

## REFRAMING MALAYSIAN FANTASY LITERATURE IN *PUTERI BUNIAN BULAN* (2020)

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### ABSTRACT

Fantasy literature, as a creative writing genre combines elements of imagination, magic, and the supernatural to create worlds that transcend reality. While globally recognized works like those of J.R.R. Tolkien have been extensively studied. In contrast, Malaysian fantasy novels genre remains underexplored. Thus, leaving a significant gap in appreciation their unique narrative contributions and cultural contexts. This paper focuses on *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) by Aliff Mustafa to explore the role of fantasy genre in Malaysian literature. The paper aims to investigate their function in shaping the narrative. Using a qualitative methodology the research investigates two key components such as the elements: system of magical and the elements of the prophecy and free will, which are identified as the centre to the novel's plot. By situating these elements within the broader framework of fantasy literature, the study explores how these two elements contribute to the characters journey, the development of the fantasy world and the thematic resonance of the story. This research addresses the gap by showcasing the literary Malaysian fantasy novels.

**Keywords:** Fantasy genre; Fantasy literature; Malay novel; Malaysian creative writing.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Fantasy Genre as a Branch of Creative Writing

Fantasy is a significant genre branch of creative writing. It can be defined as a world imbued with magical and supernatural elements that influence various aspects of life (Athans & Salvatore, 2010). This is supported by Matthew Oliver (2022), who states that every fantasy novel incorporates a magic system, particularly in quest-driven narratives. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, magic refers to the power to use supernatural forces to achieve the impossible. Similarly, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka dictionary defines fantasy as an unlimited creation of imagination. In other words, fantasy emerges from creative thought and unbounded aspirations. The creation of anything, including fantasy, carries specific purposes and meanings. Fantasy provides humans with an experience of escaping worldly concerns and entering a realm full of possibilities (Fabrizi, 2016). When discussing fantasy the name J.R.R. Tolkien inevitably arises. Tolkien revolutionized the genre, asserting that fantasy is not merely a world of imagination or illusion but a secondary world parallel to reality.

Fantasy can be categorized into five genres: epic fantasy, high fantasy, dark fantasy, historical fantasy, and contemporary fantasy. Each genre presents a unique storytelling form. High fantasy, for instance, is fiction set in a secondary world separate from reality. Focusing on a hero's journey to achieve a goal. Epic fantasy, on the other hand, depicts a hero's tale filled with wonder, romance, and challenges against powerful adversaries. In epic fantasy, the quest concept serves as the core, guiding the hero toward the final objective. Both high and epic fantasy strongly incorporate magical elements, making them widely popular genres. Dark fantasy, however, explores the concept of antiheroes, offering readers a chilling experience within a fantastical world. The environment is highly impacted by the evil forces within this world, and the protagonist usually have ambivalent morals and ideals as they are not as distinct from the genre compared to others.

With this, it is believed that there has been insufficient focus on local fantasy novels, more so in Malaysia. As mentioned earlier in this article, the world fantasy literature genre has been given great academic consideration, but most of that focus has been on globally recognized works and the contemporary Western writers. At the local level, there is a dearth of studies that focus on Malaysian fantasy novels. Most of the current studies work with foreign works such as Tere Liye's *Komet*, for example, a beautiful novel but not the local cultural and folklore of the environment. This lack of attention however leaves a significant knowledge gap on the specific components and contributions of Malaysian fantasy literature, especially in terms of how indigenous worldviews and fantasy elements mould the genre.

Studies that examine the fantasy in a Malaysian context are limited, so we have less understanding of how fantasy in such works draw upon cultural identity, folklore and imagination to create individual story worlds. It is especially the noticeable with *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020), which intermingles local supernatural folklore with

contemporary narrative. She argues that without a specific analysis of its 'fantastic' elements, the opportunity to review the narrative techniques, cultural resonance and richness of Malaysian fantasy writing is lost. This issue must be addressed in order to both extend the conversation within fantasy studies would encourage reading local literacies with greater attention to the subtleties and nuances of regional creative activity. In this respect, this paper aims to concentrate its attention on fantasy features which have been included into this novel and how do these such elements work for the development of the story.

