primary source is the 2009 e-book edition of *Ingo* published by HarperCollins, with collected data drawn from narrative passages and dialogues involving the three main characters, namely Sapphire, Conor, and Faro. The analysis follows the TEEL (Topic, Evidence, Explanation, Link) structure and is supported by relevant previous studies. The findings reveal that *Ingo* exhibits all five of Wendy B. Faris's magical realism elements, and its extraordinary elements effectively highlight environmental concerns, ultimately shaping the main characters' environmental awareness.

Keywords: magical realism, environmental, awareness, identity

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, literature has played a crucial role in expressing and exploring human experiences, beliefs, and social concerns. Among the diverse range of literary genres, magical realism is particularly notable for its ability to merge the mundane with the magical, creating a narrative space where fantastical elements coexist naturally within a realistic setting (Pamungkas, 2023). This unique narrative technique enables authors to explore complex themes in a subtle yet powerful manner.

Although magical realism has its origins in Latin American literature, over time it has evolved into a global literary phenomenon, now used by writers from various cultural backgrounds to address issues such as identity, cultural conflict, political struggle, and environmental degradation.

An example of this genre adaptation can be seen in Helen Dunmore's *Ingo*. In this novel, Dunmore integrates magical realism to tell the captivating story of Sapphire, a young girl who embarks on a mystical journey after discovering a hidden underwater world deeply connected

to her personal identity and family history. Through this narrative, Dunmore seamlessly weaves together fantastical elements—such as talking sea creatures and magical sea currents—with realistic environmental concerns, such as the protection of natural habitats and the balance between humans and the ocean. By doing so, the novel underlines the fragile yet profound bond between humanity and nature.

Dunmore presents the natural world not merely as a setting, but as a living, sacred force that demands respect and understanding. The magical elements are not meant to distract from reality but rather to intensify the reader's awareness of environmental issues. In this way, magical realism becomes a powerful narrative strategy that deepens the reader's emotional and intellectual engagement with ecological themes. Through *Ingo*, Dunmore demonstrates how literature—and magical realism in particular—can be used as a meaningful vehicle to promote environmental awareness and appreciation for the natural world.

Combining magical realism with environmental awareness might appear contradictory at first. Nevertheless, magical realism can shed light on hidden or often overlooked environmental problems (Mukherjee, 2010). By merging realistic natural settings with fantastical elements, this genre deepens the audience's emotional and imaginative connection to nature, thereby highlighting ecological issues more effectively. In *Ingo*, the seamless fusion of an enchanting underwater realm with real environmental challenges emphasizes the value of nature and the importance of preserving it.

The relationship between magical realism and environmental awareness corresponds with the core ideas of ecocriticism. This approach explores how literature engages with the natural world, emphasizing the dynamic between humans and the environment (Zhang, 2023). From ecocriticism emerge several key concepts, including environmental awareness. This idea involves individuals' understanding of appropriate environmental behavior, as well as their awareness and interpretation of nature's significance in their lives. Moreover, environmental awareness signifies the concern people show for the environment in response to the impact of their actions.

Helen Dunmore's *Ingo* serves as a compelling example of how the concepts of magical realism and environmental awareness can be portrayed in literature. The novel offers a clear illustration of the connection between these two ideas. Through the protagonists' experiences, Dunmore highlights the contrast between the Mer—*Ingo*'s inhabitants, who hold deep reverence for the ocean, and the often harmful behavior of humans. The seamless blending of the human world and the underwater realm, along with the characters' interactions, effectively

showcases the themes of magical realism and environmental awareness.

Several scholars have explored this topic in their research. François Gavillon (2013), for instance, analyzes *People of the Whale* by Linda Hogan through the lens of magical realism, drawing on theories from scholars such as Faris and linking them to environmental awareness. Gavillon contends that magical realism narratives offer a deeper engagement with the natural world. His study reveals that Hogan's novel serves as a tool to open readers' minds, ultimately fostering environmental awareness by presenting a new way to reconnect literature with nature (Gavillon, 2013).

In 2018, Nesrin Yavas conducted an ecocritical study examining environmental issues in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*. Yavas discovered that Yamashita employs magical realism to address ecological concerns, notably the Mataco phenomenon—a plateau covered in plastic waste resulting from global industrial production. According to Yavas, the integration of magical realism with ecocriticism enables Yamashita to highlight the concept of slow violence, a form of gradual and often invisible environmental harm. This narrative approach enhances readers' understanding and awareness of such issues, making the hidden global-scale environmental damage more tangible (Yavas, 2018).

