



## Communicating culture through magical realism perspectives on selected Malaysian short stories

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### Abstract

Malaysia is a multicultural society with diverse cultures, races and religions. Hence, the government had to set up policies to enhance mutual understanding for the betterment of the nation. This would include the setting up of policies on national language and literature to strengthen the harmony among races. It was then that the Malay literary movement or known as ASAS 50 introduced its philosophy, *Seni untuk Masyarakat*, or art for the masses, was somehow deemed right to support the national agendas after the independence. However, after more than 50 years of achieving independence and national stability, the nation had witnessed the emergence of young writers who adamantly in wanting for their works to be uniquely known; sets them away from any national agendas. These new works tend to apply eclectic approaches without having the need to highlight the issues prevalent in the current situations. The notion of Art for the sake of the society had been long exhausted and the current audience's demands have since changed from the past. This paper traces the tendencies of the two short stories written by two contemporary writers who tried to draw away from fulfilling such ideologies. The research focuses on two short stories namely, *Kuda Kepang* by Fadzliah Johanabas and *Little Sweet* by Ernie Yap. It will examine the ways in which these two writers have explored the supernatural elements in their works through the lens of magical realism. It is found that these two writers tend to communicate with their readers through their cultural backgrounds. It can be postulated that these explorations of their cultural experiences in their writings are to be purely creative and experimental. The experimentation with such mystical elements indicates that although there were no such attempts to project any ideologies, these two works proved that good literary texts can always be entertaining yet didactic.

**Keywords:** culture, experimentations, ideology, magical realism, supernatural elements,

### Introduction

Malaysia literary works has been generally shaped by the policies set forth by the government with specific intention that is to suit the national agendas. One of the many national agendas is to promote harmony among all races. All writings in the national mainstream should be written in the national language; that is the Malay language and the literary works should promote good values to all readers. However, after more than fifty years of independence, the slogan of 'arts for the masses' have been long exhausted and the society is now looking for more challenging readings to fulfil their inquisitive minds. The readers want something more fulfilling and entertaining rather than being presented with the kind of stories that only teach good values. In the advent of postmodern era, the masses perceive good values as being culturally negated thus it is perceived to be constructed. Good values have no longer become the subject of interests of

readers nowadays as people want more realistic portrayal of human nature in a more eclectic and creative approaches.

Supernatural elements and mystical realms were once annihilated from the mainstream of local literary scenes since these were deemed to accentuate the elements of *khurafat* or superstitions. This is paralleled with the guidelines set by the government that all creative works which pertain to publication or production for the masses must not impose any elements that are deemed to be superstitious or *khurafat* in nature<sup>1</sup>. Such acts were perceived appropriate before and many writers tend to only focus on the issues prevalent in their society. Writers were found to recreate the issues through their varied approaches in their writing techniques to ensure that their works are accepted by the local authorities or and the audiences. However, superstitions have never been ventured or could have but not as seriously attempted as a technique in bringing out any meanings in creative writings. The elements of supernatural or mystical elements have always been perceived to be vague, not serious and nonsensical as being portrayed by the acts imposed by the authority.

Stories from folklores and cultural myths were only regarded as stories from the past. These portrayals of rich symbolisms were intended to be didactic in nature. Little do the younger generations realize the importance of such tales in their cultural upbringing that forms what they are now at present. Such stories are then long forgotten but ironically, stories from Western folklores and mythologies gained better popularity. In the west, supernatural and mystical elements were highly exploited in producing a myriad of literary repertoires. Judging from this, folklores and myths can be manipulated to be good teachings to any generations. However, the methods and approaches have to be suitable to address the readers in different eras. Quayum (2001:4) mentioned that:

But Malaysia is made up of various races and therefore writers lack a common pool of consciousness; there is no “common source of collective imagery, symbols and myths”<sup>2</sup>, available for them in the way it is available for writers in a homogenous society. Their creative medium is one but their cultural backgrounds and therefore their imagination and value systems are many.

It can be surmised here that, magical realism can be deemed as to be suitable as a medium to explicate good values from myriad cultural backgrounds for younger generations in this country. Good values that stretch to all cultures can be instilled through these stories as these tales were meant to be didactic especially in disseminating values and identity of a multicultural nation.