### **The Novel *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020)**

Aliff Mustafa's novel *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) tells the story of a teenage girl, Laila Dahlia. On her 17th birthday, she begins experiencing mysterious events. Unbeknownst to her, she becomes entangled in a conflict over the throne of a supernatural kingdom governing Pulau Sri Kemboja. The Bara Pawaka clan, residing atop Gunung Bakar, and the Purnama Sari clan, based on Gunung Mengambang, have ruled the island for centuries. As the moon fairy princess and heir to the Purnama Sari kingdom, Laila is tasked with safeguarding the peace of Pulau Sri Kemboja. Alongside the throne conflict, an imminent danger threatens them.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Fantasy is a major genre in literature with diverse meanings proposed by various scholars. Among these definitions, fantasy is described as a fictional work containing elements of magic and the supernatural (Athans & Salvatore, 2010). According to the *Kamus Dewan* (Malay Language Dictionary), it is defined as the creation of boundless imagination. Fantasy serves as a medium for readers to escape from their mundane existence (Fabrizi, 2016). Mark Fabrizio (2016) elaborates on the notion of "escape" through Tolkien's (2012) perspective, stating that escape is often contrasted with "interpretation," where the former implies superficiality and immaturity, while the latter signifies complexity, refinement, and knowledge. Daniel Saffell (2012) expands on this by noting that fantasy as a genre provides unparalleled freedom of expression, allowing readers to envision a world where anything is possible. J.R.R. Tolkien, a pivotal figure in popularizing fantasy, defined it as the creation or reflection of an alternate world. He emphasized that this "secondary world" is not merely imaginary but is, to some extent, another reality that parallels our own. Mark Fabrizio (2016) later highlights the intellectual richness of fantasy literature, stating that it often addresses profound questions of life. It explores themes like good versus evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism, individual roles in society, and the significance of cultural diversity.

Philip Athans and R.A. Salvatore (2010) argue that broad definitions of fantasy are insufficient and classify it into subgenres such as epic fantasy, high fantasy, dark fantasy, contemporary fantasy, and historical fantasy. Each subgenre shares similarities but differs in focus. High fantasy centers on a hero's personal quest to achieve a goal, often without altering the broader world (Athans & Salvatore, 2010).

Matic Vecko (2009) defines high fantasy as fiction set in a secondary world that shapes the fate of its inhabitants, often characterized by significant magical elements (Long, 2011).

Epic fantasy, however, involves a hero's journey to save the world from evil, featuring themes of quests, grand struggles, and monumental conflicts (Athans & Salvatore, 2010). Steven Long (2011) describes the quest as central to epic fantasy, where the hero strives toward a distant and meaningful end goal. Further, dark fantasy, as defined by Gary Hoppenstand (2005), blends horror, science fiction, and fantasy, often portraying existential dread and the failure of conventional heroism when confronted with overwhelming evil. Unlike traditional fantasy, dark fantasy frequently features morally ambiguous antiheroes and settings dominated by evil (Athans, 2010). Contemporary or urban fantasy integrates real-world urban settings, making cities integral to the narrative, often serving as living, dynamic characters (Anyiwo & Hobson, 2019). Similarly, historical fantasy combines elements of past historical realities with fantasy, adding imaginative twists to events grounded in realism.

A recurring feature of fantasy is the presence of magic. According to Matthew Oliver (2022), nearly all quest-based fantasy novels incorporate magic systems, often closely tied to language. Oliver emphasizes that "language has long been closely associated with magic" due to its perceived power to shape reality. Worldbuilding is another hallmark of fantasy, requiring imaginative extrapolation beyond realism. Audrey Taylor (2017) notes that worldbuilding in fantasy involves creating secondary realities with their own unique parameters. For example, Patricia McKillip's *The Bell at Sealey Head* (2008) seamlessly integrates magical elements with reality, challenging readers to accept the coexistence of both. David Costello (2023) identifies prophecy and fate as central themes in fantasy, highlighting their ability to intertwine free will with destiny, creating a rich tapestry of possibilities that resonates with human fascination for the future and our place within the larger scheme of life.