The third ecocritical study, conducted by Reyyan Bal in 2021, examines how nature is portrayed in fantasy fiction. The research emphasizes the role of fantasy literature in fostering environmental awareness. Bal argues that this genre plays a significant part in shaping and promoting environmentally conscious lifestyles. To support this claim, he explores the theoretical perspectives of Tolkien and Le Guin and analyzes Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* through an ecocritical lens. Bal concludes that fantasy literature, with its non-anthropocentric qualities, has the potential to inspire readers toward building a more sustainable world (Bal, 2021).

The three previous studies focus on different literary works, yet all of them apply an ecocriticism approach and use magical realism as their theoretical framework. However, none of these studies have examined Helen Dunmore's *Ingo*. To address this gap, the current research will use *Ingo* as its primary text and analyze it through the lens of Wendy B. Faris's five key characteristics of magical realism. By employing this framework, the study aims to investigate how elements of magical realism are presented in the novel and how they contribute to shaping the main characters' environmental awareness.

METHOD

The main source of data for this study is the novel *Ingo* by Helen Dunmore. While the novel was originally published in 2005 by HarperCollins, this research uses the 2009 e-book edition released by the same publisher. The data consists of textual citations, specifically taken from both the narrative passages and the dialogues involving the three central characters: Sapphire, Conor, and Faro. These selected texts serve as the foundation for the analysis conducted in this study.

The novel is first read through skimming and scanning in order to obtain the basic information, including the theme, characters, and their characterizations, plot, and settings. After the basic information has been briefly noted, more profound data are collected through close reading and note-taking. Passages taken from the novel depict the concept of magical realism and its connection with environmental awareness. Each datum is carefully quoted regarding its exact position in the e-book to maintain accuracy and ensure traceability during analysis.

After closely reading the novel several times, some potential data are collected and classified based on which element of magical realism they are. To make this study concise, the potential data are selected based on their capacity to illustrate the magical realism presented in the novel. Passages that contain significant magical events and supporting linguistic choices are considered most relevant. Those selected data are then analyzed according to Wendy B. Faris's five key elements of magical realism using the TEEL technique. Each analysis begins with a clear topic sentence, followed by evidence and elaboration of the element being discussed. Finally, the analysis is concluded by linking the discussion back to the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section is divided into two main parts: analyzing the presence of magical realism in the novel using Wendy B. Faris's key characteristics of magical realism and exploring how these extraordinary elements play a role in shaping the main characters' environmental awareness. The analysis is presented using the TEEL structure: each paragraph begins with a clear topic sentence, followed by supporting evidence from the text, a detailed elaboration of the evidence, and a concluding sentence that links the analysis back to the main topic.

Magical Realism in *Ingo*

1. The Irreducible Elements of Magic

The first key characteristic of magical realism identified by Faris is irreducible magic, which refers to magical elements that cannot be logically explained. In *Ingo*, this trait is reflected through various events described in the narration. One notable example is when

the main character, Sapphire, frequently hears mysterious and unexplainable calls coming from the sea.

...and now there's the sound of the sea again, soft and sweet this time, like a breath in my ear...closer and closer. (Dunmore, 2009, 127)

In the passage above, the use of the word "again" indicates that this is not the first time Sapphire has heard the mysterious call, suggesting that she has experienced it repeatedly. This highlights how Sapphire receives the call more frequently than anyone else in the story, unlike her mother, who has never heard it, and even her brother Conor, who has been to Ingo but does not hear the call as consistently as she does. Furthermore, the phrase "soft and sweet this time, like a breath in my ear" reveals how the nature of the call changes over time. The very first call Sapphire hears occurs before she even visits Ingo; at that point, the call sounds distant and faint, and she must be very close to the shore to detect it. In contrast, in the current passage, the call is so near and vivid that she can describe its softness and sweetness, even though she is indoors in her bedroom with the window closed. This shift reflects how the magical connection between Sapphire and the sea intensifies as the story progresses.