Any piece of good literary readings should be able to move the readers to appreciate the writers' efforts and intentions. However, too much values and national agendas will definitely turn the readers away. It is the objective of this paper to highlight the efforts made by these two writers in bringing stories from the past and blending them as their unique attempts in their works. It is evident that these writers were not bound by any national agendas; in fact they had no intentions to be didactic initially<sup>3</sup>. Somehow their creative endeavours had successfully brought superstitions to become their vehicle in bringing the readers to the worlds of the unsaid or unexplored. Through the application of magical realism that was once popular in South America, superstitious or mystical elements can be perceived as an approach in highlighting the culture that is rich in heritage. Magical realism is also seen fit in tackling the elements experimented by these two new writers in their attempts to reverberate the culture highly influenced by the past through their stories.

## Arts for the masses vs. arts for the sake of arts

Arts for the sake of the masses or *Seni untuk Masyarakat* was an ideology started by Angkatan Sasterawan Negara (ASAS 50) or also known as a society that belonged to a group of Malay literature laureate whose major concern is to promote Bahasa Malayu to be the national language in the national literature mainstream. This will certainly advocate the national agenda that was suitable at the time after the independence and during the early formation of the new nation. It was believed that literature was an ideal thrust towards the development of a society. This literary body was pioneered by among others key figures such as Kamaluddin Muhammad ([Keris Mas](#)), Usman Awang and Abdul Samad Ismail. With new approaches and younger proponents, ASAS 50 is currently still active in promoting literature through seminars, workshops, forums and dialogues.

Hamzah Abdul Majid Hussin who was also part of the movement began to question the validity of such ideology, hence *Seni untuk Seni* or arts for the sake of arts, was later debated by ASAS 50 who was resolute in getting their ideology to be well received by the local artists, writers and the public in general. Hamzah argued that writers and artists should not be viewed as figures carrying out the national agendas. Arts should be purely creative and is not meant to always be assuming such a big responsibility to the society. The debate which continued for a while that eventually went on for a year, later remains as a polemic in the local literary development.

Such developments were the beginnings of a new literary progression in the Malaysian scene. It would be wise to mention that there are artists or writers who do not conform to any social nor political influence. Undeniably, there are instances as well as the latter generations of writers and artists who tend to move forward and shied away from any aforementioned responsibilities.

## Magical realism: Definition and conceptual approach

Magical realism can be defined as a mode of narration that naturalizes the supernatural; a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural are coherently represented in a state of rigorous equivalence. Because of this, it does not transcribe to the truth of referentiality. (Warnes, 2005: 2). In Warnes's article, *Faith, irreverence and Magical Realism* further described that, magical realism has always been labelled as "growing corpus of literary works that draws upon the conventions of realism and fantasy, folktale or even mystical encounters" (ibid). Magical realism was first introduced in the corpus of the Latin literature by a prominent Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier who proposed the idea of *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous real)<sup>4</sup> to reflect the richness of values and cultural heritage of the people from Latin America. As Carpentier (1995: 88) described,

Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing (mestizaje), America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicles of the marvelous real?.

He highlighted that the reason magical realism is so supernatural simply because the applications of these elements profoundly reflect the cultural richness of the people and also the beautiful landscape of Latin American that were uniquely different from the western worlds. As a result of these differences, the portrayals were distinguishingly real to the readers' experiences and thus such a phenomenon deserves to be presented as magical.

The conceptual framework of magical realism in Latin America was further developed by Angel Flores in 1954. Flores (1955:190) defined magical realism as a rediscovery of symbolism that is cleverly integrated between reality and fantasy. Thus, magical realism was perceived to be no longer limited to represent the typical of life as there was "a transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal". It can be described here that, the magical realism is no longer seen as only a depiction of the extraordinary life of Latin Americans' culture and way of life, but somehow, magical realism has moved forward to another source of magic, and that source of magic can be found in the extraordinary elements evident in the indigenous people's every day and mundane life. The magical or supernatural elements portrayed were later subtly amalgamated into another constructed reality that is acceptable and well received by the readers alike.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a prominent figure in magical realism had proposed magical realism as a concept that deconstructs any barriers in between the real and the fantastic since "in the world that I am trying to evoke, that barrier didn't exist"(Ungku Maimunah, 2006:87-88)<sup>5</sup>. The limitless barriers in these two extremes of the real and the fantastic are pointed out by Farris and Zamora (1995:2),

...the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter but IS an ordinary matter, on everyday occurrence- admired, accepted, and integrated into the reality....