Fantasy literature, as a creative and expansive genre, offers readers an escape into alternate realities filled with magic, supernatural elements, and boundless imagination. It transcends mere fiction by addressing profound philosophical and existential questions, providing a unique platform to explore themes such as morality, heroism, cultural diversity, and the nature of good and evil. Fantasy, as explored by thinkers like Tolkien, Fabrizio, Athans, and others, is more than just escapism—it's a genre rich in intellect and layered storytelling. Its many subgenres—high, epic, dark, contemporary, and historical—each bring their own narrative style, offering readers a spectrum of experiences and imaginative worlds to explore. At its heart lie essential elements: the presence of magic, the art of worldbuilding, and the tension between prophecy and fate. Together, these create immersive worlds that mirror reality while giving readers space to reflect on timeless human truths.

Ultimately, fantasy remains one of literature's most dynamic and transformative genres. It blends boundless creativity with thoughtful depth, and its ongoing evolution—especially as it embraces local cultural narratives—ensures it stays relevant and resonant. By pushing the limits of imagination, fantasy not only redefines how we see the world but also deepens our understanding of the human

condition.

## Development and History of Western

### *The Era of 1800 to 1900*

In 1838, *The Mabinogion* (1350–1410), a collection of some of the earliest works of British literature, was published in English translation by Lady Charlotte Guest. These classic works of fiction became the foundation for many characteristics of modern fantasy stories. Shortly after, during the Victorian era, the production of one of the most influential fantasy novels in history took place: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll. This novel introduced a female protagonist living under the oppression of Victorian society and presented a new premise that showcased a fantastical world inhabited by magical creatures accessed through a mystical door. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and other works like *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), *Peter Pan* (1902), and *The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904) were instrumental in creating a new subgenre, "The Lost World," where characters accidentally discover ancient, hidden worlds beneath their reality (Pagan, 2020). Most fantasy novels of the 19th and early 20th centuries were aimed at children but remained suitable for adult readers, forming what is now referred to as classic fantasy.

### *The 20th Century and the Rise of Iconic Authors*

Elizabeth A. Whittingham (2008), states that the 20th century saw significant growth in the fantasy novel genre with the emergence of prominent authors like J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, published in 1937, captivated children and achieved great commercial success. Following Tolkien's triumph, C.S. Lewis published several works, beginning with *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* in 1950. C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950–1956), consisting of seven novels, presented the enchanting world of Narnia through high fantasy. These novels, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and *The Last Battle* (1956), showcased intricate settings, mythological creatures, and magical beings, appealing to both children and adults. Tolkien redefined the genre with his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1937–1955), which became a blueprint for writing fantasy novels. For Elizabeth A. Whittingham (2008), his epic fantasy style featured complex characters, multiple subplots, and richly detailed worlds, setting the standard for the genre.

### *The Era from 2000 to the Present: Development of Western Fantasy Novels*

Sammons, M. (2017) discusses, Tolkien was the seminal spark of a second generation of fantasy writers that appeared in the late 1970s inclusive of Patricia A. McKillip and Jane Yolen. One of the most celebrated writers in the field, Patricia A. McKillip, with 38 novels since 1973 and won her first World Fantasy Award for *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (1974). Her honour with the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award, not to mention the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement she won in 2008, spotlighted her major impact on speculative fiction.



Since first appearing in the 1800s, Western fantasy novels have come a long way. Rick Riordan, who is currently considered one of the most successful fantasy authors, gained fame with his Percy Jackson & the Olympians series started in *The Lightning Thief* (2005). Based on Greek mythology, this series came to be by bedtime stories he used to tell his son. As Riordan says, "Percy is an idea-my son's struggles brought him to life; they are of similar ages and disposition, which is what makes him the hero." Percy's quest to claim Zeus's lightning bolt is the storyline we are introduced to in Rick Riordan first book of the series, *The Lightning Thief* (2005). The book, which takes place in contemporary New York City, combines a mostly urban environment of the 21st century only slightly touched by Greco-Roman mythology. While Riordan did use those heroes for the basis of his stories, he also created new characters and plots to incorporate into the saga.