The phrases above illustrate that Sapphire, unlike the other characters, shares a uniquely strong and personal connection with the sea and the mysterious world beneath it. She perceives the sea as more than just a body of water—it communicates with her on a deeper, almost spiritual level. This extraordinary bond is evident through her frequent, vivid dreams and sensations of being gently pulled or swayed beneath the ocean's surface, which often feel both strange and realistic. Initially, the sea's voice reaches her in a faint and unclear way, but over time it becomes increasingly powerful, vivid, and irresistible, as if persistently calling her back to Ingo. Sapphire also experiences a profound sense of longing whenever she is away from the ocean, which strengthens her belief that Ingo is personally reaching out to her.

Despite being in her room far from the shoreline, Sapphire can still hear the mysterious call vividly, which she believes comes from Ingo. This mysterious and alluring call often leads her to take some actions unconsciously. In that passage, despite lying on her bed, Sapphire can clearly hear the waves as if she were lying on the beach. She can vividly describe the sound of how each wave breaks after hitting the beach, even though her window is shut. Without her realizing it, this sensation takes the young girl closer to her window and opens it wide.

Moreover, since her father, Matthew Trehwella, was lost at sea, Sapphire has always been the one who strongly refuses to believe the idea that he drowned. She is certain that her father knows the sea, especially the waters near

their beach, better than anyone else in the town. Matthew has been sailing and diving in the ocean near their house for years and has more than enough experience for this. She also believes her father was taken—or chose to go—into Ingo. This speculation comes to mind because she remembers her father used to sing a song with the word Ingo in the lyrics. Sapphire had no idea what Ingo was, but now that she often hears the call after her father's missing, she knows what Ingo is and where. This thought of Sapphire deepens her faith that the sea is not just a place but a world that intentionally calls certain people, especially those with a connection to it.

The mysterious call Sapphire often hears is the depiction of irreducible elements of magic because this cannot be explained by rational understanding. Although she tries to deny it by thinking that it is just her imagination, Sapphire cannot resist the call, and it often allures her to come as close as possible to the sea. According to Faris, irreducible elements of magic appear in the novel to enable the sense of defamiliarization, which makes something unusual or unfamiliar be perceived as normal events (Asayesh & Arargüç, 2017). This also becomes the significant difference between magical realism and fantasy. While the magical elements in magical realism are seen as ordinary occurrences, the pure fantasy genre introduces a new, different realm that has no clear rules (Değirmenci, 2016). The call from the sea also cannot be reduced to a metaphor alone, as it has tangible effects on the characters, drawing them into Ingo.

2. Detailed Description of the Phenomenal World

Magical realism's second key characteristic is that the extraordinary world is described in detail. In Dunmore's *Ingo*, most of the magical elements that appear are well explained. An example can be seen from the detailed depiction Dunmore gives for one of Ingo's sacred areas, the Limina, which the Air people called the Bawns.

Every detail shows: white glistening sand below us, scattered with shells and crab skeletons, sculptured rocks... (Dunmore, 2009, 284)

In the passage above, Dunmore clearly wants to present every detail of Ingo's sacred place, the Limina. Sapphire describes the Limina as a peaceful, quiet garden, where the water is still. The phrase "*white glistening sand*" really helps the reader to imagine the Limina as a place where the sunlight is calm, making the white sand below glow, implying how peaceful the sacred place is. This phrase is rich in sensory details, providing the readers with color, texture, and even the feel of the sparkling sand. The things mentioned, such as "*white shells, crab skeletons, and sculptured rocks*," also reinforce the condition of the Limina as the final place for the Mer and

other sea creatures. Shells are the home of marine animals like oysters, clams, and more. When the animal dies, the shell is left behind (Campbell, 2015). This is what happens at the Limina, where a dying sea animal leaves their skeleton at this sacred place. "*Sculptured rocks*" act like a gravestone in the human realm, where they display the identity or serve as a lasting tribute to the deceased. This seemingly simple yet intricate description of the Limina is similar to what a human graveyard is. This similarity between Ingo and the human world is magical realism's attitude, where the extraordinary should be recognized as ordinary rather than shocking (Figlerowicz & Mertehikian, 2023).