What is to be regarded as fantastic here can also be real and that is highly acceptable because of this, magical realism creates a profound experience to the readers. Such experiences can be created through stories that once belonged to folklores or myths that were known among the locals for generations. This is termed by Marquez as *indigenismo* or indigenous; that is magical realism is depicted to be a discourse between the reality of the current life of the Latin Americans and the local literatures.

The landmark of magical realism as a critical approach in defining literary texts had been regarded to be purely as a discourse that tends to shy away from the mainstream of criticisms advocated by the western counterparts. Hence, it could also be perceived that, magical realism is understood to be

.. a sophisticated aesthetic expression of primitivism that served the yearnings of Latin American writers for identity and cultural emancipation. (Warnes, 2005:7)

The perception may sound condescending towards the efforts made by the earlier Latin American writers. However, the attempts are identified as a strong development towards an urge to reclaim a space of otherness by trying to be appealing to myths difference<sup>6</sup>. It can be perceived that, magical realism has taken another step to be viewed from a global perspective. Farris (2004:1) had mapped out the transnational literary texts between a great range of texts, showing the 'cultural work' that reflect the application of magical realism and claiming it as "perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction". This keen observation

is inclined towards the idea that magical realism has transformed in itself as an application that portrays a strong sense of being different but unique in a realistic world that emphasizes the idea of otherness to be acceptable and yet intensely magnetic and interesting in its own perspective.

The technique of magical realism that are characterized by the matter-of-fact is the inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fictions. The narratives were told using hyperbolic expressions and depictions. Such technique is achieved through atomization of presenting the ordinary as miraculous and the miraculous as ordinary. Thus, the elaborations on subjects or the objects found are to be explored and developed successfully; without having to realize such explorations or developments to be unrealistic or illogical by the readers. Therefore, it is important to highlight that in this application, background on either the place or the people and time shall not be determined as these are most of the time have little emphasis.

Moreover, magical realism has always been associated with the history of the landscapes. The history that is mentioned here is to exemplify the local history that not only function as mere factual guidelines in the stories but also include the basis of the stories that unfold. History of the lands will reveal the ways in which how such occurrences will affect the people. However, in most situations, such historical associations and facts were slowly erased or omitted from the stories (Shannon, 2006:13-15). This could be that the effects are found to be more real than the history in itself. Hence, historical facts are deemed to be thought of less important in highlighting the stories from magical realism's perspectives. Not only that, Palmer (2011:345) argued that, the rise of arguments that particular are significant to communal and individual identities has triggered the development of a literature in geography and environmental studies that is critical of the possible implications of such arguments.

Such remark is "meaningful and becomes insightful"<sup>7</sup>, especially in the context of the emergence of new writers; who tend to experiment with magical realism in their unique works is indeed apt. It can be perceived that, though history plays no importance in magical realism, however, the geographical perspective on specific landscape in the setting provides an authenticity of the stories written.

## Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, the two stories namely *Kuda Kepang* by Fadzlishah Johanabas and *A Little Sweet* by Ernie Yap are selected to indicate the application of magical realism associated with the writers' cultural experiences. The paper will focus on the writers' attempts in creating marvellous concoctions into enchanting ordinary stories that reveal the treasures of both writers' cultural backgrounds in different but seemingly similar to this approach.

Although these works were written from the perspectives of the writers' different cultural backgrounds, they portrayed how the myths and superstitions were put to be used as a tool in highlighting the banalities of life that is perceived to be simple but with unordinary styles. These two works were unaffected by any socio-political agendas, however, with the experimentation of myths and supernatural elements, these works carry good universal values in different cultures that are worthy to be shared with the readers out there.