More recently, a major career retrospective of the modern fantasy subgenre can be held in the *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) by J.K. Rowling. In any case, starting from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), Rowling shows how there are two worlds: a normal world where non-magical person or Muggles live in and a supernatural world that houses wizards. Instead of regular fantasy, these magical elements are ingrained within the reality. Mixing urban fantasy with mystery, adventure, horror, thriller and romance *Season of the Witch* gives its readers a wide complexity of flavours.

## Development and History of Fantasy Novels in Malaysia

In Malaysia, Ahmad Patria Abdullah is recognized as the pioneer of the local fantasy genre, beginning with his debut novel *Permata Aurorius* (1987). At a time when the fantasy genre was still nascent, Ahmad Patria's work gained significant attention among local readers. *Permata Aurorius* was awarded Best Youth Novel and recognized as the best fantasy novel in the Malay language. It also received the Book of the Year award for the Most Promising Author in 1987. Inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1937), Ahmad Patria published *Saga Artakusiad* series which comprised : *Permata Aurorius* (1987), *Kota Arialun* (1988), *Kembar Artakus* (1988), *Petua Azkram* (1991) *Puteri Alindalia* (1991) and *Pedang Aurora* (1991). His brilliance in worldbuilding and unique narration structures gave him this success.

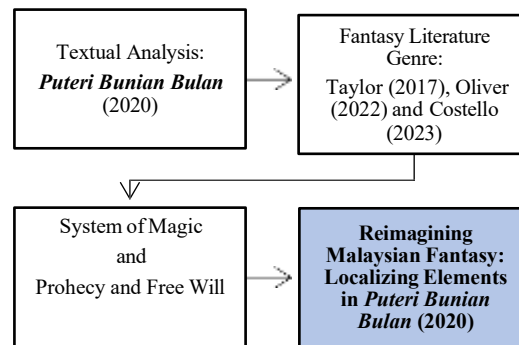
### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The research design, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, employs a qualitative methodology with a focus on textual analysis approach. This method is suitable for exploring the literary texts chosen as to uncover the deeper meanings, and elements that drive the narrative and represent the texts as fantasy. In this case, the focus is on identifying and analyzing the fantasy elements within *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) narrative. Thus, understanding their role as key components of the story's progression.

The conceptual framework for this paper is constructed from three core concepts derived from the works of Taylor (2017), Oliver (2022) and Costello (2023).

These three concepts form the foundation for understanding how a fantasy world of

the text is constructed. Also how does it operates within the narrative structure. The framework identifies two primary elements that drive the formation and progression of a fantasy story: system of magic and prophecy and free will.



**Figure 1:**

*Qualitative Research Design: A Textual Analysis Approach*

Storyworld in fantasy genre as Taylor emphasizes, is through the importance of worldbuilding in fantasy literature. The creation of immersive secondary worlds is central to the genre. This includes detailed settings, cultural systems and fantastical landscapes that shape its story world through the narrative environment. For Oliver (2022), the elements of System of Magic is an essential feature in fantasy novels. System of Magic define and set the rules, limitations and possibilities within the fictional world. Thus, it drives the plot and character decisions. Oliver also connects magic to language, as for him the element often reflects societal structures and symbolic meanings. Costello (2023), through his Prophecy and Free Will notion, explores the interplay between prophecy and free will within a thematic cornerstone in fantasy. This duality marries and creates tension and depth in the narrative, as characters navigate their destinies while exercising individual agency.

By analyzing *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) through this conceptual lens, the study explores how these elements contribute to the story world and storytelling, offering insights into the certain features of Malaysian fantasy genre literature.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Table1emphasize where the elements of system of magic and the element of prophecy and free function as the elements that propel a story forward and captivating thus, creating a desire to know. These narrative drivers reflect an in-depth interplay between the magic, prophecy and character actions, which consequence shape the fantastical world and propel the storyline.

Indicating to Table 1, the element of prophecy and free will appears only once in the novel story. This is found on page 60, where Tok *Dalang* receives a vision while performing a shadow puppet show. During this moment, Tok Dalang foretells the arrival of a disaster that will befall the entire Pulau Sri Kemboja. The prophecy evokes mixed reactions from the audience—some believe it, while others question its validity.

Whereas for system of magic is divided into four functions:

1. **Weapons:** Magic used for offensive or defensive combat.
2. **Transportation:** Magic enabling movement or relocation.
3. **Protection:** Magic providing safety or concealment.
4. **Healing:** Magic used for medical purposes or recovery.