Not only are Limina's physical descriptions presented, but the strict rules all sea creatures must obey are also mentioned through Faro. He says, "*Their families will come this far with them, but no farther.*" This sentence implies that the Limina is a restricted place even for the Mer themselves. Only those who are ready to die can cross the borderline because the seals that protect the area are always ready to attack whoever comes too close to the line. This information about the rules that the Mer follow adds a stronger and more detailed description of the extraordinary world in the novel. The information Faro gives describes a specific limit to how far the Mer people can go, indicating that the extraordinary world also has laws and social patterns, just like in real human life. Other details are also mentioned through Sapphire that illustrate the textures, colors, and atmosphere of the Limina in a way that appeals to readers' senses. This is shown when Sapphire can feel the delicate water shift around her, see the ethereal glow from the sun above the water's surface, and feel the soft currents caress her skin. Despite being an extraordinary world, the Limina is not portrayed as abstract or dreamlike; instead, it is described in detail, making it seem as real as any location on land.

This reflects Faris's concept that magical realism blends the extraordinary with the ordinary, making the fantastical a natural part of the real world (Arva & Roland, 2014). Rather than serving merely as a metaphor or illusion, the Limina is portrayed as a tangible space with its own rules and history, inviting readers to experience it through the narrative's vivid descriptions. This meets the criteria of magical realism, which requires the fantastical to be conveyed with concrete detail, which is achieved as Sapphire describes the Limina using her five senses. Dunmore shapes the Limina in ways that resemble the human world and grounds it in realistic settings, making the magical elements feel believable and fully integrated, reinforcing magical realism's unique balance (Geetha, 2010).

3. Unsettling Doubts

Magical realism narratives often contain contrasting understandings that can trigger doubts, challenging readers' way of perceiving the storyline. Contrasting understandings may be presented through some characters that undergo different experiences, which will leave readers questioning the truth about the events. This concept is depicted when Conor cannot hear the call like Sapphire.

I watch his searching, suspicious expression. I can tell that he can't hear a thing. (Dunmore, 2009, 137)

And again, Sapphire hears the mysterious call she believes is coming from Ingo that morning. While having a late breakfast in the kitchen with Conor and their mother, she is the only one who can hear it. Her family shows no sign of noticing the sound, which leaves Sapphire puzzled as to why they remain unaffected by something she hears so clearly, as if it were a knife slicing through her ears. The description of Conor's reaction as a "*searching, suspicious expression*" suggests his doubt and skepticism toward the call Sapphire keeps mentioning. His expression reveals that he either doesn't believe her or is unsure about the existence of Ingo and the call itself. Although Conor has visited Ingo before, he has never heard the call or felt drawn back to it. To him, Ingo is a dangerous place where humans don't belong, and he suspects that the call is merely a trap designed to lure people in and make them stay.

The difference in what the siblings experience brings readers to question the true nature of the mysterious call. Sapphire is shown to have a strong connection to Ingo, experiencing the call as both irresistible and comforting. In contrast, Conor approaches Ingo with suspicion and caution, hinting that the call may carry hidden dangers. This contrast raises uncertainty about whether Ingo is genuinely magical or conceals something more threatening that Sapphire fails to see. It also leads readers to question the origin of the call, whether it's a real external phenomenon or simply a psychological experience unique to Sapphire. Her sensitivity to the call may suggest a deeper connection to Ingo, or it could imply she's being manipulated. The novel never clearly identifies the call's source, whether it stems from a magical entity or something even more mysterious. Because of the contrasting responses between Sapphire and Conor, readers are left uncertain about whether the call is a tangible reality or a subjective experience shaped by Sapphire's perspective.

Unlike the pure fantasy genre, which presents the extraordinary world in a separate manner with its own rules, magical realism inserts the irreducible elements of magic into an everyday setting as naturally as possible without explanation. The magical aspects are described in

rich detail, making them appear natural and integrated with ordinary life. However, the lack of clear rules or explanations often leaves readers with a sense of uncertainty. In fantasy stories like J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter, magical elements such as Hogwarts, spells, and potions are strange but not ambiguous, as the author outlines how the magical system works, reassuring readers of its logic. In contrast, Ingo presents the mysterious call without defined boundaries or rules. It appears naturally in Sapphire's daily life but is absent from the experiences of characters like Conor and their mother, which creates ambiguity. This uncertainty invites readers to engage more critically with the story and explore the layered, complex nature of the magical world (Yasir & Fnteel, 2023).