Written by new writers in the local literary scene, they possessed the passion to write about what they felt right and their writings were presented as to be innocent yet bold in approaching towards the values that were long gone as the period passed by. Hence, by having to read these works through the lens of magical realism, it is indeed apt as these works directs the

reading process towards an intense experience of the supernatural in a real world. Furthermore, this paper is hoped to explore the depths of the writers' attempts in providing essence found in their cultural backgrounds through entertaining ways that managed to sustain the readers' interest towards the end of each stories. Revisiting the past folklores and myths is a creative attempt by new writers of this era as this is deemed to be interesting and because of that, it is important that this creative attempt need to be studied and highlighted for its contributions and significances in the vast ever changing society of this era.

It is evident that these two writings reflect the experimentation on supernatural elements found in Malay and Chinese folklores and myths. Being Malaysians, such stories are not uncommon. Even though it is nothing new, the application through these elements in these two stories should not be left ignored. Stories that reflect every day and mundane life can be interesting with such experimentations. Furthermore, by adding these elements into the narration, readers tend to get in touch with their cultural background without them even realizing it. These stories demonstrate through cultural beliefs and magical realism that displays an appropriate explication on how these works can be entertaining and yet carry values suitable for the current society.

## Results and discussions

### *Magical Realism in Kuda Kepang*

*Kuda Kepang* is a short story extracted from *Faith and Machine* anthology written by Fadzlishah Johanabas and published in 2015. Creative writing has always been his passion despite being a neurosurgeon. Using popular Malay legend as his basis in exploring the realms of mysticism in the story, Fadzlishah admitted that the story was his way in which he was trying to venture new techniques and approaches in his writing repertoires.

The time and place of the story were not explicitly indicated. However, it can be postulated that the setting was somewhere between the states of Malacca and Johor to indicate the influence of the *Kuda Kepang* dance which stretched within the Malacca sovereignty during the Portuguese invasion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The setting was set vaguely to indicate there is a strong sense of historical association of a place but the details are not being highlighted since the information is of little emphasis in revealing the plot.

*Kuda Kepang* is a traditional dance that emulates Malay warriors in action during war. The dance became popular in Johor and is still a popular mode of entertainment performance today. *Kuda Kepang* or known as hobbyhorse dance can be performed as theatre rituals or dance theatre with the incorporation of a story. The genre was said to be originated and developed in Arabia during the time of Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam. As a commander, he was trusted to lead great wars, and it is said that music was used to provide inspiration to soldiers during battles, with some of the soldiers going into the state of trance. In Java, the idea of a dance using horses was adopted; using artificial horses made of plaited bamboo or cut out leather and other decorative trappings, which turns into a war dance suitable for theatre or dance performances. Such adoptions are also practiced in Johor whereby the equipment used for the dance are similar to the ones found in Java. The first part of the performance is usually the choreographed dancing before the dancers shift into a state of trance in the second phase of the performance. The third phase of the dance may consist of a Barongan- a dance theatre form using a huge peacock-lion mask to indicate conflicts with evil spirits<sup>8</sup>.

The story begins with a scene of the villagers entertained by a group of *Kuda Kepang* troupe during Malik's wedding. When the entire villagers are in the midst of celebrating the wedding, the village is shocked to receive bad news that Malacca has been attacked by the Portuguese. Malik and his brother Hassan are worried as the invaders might come and attack their village as the village is situated nearby the borders of Malacca. However, being unequipped and unprepared for such attacks, the village headman decides to let the villagers escape to the south. Legend states that the mistress can offer help to those who seek assistance during times of need. Not knowing whether the legend was true, the brothers took the chance to seek help from the mistress of Gunung Ledang who is believed to reside somewhere on the foothill of Gunung Ledang. They successfully gained the trust from the spirit, and in fact were given special gifts that are believed to be able to help the villagers face the invaders. The mistress gives Hassan a whip and a golden ring. However, such gifts are not given without ominous conditions. The mistress warned, "Use this only if all fails. The ring's boon is great, but its curse is greater. Your life will be forfeit." (Fadzlishah, 2015: 106) The golden ring and the *Kuda Kepang*'s master whip symbolized the source of magic in helping the villagers through the brother's courage and wisdom.