**Table 1:**  
*Fantasy World: Fantasy Elements in Puteri Bunian Bulan (2020)*

System of Magic	Page	Type/Function	Prophecy and Free Will	Page
A large black iron chain emerged from Prince Andika's left arm, accompanied by blazing flames.	18	Weapon	Tok Dalang foretells a prophecy about a disaster that will befall Pulau Sri Kemboja.	60
Two figures dressed as warriors appeared from within a fireball.	20	Transportation		
Rizal stabbed the music box with his sword, and in an instant, they all vanished from the spot.	26	Transportation		
Golden threads emerged from Elfa's body, stitching the wounds on her body.	29	Healing		
Elfa created an invisible curtain to hide herself and Laila from being detected by Black Shuck.	205	Protection		
Laila extended her left hand forward, producing golden threads that formed a translucent bow and arrow.	211	Weapon		
Laila released sharp golden threads to bind Prince Andika's body.	307	Weapon		
Laila crafted a large cannon using her golden threads.	308	Weapon		
Prince Andika created a large cocoon of fire to envelop himself.	309	Protection		
Maharani Duyung raised her trident, casting a spell that formed a water block that engulfed Laila.	337	Weapon		



## System of Magic

The *system of magic* in the novel is multi-faceted, serving roles such as weapons, healing, transportation, and protection. Each manifestation of magic enhances the narrative in unique ways. Based on Table 1, the concept of the *system of magic* in the novel *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) is divided into four functions: as a weapon, as transportation, as protection, and as healing.

### Weapons

The golden threads created by Laila (pages 211, 307, and 308) symbolize her growing power and responsibility as the heir to the kingdom. The ability to craft weapons such as bows, arrows, and cannons not only underscores her magical abilities but also reinforces her role as a protector of Pulau Sri Kemboja. Prince Andika's fiery cocoon (page 309) and black iron chain (page 18) highlight his darker, more aggressive use of magic, reflecting themes of conflict and duality.

According to Table 1, the system of magic as a weapon is the most dominant function. Such as a black flame-patterned tattoo on Prince Andika's right arm glows red while a chain of black metal, engulfed in roaring flames, emerges from his left arm. This flaming black chain is used by Prince Andika as a weapon to attack Laila. Secondly, Laila creates a bow and arrow made of golden threads by extending her left hand forward. She uses the bow to counter an attack by Black Shuck. The third example of the element of weapon, identified through a situation during the battle between Laila and Prince Andika. In this scene Laila uses her golden threads 'magic' to bind and restrict Prince Andika's movements. Finally, in a sequence of a battle occurs between the Sea Empress and Laila, alongside Prince Andika. Through this scene the Sea Empress uses her trident, enhanced with spells to attack Laila.

Through the data, these weapons cause severe physical injuries to their targets. As evidenced in various action sequences involving Laila, Prince Andika and the Sea Empress. The black chain, bow, arrow, cannon, golden threads and trident in this narratives functions as the key weapons in the novel narratives. These weapons playing a significant role in action scenes.

### Protection

The *system of magic* also functions as protection, aimed at shielding characters from attacks. The first instance is where Laila battles Black Shuck. When Laila is injured, Elfa appears and creates an invisible barrier to hide them from Black Shuck's detection. The second instance occurs during Prince Andika's fight against Laila for the throne of Raja Pulau Kemboja. Prince Andika generates a fiery cocoon around himself to reduce the impact of Laila's attacks. Thus, the invisible barrier and fiery cocoon are magical protective elements used against enemies.

## Healing

The magical golden threads used for healing (*page 29*) and creating an invisible curtain (*page 205*) demonstrate the versatility of magic in the story. These elements offer moments of respite and survival, contrasting with the destructive use of magic elsewhere. In the novel *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020), the *system of magic* serves a healing function in one instance when Laila summons Elfa to assist her in defending against Prince Andika's sudden attack. As a result, Elfa is injured and uses her golden threads to heal her wounds. Therefore, the golden threads also function as a healing element in the novel.