4. Fusion of Two Different Worlds

The fourth key characteristic of magical realism narratives, according to Wendy B. Faris, is the presence of two different worlds—the ordinary and the extraordinary, which are seamlessly merged. In such narratives, the everyday world exists alongside magical elements, yet the line dividing them is so subtle that it becomes nearly imperceptible.

The two seals are close to me, one on each side. They want to push me onward into the shallower water. (Dunmore, 2009, 114)

As Sapphire prepares to leave Ingo, the boundary between the ordinary and extraordinary worlds becomes a bit more visible. In this scene, the magical realm is represented by two seals that accompany her as she swims back to the human world, known as the Air. In magical realism, animals often serve as symbols of the merging between the real and the fantastical. The line "*The two seals are close to me, one on each side*" highlights Sapphire's deeper connection to Ingo compared to other characters. Their act of escorting her suggests that she exists between both realms, with no clear division separating them. The phrase "*They want to push me*" reflects how these sea creatures behave in a way that differs from how animals are typically perceived by humans. Here, the seals are given human-like intentions, a common element in magical realism that blurs the distinction between human and non-human beings (Faris, 2024). Additionally, the phrase "*into the shallower water*" emphasizes the symbolic threshold between Ingo and the human world—a transitional space that is neither entirely land nor completely sea, representing the liminal boundary between the two realities.

In addition, the coexistence of the ordinary and extraordinary realms is clearly illustrated during Sapphire's first encounter with Faro, marking the novel's initial introduction of the magical world. While searching for her brother, Sapphire decides to go alone to the cove,

convinced that Conor is either swimming or relaxing by the shore. Instead, she unexpectedly meets Faro. At first, Sapphire assumes he is just an ordinary boy in a dark diving suit, but she is shocked when she sees his true form. She describes Faro as appearing human from the waist up, resembling Conor, while his lower half is that of a seal: “I see a boy like Conor, with dark, wet hair and brown eyes and suntanned skin. And I see the curving tail of a seal.” Faro’s presence—part human, part seal—symbolizes the merging of the magical with the real. As a figure from Ingo, the underwater realm, Faro represents the overlap between the extraordinary and the everyday, embodying the fluid boundary between the two worlds.

The ability of characters from both realms to move between them reflects magical realism’s tendency to blur the line between the magical and the ordinary (Prasanty et al., 2024). In the earlier passage where Sapphire is leaving Ingo, both worlds are shown to coexist. As a human, Sapphire is able to enter and explore the underwater world of Ingo, while Faro, a being from the magical realm, can move freely into the human world and breathe air. This mutual access is not limited to humans and Mer; animals such as seals, dolphins, sharks, and seagulls also embody this blending of worlds. These creatures function as connectors between the human and magical realms, frequently interacting with both Sapphire and Mer. Unlike in traditional fantasy, where magical animals often exist solely in a separate realm, these animals belong to the natural world while maintaining a close relationship with Ingo. They are not overtly magical, yet their deep ties to both worlds suggest a natural harmony between water and air, reinforcing the seamless integration of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

5. Disruption of Time, Identity, and Space

The concept of the disruption of time, identity, and place in magical realism refers to the way the genre challenges and unsettles traditional perceptions of these elements, offering readers an alternative and often new experience of reality.

Disruption of Time

The notion of disruption of time, identity, and place refers to how magical realism challenges conventional understanding of these elements, presenting a new experience for both the characters and readers. In the novel, this concept can be seen when Sapphire and Conor finally realize that the time in Ingo and their world work differently.

“You were so deep in Ingo that it felt like minutes. But it was hours, Saph.” (Dunmore, 2009, 164)

The passage above illustrates the contrasting system of time between the human world—representing reality—and Ingo, the extraordinary realm. Sapphire believes she

didn’t spend much time in Ingo that day, yet Conor strongly disagrees. The phrase “so deep in Ingo” suggests more than just physical immersion; it points to Sapphire’s emotional and psychological attachment to the underwater world. This deep connection hints that time in Ingo is subjective and personal—Sapphire experiences it differently from others, indicating that time in magical realism is often internal and emotionally driven rather than objectively measured. When Conor says, “But it was hours, Saph,” it brings attention to the sharp difference in how time passes in the two realms. While Sapphire feels she only had a brief conversation with Faro and rode a few currents before returning to the surface, Conor reveals that nearly an entire day—around 24 hours—had gone by in the human world.