It is prudent to highlight the contrastive tones which successfully evoke a sense of delight through the scenes found in this story. From the magical happy moments in between the newly-weds to a sudden change of panic tones among the villagers from the invaders attack, readers can easily observe them all in the story. Somehow, the tone of the story is yet changed again to desperation when the two brothers seek help from a spirit who lives at the foothill of the mountain. The practice of seeking help from the spirits is common in the Malay culture that was believed to emerge before the arrival of Islam in this Malay Archipelago. This inclines with what had been mentioned by Flores (1955), that such typical practice is common and the everyday life could have easily been transformed into the awesome and unreal. In this context, the typical story about two brothers who are nothing but commoners lead a simple life in a small village. Their course of lives changed immensely during the attack by the invaders. In this sense, the portrayal of a simple life that of the two brothers, is no longer simple and typical. Their sacrifices have helped the villagers from the invasion. The banality of the plot changed entirely with the mystical portrayals of a spirit donned as a mistress that lived nearby the Gunung Ledang.

The historical timeline and the manifestations of local popular legend indicated that the writer attempted to deconstruct the barrier of what is real and the fantastic that had once proposed by Marquez in 1969. Though the setting of the story was not explicitly told, the readers can easily assume, and such assumption requires great detail from the readings of the text. The writer's attempt to recreate the story with the depiction of the mistress also known as the spirit of Gunung Ledang evokes the sense of enchantment. In this perspective, the element of the supernatural and spirits have heightened the readers' interest to engage the reading experience to be fantastically real. Such feelings of acceptance from that reading experience comes from what had been mentioned by Marquez that magical realism creates a profound experience to readers, and that kind of experience can be created through *indigenismo*<sup>9</sup>, stories that were once belonged to legends or folklores known for generations.

The readers are continuously served with elements of fantastic surprise when Hassan went berserk with his *Kuda Kepang* riders attacking the invaders during the dance rituals. It is acknowledged that during the actual dance rituals, dancers of *Kuda Kepang* can easily get into a state of trance, and with this eerie fact, the writer uses this opportunity to portray Hassan as being so fearless in attacking the Portuguese soldiers. However, Hassan's courageous moves

seem to be failing, and the riders of *Kuda Kepang* are outnumbered by the massive attacks by the Portuguese troops. Seeing this, Malik decided to use the ultimate alternative to save the other riders and his brother's lives. This could be seen in the lines,

“Where is the ring? Hassan, where is it? Using his left hand, Hassan fished the heavy ring out of his pocket. He fumbled to put it on, but Malik grabbed it from him. Hassan's eye widened in horror, “Little brother, no! You have a wife. You promised to take care of your family.” (Fadzlishah, 2015:113).

Malik adamantly wanted to take charge in saving the lives of his family and the other villagers. By taking the ring from his brother, he transformed himself into a huge black stallion, ready to kill anyone who tried to stop it. This can be seen in the lines,

Malik charged forward. Instead of taking the air, Malik's form blurred and grew. Within seconds, a gigantic stallion took his place, black as the deepest night; its mane, tail and hooves were made of dancing orange and red flame. (Fadzlishah, 2015: 114)

He might have saved the entire village, but his family has lost the person that is dear to their hearts. This is the part that captivates the idea that no matter how the story is told, the story shall never miss its functions in enthralling to the minds whilst at the same time sharing the values that are invaluable to the readers. Any piece of literary texts holding such ideology depends immensely on the readers in explicating and receiving the values that it displays.

### *Magical Realism in A Little Sweet*

*A Little Sweet* is a novella which was written by Ernie Yap and published in 2013. This was his first attempt to write longer but yet complex stories within stories that explored between horror and superstitious genre. This novella is split into two different eras, in which the narratives were unfolded in two different omniscient voices. The first story was narrated by the voice of Siew Po's grandson, Lam, and the latter was told from the perspective of a neuroscientist, Sam, thirty years later. The story was presented in two different ways of looking at séances as a form of traditional beliefs and it can also be understood from the logical perspective. It can be mentioned here that, the writer's background as a medical doctor played an important part in revealing the causes and scientific explanations of the mediums' mental process during the mystical rituals. This can be seen through the portrayal of the young scientist, who had accidentally unravelled the mysterious deaths of the famous medium and her family whilst researching for some scientific basis of séances and superstitions in an abandoned village. The attempts to write stories that unravel the realms of what is believed to be myths or superstitious are indeed novel. Superstition is simply a practice comprising of specific rituals such as séances or calling the dead through mediums that can still be found in most indigenous cultures across the globe. Furthermore, this oldest practice in any cultures easily gains the attention from readers who are always thirsty for some delightful wonders around them.