## Transportation

The concept of transportation in the novel is categorized into two types: as a *portal* and as a *means of transportation*. Magical transportation, such as Rizal's use of the music box (*page 26*) and the warriors appearing from a fireball (*page 20*), adds dynamic action sequences to the narrative, emphasizing the unpredictability and excitement of the fantasy world. This is depicted as a method of moving from one place to another, traversing air, land, or water. A scene when Prince Andika suddenly attacks Laila, two warriors—his guards—arrive at the scene using a fireball. The fireball carries them and moves through the air. On the other point, a portal, in contrast, transports individuals or objects instantly without traversing physical space. This can be understood when Rizal, attempting to escape from battling Prince Andika, activates a music box, which transports him to a different location in an instant. The use of the music box enables an immediate transition to another destination. Thus, the music box and fireball serve as magical transportation tools in the story.

In brief the system of magic in *Puteri Bunian Bulan* is intricately woven into the plot, driving character development and conflicts. It not only enhances the immersive quality of the fantasy world but also symbolizes the characters' inner struggles and their roles in the larger narrative.

## Prophecy and Free Will

The concept of prophecy identified through Tok Dalang dialogue (*page 60*). His words introduce a foreboding sense premonition of destiny. A prediction of feeling with a strong belief that something bad or unpleasant is going to happen in future. Thus, serves as a central plot device that moves the actions of characters. The prophecy foretells disaster for Pulau Sri Kemboja. Thus, this premonition creates tension and urgency in the storyline. This element aligns with the structure of traditional fantasy trope where characters must navigate their fate, balancing prophecy with their own choices. In the novel *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020), the elements of prophecy and free will center on a premonition or forewarning of disaster set to strike Sri Kemboja Island. In this text, the prophecy initiates and unfold when a disaster prompts a collaborative attempt between the two clans.

## Analyzing Fantasy as Cultural Expression in Malaysian Literature

The exploration on *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020), presents an interesting investigation of Malaysian fantasy genre literature. Its highlighting the significant and unique relationship through the interplay of local folklore, cultural values and universal fantasy tropes, especially from the western. Through the narrative, Malaysian fantasy novel emerges as a genre of escapism and also as a medium for addressing themes of identity, power, human agency and society.

The system of magic in *Puteri Bunian Bulan* is central and significant to the novel narrative structure. It functions as a tool for exploring the plot progression, character development and thematic depth. Thus, it serves four distinct purposes. Clearly, through the data collected (refer to Table 1), the dominant function of the elements system of magic is identifies as a weapon. It significantly reflects the story's conflict. Hence, pursuing and the exercising of power and authorism. As the element of magical weapon, such as first, Laila's golden threads that could transform into a bow, arrows and cannon, the golden thread signify her journey as both a defender and an active agent in her destiny. Second, similar to Laila, Prince Andika's magical iron chain and magical fiery cocoon symbolize his darker, aggressive methods and also his struggle for dominance. Finally, the Sea Empress's magical trident serves a dual purpose: capable to unleashes catastrophic floods which this magical power emphasizing her destructive influence. Also connotes her requiring strategic unity to overcome. On this point, all the weapons in the novel signify and transcend the owner physical roles, symbolizing their inner strength, responsibility and growth of their wielders. Such as for Laila when her evolving control over her golden threads mirrors her transition from a passive figure to a decisive leader. These magical weapons underline and signify the broader themes of personal and self-empowerment and the price of exercising the magical power in a contested world.

Magical transportation such as a fireball and a music box identified through the text narrative, enriches the story dynamic quality. Its blends action with its imaginative storytelling. The use of a fireball to carry Prince Andika's warriors and a music box that acts as a portal reflects the novel's beautifully blends the traditional and fantastical elements together. These two devices not only move characters across space but also symbolize the magical power transformative, allowing characters to transcend physical and metaphorical boundaries.

While the elements of magic as protection, such as Laila's invisible barrier and Prince Andika's fiery cocoon, serves as the elements of counterbalance to destructive forces. Emphasizing the symbol of survival and resilience. These protective elements contrast with the offensive capabilities of magic. Thus, showcasing its versatility and its thematic role in safeguarding individual and collective destinies.