This sharp difference between Ingo’s time and human time highlights the presence of two coexisting temporal systems, a common trait in magical realism. When Sapphire and Conor enter Ingo, their normal sense of time begins to fade. Minutes spent underwater can stretch into hours on land, and vice versa, making it impossible to rely on a conventional, linear timeline. This experience reflects one of magical realism’s defining features: the disruption of chronological time. Time becomes fluid, unpredictable, and unbound by logic, yet it still operates in a way that feels natural within the story’s world (Asmida, 2020). This fluidity enhances the blending of the magical and the real, creating a timeless atmosphere that challenges the reader’s common understanding of reality.

Disruption of Identity

Magical realism also challenges fixed assumptions about self-identity, allowing characters to exist between states of being, not in a single stable identity (Haghighi et al., 2024). Being caught between two worlds, one’s identity is often depicted as fluid rather than fixed, as can be seen in Sapphire.

I open my mouth, and the cool, sweet underwater rushes into it. Speak Mer, not Air. I let the sea flow out of my mouth and make its own words. (Dunmore, 2009, 114)

As Sapphire engages deeper into Ingo, she also grows the ability to speak Mer—the language the Mer people speak. The phrase “*I open my mouth*” can be translated to mean that Sapphire has finally surrendered and invited the new world to enter. This is also supported by the next phrase: “*and the cold, sweet underwater rushes into it.*” She describes the sea water as not as salty as normal people would say, but it is cold and sweet, implying that the sea is not a threat, but rather welcoming, as if it is becoming part of her. The way she encourages herself to “*speak Mer, not Air,*” also suggests that Sapphire finally embraces her new identity. Then the last sentence, “*I let the sea flow out of my mouth,*” indicates that she is not just in Ingo, but

Ingo now is inside her, speaking through her. The sea “makes its own words,” hints that the shift in Sapphire’s identity is fluid because she does not need to learn the language over a long time; instead, she instantly acquires the ability after embracing her new identity. She recognizes that the sounds she makes do not belong to Air, but at the same time, she feels familiar with them. Not only can she finally speak a little bit of Mer, but Sapphire can also understand what the seals say to her. She starts to understand and instinctively speaks Mer language, indicating a shift in her identity that she is now no longer purely human.

Not like learning languages at school, Sapphire absorbs the Mer language effortlessly, as if the language magically appears within her rather than being acquired. This proves that in magical realism narratives, characters will experience a switch in their existence, be it physical or cognitive, allowing them to have a dynamic identity (Aljohani, 2016).

Disruption of Space

Faris also suggests that magical realism challenges the conventional idea of place. In the novel, the sea itself is a good example of this concept. The sea is not just a physical location, but it has its logic, rules, and magic that challenge humans’ common sense about it.

The water’s filling with sound...It comes from all sides, clicking, whistling, echoing, fluting.
(Dunmore, 2009, 201)

The sea, which is known as a silent object, is depicted as alive in this passage. By reading the sentence “*The water’s filling with sound,*” readers are presented with a new and strange nature of the sea. This sentence suggests that the sea becomes a place where overwhelming sounds from all the creatures in it and the sea itself can be heard once you are in Ingo. This sets up a transformation of place where the sea behaves in a way that contrasts with reality. “*It comes from all sides,*” implies that the sound does not only source from one point, but it is multidirectional and vivid, surrounding Sapphire. The sea not only makes conventional sounds such as splashing, rippling, and bubbling, but it also makes some richer sounds like “*clicking, whistling, echoing, fluting,*” as if it tries to communicate with the marine life living in it. The notion of a water body being a silent, dead, and cold place is disrupted here. Instead, it is said to be lively, vibrant, and surreal, defying realist expectations.

The passage above blurs the line between the physical nature of the sea and the characters’ sensory experiences, challenging conventional perceptions of what the sea represents. According to Faris, settings in magical realism are often recognizable in appearance yet unfamiliar in purpose, similar to how Dunmore portrays the sea as both magical and alive. Magical realism frequently presents

spaces where multiple realities coexist, creating a sense of spatial fluidity and uncertainty. By rejecting a fixed, singular understanding of place, this narrative mode opens up more dynamic interpretations that often reflect marginalized or suppressed viewpoints (Grzęda, 2013). In this context, the sea represents the oppressed perspective, while humans are portrayed as the oppressors and this idea will be explored further in the next part.