Séances or a ritual that intends to communicate with the dead through a medium is common in most cultures. In *Little Sweet*, the writer had created the story that lies within a Chinese community in some remote unknown village. Thus, it is deemed appropriate to look at the elements of supernatural applied in this novella through the racial and cultural practice that



belonged to the Chinese as represented by the writer in the story. This paper will focus on the story *Little Sweet* which tells about the spirit of a dead girl named Little Sweet and how the story was developed which gives a whole meaning to the entire stories found in the novella.

Similar to *Kuda Kepang* which was discussed earlier, there is neither clear mention nor any definite time and specific place in the setting for *Little Sweet*. Possibly, the setting was to indicate that specific time and place have no importance since the practice and belief is still evident till these days *Little Sweet* is a representation of a life as a medium in a Chinese society who lived in a small and remote village. Many villagers tend to seek for Siew Po's services as her demeanour is far more welcoming than that of another medium, Fong Ma who lived next door. The belief in such realms has made Siew Po to earn a living through rituals and proceedings in talking to the dead.

Séances or the ritual of communicating with the spirits is a common practice in Chinese traditional culture. Usually, the ritual will require the medium to offer his/her body and the medium must not have had any knowledge prior to the rituals or subsequent memory after the proceedings<sup>10</sup>. It is also explained by Amran Kassimin (2006) that in Chinese traditional culture, it is believed that the Gods can protect humans from any evil spirits which can disturb and bring diseases to humans. Therefore, the rituals that are carried out by these mediums are meant to call upon the Gods' helps. Through the physical body of a medium, these Gods will speak their commands and prohibitions to humans on the ways in which to gain protection from these evil spirits. In return, the Gods will be served with their favourite foods as to represent the people's gratitude towards the Gods' kindness. The rituals have slowly become a cultural practice which later many people tend to depend on to seek help not only from Gods but also from their deceased family members or even evil spirits. The séances' functions have developed to also assist people with marital problems, conflicts within the family or even financial matters<sup>11</sup>. In solving these problems, similar procedures will be applied, where the rituals will be carried out by the mediums. The spirit will enter the bodies and speak through the mediums and the conversation between the spirits and the clients will soon take place. Often, solutions to the problems raised by these individuals will be solved eventually.

The story was told from the perspective of the grandson named Lam. He loves to sit underneath the altar and witnessed almost every ritual conducted by his Siew Po or grandmother. He is seen to be alone most of the time until he meets Little Sweet whom he thought is real. Siew Po and Ma have always thought that the presence of the girl through Lam's stories is just his imagination. Little Sweet is a lonely spirit who roamed around the house trying to befriend Lam who is being portrayed as an aloof boy in the family. Lam was sometimes joined by Little Sweet to watch Siew Po conducting séances. Séances and its rituals are already part of Lam's everyday life. Siew Po's changes in facial expressions and voices during the rituals have also become a typically common sight at home. This parallels with what had been mentioned by Flores (1955), that the writer's way of transforming the banalities of life in Siew Po's households into something unreal and awesome. From the spirits that lived in the altar roaming around making friends with Lam and Siew Po's transformations during the rituals have surely created a surreal phenomenon out of the ordinary lives of common people in that village, especially.

The friendship between Lam and Little Sweet had evoked the barriers of humans and the spirits which have become almost non-existent. Lam seemed to enjoy Little Sweet's presence although in the beginning he mentioned that,

When I played with my trucks underneath the altar, she would watch me shyly from the corner. For many days I pretended to be aloof but my heart softened at her attentiveness. She had a peach-like face that seemed to smile even she was not, with dimples that deepened when she spoke. Little sweet rarely spoke. We started to communicate when I offered her a turn at my truck which I was pretending to be robot.