Lastly, though less prominent elements which is healing magic, identified represented through Laila's golden threads, the notion provides moments of respite and recovery amidst the chaos. This aspect of magic humanizes the narrative, reminding readers of the physical and emotional toll of conflict. It also reflects the

novel's commitment to balance, where destruction is countered by renewal.

The prophecy narrated by Tok Dalang introduces an inevitable disaster for Pulau Sri Kemboja, serving as both a narrative catalyst and a thematic cornerstone. While the prophecy sets the stage for collective action, it also raises questions about agency and choice. The prophecy drives the characters' motivations, particularly Laila's determination to claim the throne and prevent the foretold calamity. However, the prophecy's ambiguity—believed by some, doubted by others—creates tension and layers of meaning. This interplay between belief and scepticism mirrors real-world debates over fate and free will, grounding the fantastical elements in relatable human experiences. Despite the prophecy's deterministic undertones, the characters' actions highlight their struggles with agency. Laila's proactive creation of magical weapons and her leadership in uniting the warring clans of Bara Puaka and Purnama Sari demonstrate her resistance to being a passive participant in her destiny. Similarly, the eventual collaboration between the two clans to confront the Sea Empress reflects the power of collective agency in shaping outcomes. Thematically, the novel explores how destiny and choice coexist, offering a nuanced perspective on the human condition. By blending local cultural beliefs about fate with universal themes of resistance and self-determination, *Puteri Bunian Bulan* bridges cultural particularities and global fantasy conventions.

The novel stands out for its seamless integration of Malaysian cultural identity into a global fantasy framework. Characters like Tok Dalang, settings like Pulau Sri Kemboja, and elements like the golden threads and trident are deeply rooted in local traditions yet resonate with universal fantasy motifs. The cultural specificity of *Puteri Bunian Bulan* enriches the narrative, offering readers a uniquely Malaysian perspective on fantasy. At the same time, its use of common fantasy tropes—such as the hero's journey, magical systems, and prophecy—ensures its accessibility to a global audience. This duality highlights the potential of localized narratives to contribute meaningfully to global literary discourse.

*Puteri Bunian Bulan* redefines fantasy as not merely a genre of escapism but a platform for exploring deep-seated themes such as identity, destiny, and agency. Its integration of local and global elements demonstrates how fantasy can serve as a bridge between cultures, fostering a deeper understanding of the human experience. The study of *Puteri Bunian Bulan* addresses the scarcity of academic attention to Malaysian fantasy literature, emphasizing its cultural and literary significance. The novel serves as a model for how local narratives can thrive within a global genre, showcasing the richness of Malaysian folklore and imagination. By analyzing the novel's fantasy elements, this research highlights the potential of Malaysian literature to expand the boundaries of the fantasy genre. It calls for greater recognition of local voices and encourages future scholarship to explore the intersection of cultural identity and creative writing in Malaysian works.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Puteri Bunian Bulan* (2020) exemplifies the transformative potential of fantasy literature, combining cultural specificity with universal themes to create a compelling narrative. The *system of magic* and the interplay of prophecy and free will are not merely narrative devices but integral components that enrich the story's thematic complexity and character depth. Through its localized perspective, the novel asserts the importance of Malaysian voices in the global fantasy discourse, paving the way for a richer, more inclusive understanding of the genre. This study reaffirms that fantasy is a powerful medium for exploring the complexities of identity, power, and the human condition.

This research not only addresses a significant gap in scholarship on Malaysian fantasy literature but also underscores the potential of localized narratives to enrich global literary discourse. One of the primary contributions of this research is its emphasis on localizing the fantasy genre. *Puteri Bunian Bulan* seamlessly blends Malaysian folklore, cultural motifs and supernatural elements with broader fantasy conventions such as prophecy, magic systems, and the hero's journey. By showcasing these cultural narratives, the research positions Malaysian fantasy literature as a significant creative force capable of broadening the global understanding of the genre. The research also contributes to the global accessibility of Malaysian literature by positioning *Puteri Bunian Bulan* within the broader framework of fantasy literature. The novel's integration of Malaysian-specific elements with global tropes ensures its appeal to international audiences while preserving its cultural authenticity. This duality highlights the potential of localized narratives to contribute meaningfully to global literary discourse and encourages greater recognition of Malaysian voices in the fantasy genre.

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