Magical Realism’s Influence on the Main Characters’ Environmental Awareness

As ordinary human beings, Sapphire and Conor initially do not realize how certain human traits, especially curiosity and the urge to copy things, have contributed to environmental degradation; often in ways that humans themselves do not notice. It is only after Faro reveals the truth that the siblings begin to gain awareness.

In a conversation with Faro, Sapphire tries to draw a comparison between human behavior and that of the Mer. When Faro explains that the Mer do not imitate aspects of the Air world, Sapphire responds with the question, “*But if you see someone doing something, don’t you want to do it too?*” (Dunmore, 2009, 186). This innocent question reveals Sapphire’s limited awareness of how deeply rooted the human impulse to imitate is, and how such behavior—often driven by curiosity—can unintentionally lead to environmental harm. Faro’s reply serves as a gentle but pointed critique of human tendencies. He highlights how humans often dive into the sea with oxygen tanks out of sheer curiosity and a desire to explore, an act that, from the Mer’s perspective, violates the natural boundaries between air and water. For the Mer, these two realms are meant to remain separate, and crossing those boundaries out of curiosity is seen as disruptive. This moment not only emphasizes the differences between human and Mer worldviews but also invites readers to reflect on the environmental impact of human behavior. Through Faro’s voice, Dunmore also weaves in a broader environmental message, shedding light on the consequences of careless human exploration and interference with nature as follows:

“You crush the coral and destroy the secret places where life begins...You rip up the life of Ingo, and you don’t even want it once you’ve wrecked it.” (Dunmore, 2009, 189)

Environmental issues, such as humans demolishing the sea ecosystem, are well presented through Faro’s words. He, as the magical agent, plays a crucial role in conveying those issues by embodying the perspective of the ocean and its inhabitants. The passage above shows how human beings are oblivious to their surroundings and oftentimes take nature for granted. The usage of the verb “*crush*” conveys humans’ carelessness and violence. Corals are home to a lot of marine animals, and crushing them

suggests that humans are destroying life both physically and metaphorically. Moreover, the mention of “*secret places where life begins*” highlights the sacred and hidden aspect of marine ecosystems, which is crucial for marine life. These are not just places; they are the origin points, implying how humans’ actions destroy the birth and new beginnings of the environment.

The destruction of the underwater ecosystem, along with other environmental issues, often invisible to humans, is revealed through the magical aspects of the narrative. These concerns are voiced by Faro, a character from the extraordinary world, illustrating how magical realism can communicate ecological damage through mystical figures, making such issues feel more immediate and emotionally impactful. Faro’s worries about the ocean are not presented as vague or abstract, but rather as deeply personal injustices experienced by him and other sea creatures. This reflects Rob Nixon’s (2011) argument that imaginative literature—such as magical realism—is a powerful tool for making slow and often unnoticed environmental degradation more tangible to readers. By using magical agents like Faro, the narrative provides a unique and compelling perspective on environmental harm, drawing attention to the subtle and frequently overlooked ways in which nature suffers.

Moreover, Faro’s presence in the novel also serves as a bridge between Sapphire and the underwater world, not only introducing her to Ingo but also making her aware of the harmoniously balanced life of the creatures underwater and the dangers caused by humans. The passage below shows how Sapphire’s interaction with Faro leads her to environmental awareness.

But a diver in a wet suit with air on his back could have swum down after me and caught me. Faro’s right. Divers are dangerous. (Dunmore, 2009, 196)

As Sapphire knows Faro deeply, she begins to adopt his perspective, developing a more profound respect for the ocean. In the passage above, the phrase, “*could have swum down after me and caught me*,” shows Sapphire’s realization of how easily humans can invade the ocean, a place that is not humans’ habitat. This phrase also implies how humans treat the sea: not as a home, but as a place to explore and exploit, even though they have to harm those who live there. Moreover, the idea of being “*caught*” like a fish suggests that humans often see the ocean as their personal possession and treat it as they like. And finally, Sapphire’s thoughts, “*Faro’s right. Divers are dangerous*,” reveal the turning point in her awareness. She finally adopts Faro’s *Mer perspective*, realizing that human presence is threatening to marine life, and that even light human activities, like diving or tourism, can be *dangerous* for the ocean’s fragile ecosystems. Humans

with air on their backs could discover too much, to the point that they will exploit the natural resources. From her interaction with Faro, Sapphire gains awareness that divers are dangerous for the sea as they can come as far as where only Mer can be.