(Yap, 2013:14)

The descriptions about the little girl are vivid and this can be pointed out that Lam is not imagining the presence of the young girl. This inclines towards what had been highlighted before, according to Marquez (1969), such real experiences are made to believe since the barrier in between the real and unreal becomes blurry. Hence, the state of blurriness in the two worlds of human and the spirit, has heightened the reading experience as the readers not only could have sensed the presence of the spirits to be acceptably real but also such portrayals are highly anticipated.

It has been perceived as to be a myth or belief that when someone passed in a terrible death, the spirits will roam as to gain revenge or justice to his/ her death. In this case, Little Sweet roams but no one would have noticed her presence except Lam who was too immature to understand back then. After a series of séance sessions with Mui Po, Sam the neuroscientist, who went to study traditional rituals and séance in that small village, began to receive dreams about Lam who was murdered thirty years ago. Through these dreams, Sam was told things that left him feeling unsettled for days. In the lines,

Forgoing sleep, Sam reread the transcript of the recording. Little Sweet! Why did Lam talk about Little Sweet? Suddenly it dawned upon him what he must do. Two days later, Sam took a trip down to Plum Blossoms village, six hours by road (Yap, 2013: 94).

The contact was successful that it managed to send Sam to go and seek for meanings to his dreams. Later, after a thorough search from the clues left by Lam in the dreams, Sam managed to find pieces of bones in a hidden huge urn nearby the abandoned house. The bones were believed to belong to Little Sweet who was claimed to be lost for a very long time. The depiction of dreams in the story indicates that the writer had unintentionally highlighted the miraculous aspect on how Lam could have appeared in Sam's stream of consciousness. The dreams keep on haunting him, but at the same time evoked Sam's curiosity to seek meanings out of these dreams. Through the perspective of magical realism, this is the significant part whereby the writer tends to scrutinize the supernatural elements into a seemingly plain reality in this story. Sam is indeed a man of science, and he seeks meaning through his logical minds and for that Sam's pursuit in getting answers had revealed the mystery of more than thirty years.

## Conclusion

The explorations of the world of spirits, superstitious practices, legends and myths have indeed turned typical stories to become miraculously wonderful experiences to the readers. Such attempts will definitely bring many interpretations and reactions by many as assumptions on these attempts to highlight the world of the supernatural have been found to be regarded as illogical and nonsensical. Hence, not many intend to see how these experimentations with elements from the past can actually be useful and appropriate in telling good stories to the

masses. Such stories have been revisited for many times and this has proven that old stories functions still the same, that is entertaining whilst at the same time disseminating values that are supposed to be inherent in people regardless of generations.

The hallmark of magical realism through the perspective of the West is that the discourse in this context tends to shy away from the western mainstream of literary criticisms. Local stories or literary texts should and must always be read through the perspective of the specific culture that belongs to an ethnic group. Such notion is indeed seemed to be condescending towards the literary development in the third world nations. On the contrary, the concept of otherness that stemmed from that notion, has given a whole new dimension to the local literary movements. It is to be found that the local literature can be shaped and developed into a mould without boundaries and creatively distinct in a class of its own.

Stories that are focused in this paper can be classified as creative attempts by new writers to explore different approaches in their writing endeavours. The technique of revisiting the stories from the past have made these two focused stories reverberates their cultural backgrounds. Fadzlishah's attempt was on the most popular Malay legend, the Mistress of Gunung Ledang found in his short story. The story which presented the *kuda kepang* dance ritual to be his foundation in further developing the plot managed to create a surreal experience whilst reading. Moreover, the writer's tone that is convincingly real has contributed an intense feeling and without effort, leaves the readers to pray that Malik will not die and will someday be reunited with his new bride. The sense of faith in doing what is right can be perceived from this story. The case is not similar in *Little Sweet*. Yap's attempt to explore the realms of the supernatural world is indeed in the form of sarcasm. The story highlighted the practices of séances from two different perspectives, thus the two voices that narrated the story were intentionally created. One perspective is from a young boy who perceived that his grandmother was not fully gifted with the sense of clairvoyance to speak to the dead or spirits from the Netherland. The second voice comes from the young neuroscientist who reflects the scepticism held by many modern generations on such practice and beliefs. It is undeniable that, séance or talking to the spirits from the unknown horizon, can be related to the Chinese culture, somehow there are some of the things from the past that should be remained in the past as séance is perceived to be a mere practice that has no basis in scientific evidence. However, the haunting dreams that led to the findings of the young girl's bones will be some of the mysteries of the world that science has not been able to give any conclusive explanations to.

Both stories regardless of intentions that are reflected through the different tones found in the narrations indicate that these young writers tend to experiment with the elements that were given little attention not only by seasoned writers but also the general reading crowds. The two stories were written in the English language that further strengthens the idea that these two writers wrote stories without having preconceived notions of neither nationalistic nor political ideologies behind their creative attempts. Language is not a barrier especially in bringing out values that are good to be shared by many as being mentioned by Zulkifley (2014: 86) that, "a good content should come from a language that is fully understood and well -received by the audience that could stretch beyond any geographical borders, political differences, religious or social ideologies"<sup>12</sup>. However, regardless of the language choice made earlier by these writers, stories that portrayed supernatural elements and superstitious practices are indeed interesting. Catchy as it might seem, these stories unintentionally echoed the writers' strong cultural backgrounds as these stories are worthy to be regarded as didactic readings to the readers. They

shared their perspectives and values through their creative works and such efforts deserve special mention in the field of local literary criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to “LampiranGarisPanduanPenapisanFilemengikutAktaPenapisanFilemolehKementerianKomunikasidan Multimedia” Akta 620, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Maniam, K.S. The Malaysian Novelist: Detachment or Spiritual Transcendence?” Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader: Eds. Mohammad Quayum and Peter C. Wicks, 2001: 80-84

<sup>3</sup> Mentioned by the two writers, Ernie Yap and FadzlishahJohanabas during in an interview carried out separately on 25<sup>th</sup> of October and 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2015. These two writers admitted that they had no intentions to bring any ideologies or national agendas in their works. However if there were instances their works sounded like they did carry such notions, those would be unintentional.

<sup>4</sup> The term was introduced by Carpentier in his novel, *The Kingdom of This World*; that was published in 1949 in Spanish. It was regarded the first magical realism novel in America continents (UngkuMaimunah, 2006: 83).

<sup>5</sup> Also mentioned in an interview published online between the late Gabriel Marcia Marquez and Miguel Fernandez-Braso in 1969 in <http://www.quilldrivers.com/OHYS.shtml>. The paper would also include the citations from UngkuMaimunah published book in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *Realismomagicoprimitismo*, p. 49 in Christopher Warnes (2005 7).

<sup>7</sup> Refer to HamoudYahya Ahmad and RuzySuliza Hasyim , inEnvironment and home in Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry: An ecological perspective. *Geografia*, 2001, 10 (5), 9-19.

<sup>8</sup> Source is taken from *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Performing Arts*, Ghulam SarwarYousof (2004) Archipelago Press: Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>9</sup> Mentioned earlier in the discussion in explicating Magical Realism as an approach of this paper pg. 8

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Bowie, F. (2013). Material and Immaterial Bodies: Ethnographic Reflections on Trance Séances p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> AmranKasimin (2006). Unsur- unsure Menurun Dalam PersembahanTeater MelayuTradisional, p.116.

More information on these details which were not fully explained in this paper can be found in Cheu Hock Tong, (1988). *The nine emperor gods: A study of Chinese spirit-medium cults*. Singapore: Time Books International.

<sup>12</sup> Bahasa membolehkanmanusiaberkomunikasidenganmudahdanberkesan.Sebagaialatkomunikasi, bahasamampumelepasipelbagaibatandanhalangan.Iamampumelewatibatasaatauhalanganetnik, sempadangeografiataupolitik, status danhirarki social, agama danideologi.... In Zulkifley Hamid (2014) Faktorpersekitaransekolahdanetnikdalamperancangandanpelaksanaan program pendidikan Bahasa Melayu di Malaysia, *Geografia* 10 (5) pp.86.