Not only Sapphire, but Conor also gains the same kind of awareness after finding out the fact about how strict the rules of the Limina are from Faro. His awareness of the invisible boundary between water and air is shown in this passage:

“This Limina...He’s got to be warned, so he doesn’t come here. He won’t dive if he knows.” (Dunmore, 2009, 290)

When Roger, their mother’s friend, decided to go diving near the Bawns, Conor initially felt enthusiastic, seeing it as a fun and harmless activity. At that point, he had no idea that such an act could pose a threat to the environment. However, after Faro informs him about the sacred area beneath the Bawns known as the Limina, Conor’s excitement quickly turns into concern. Faro explains that the Limina is guarded by seals who will attack anyone—human or even Mer—who dares to approach, especially divers carrying air tanks. This sacred boundary is not to be crossed. Conor’s growing environmental awareness becomes evident in his urgent response: when he says Roger “got to be warned, so he doesn’t come here,” it marks a shift in his understanding of nature. He begins to see the Limina not just as a physical location, but as a fragile and protected space that must be respected. He finally understands that the environment also has boundaries that humans must not violate. His words also reflect that his awareness is not just internal, but he is motivated to protect the environment by informing others as well. From Faro, Conor finally realizes that there is a boundary between the environment and creatures that shouldn’t be crossed to keep the balance between them.

The siblings’ journey toward understanding and respecting nature reflects Korotenko’s view that environmental awareness develops through personal experiences—whether direct or indirect—arising from interactions with the surrounding world (Korotenko, 2017). Faro, acting as a magical agent and catalyst for this awareness, provides a non-human perspective on nature. He criticizes the destructive impact of human activity on the ocean and encourages a more respectful and balanced relationship with the natural world. Unlike humans, Faro possesses a deep, instinctive connection with the sea, viewing it not merely as a setting or resource, but as a living, sentient entity deserving of protection. Through Faro’s character, Helen Dunmore blends the magical with ecological concerns, using the narrative framework of magical realism to highlight environmental issues in a way

that feels urgent and personally meaningful (Mazzocato, 2024). This portrayal aligns with Wendy Faris's concept of magical realism, in which magical beings—such as Faro—confront and challenge human-centered views of nature, opening space for a more holistic and compassionate environmental awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study reveals that *Ingo* by Helen Dunmore contains a variety of magical elements, one of the most prominent being the mysterious call from the sea. This phenomenon exemplifies Wendy B. Faris's concept of irreducible elements, as it defies rational explanation, cannot be interpreted purely as a metaphor, and creates a sense of defamiliarization. The depiction of the *Limina* is rich in vivid sensory details, allowing readers to visualize its colors, textures, and atmosphere. The contrasting experiences between Sapphire and Conor provoke unsettling doubts, encouraging readers to question their assumptions about reality.

The study also identifies Faris's characteristic of merging realms within *Ingo*, particularly through Sapphire's interactions with sea creatures and the "skin of water," which serves as a symbolic boundary between the human and marine worlds. Disruptions of time, identity, and space are evident in the novel, such as the differing time systems between the surface world and *Ingo*, Sapphire's unexplained ability to speak the Mer language, and the sea's magical power to communicate.

Lastly, Faro's role as a magical figure embodies the environmental consciousness at the heart of the novel. Through him, magical realism becomes a tool to highlight subtle and often overlooked environmental issues. Faro's deep bond with the sea presents nature as sentient and emotional. Unlike human characters, Faro offers a non-human perspective that challenges anthropocentric views, ultimately influencing both Sapphire's and Conor's growing awareness of the environment.

SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study are expected to offer broader implications both theoretically and practically by applying Wendy B. Faris's framework of magical realism and exploring its relevance in revealing environmental issues embedded within literary texts. This research also aims to deepen the understanding of how magical realism can influence readers' environmental awareness, serving as a foundation for future studies in this area. However, despite its contributions, the study also has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The analysis primarily centers on the main plot and central characters, which, while insightful, may be somewhat broad in scope. Therefore,

future research is encouraged to narrow its focus by examining other characters and secondary events that also play important roles in shaping the narrative, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's incorporation of magical realism and environmental themes.

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