

Magical Realism in Anime: *The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes* (2022)

Afwa Izzul Ahsan^{a*}

^a Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: afwaizzul.21057@unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study uses a qualitative analysis of magical realism in the anime “The Tunnel to Summer, the Exit of Goodbyes” (2022), with the main goal of identifying the elements of magical realism as depicted in the anime and exploring how these elements shape the overall narrative structure. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study uses Wendy B. Faris’ theory of the five characteristics of Magical Realism to analyze key scenes and dialogues. The analysis confirms the presence of all five characteristics, identifying the Urashima Tunnel as the main “irreducible element,” a magical event set in the “phenomenal world” of Kouzaki City, Japan. “Unsettling doubt” is formed through the absence of any logical or historical explanation for the tunnel’s existence, while “the merging of nature” is demonstrated when the protagonist, Tono, brings his dead parakeet back to the real world alive and physically enters scenes from his past. Finally, the anime features “disruptions of time, space, and identity” through measurable time shifts, the tunnel’s ability to manifest psychological memories as physical space, and Tono’s past and present selves coexisting. The study concludes that these elements fundamentally disrupt the anime’s narrative structure. The narrative does not employ traditional conflict, instead focusing on the characters’ hesitations in using the tunnel.

Keywords: Anime, Disruption, Magical Realism, Narrative Structure, Tunnel

INTRODUCTION

The term "magical realism" was first applied to German art in 1925 by critic Franz Roh. It later appeared in 20th-century French literature, reflecting a shift toward embracing human irrationality. After fading in Europe, the concept was revitalized in Latin American literature beginning in the 1940s. Its popularity peaked in the mid-1970s during the famous literary movement known as "El Boom." Subsequently, as its use in Latin America declined, magical realism was adopted and adapted by diverse cultures worldwide. This global evolution has made the already broad concept even wider.

Magical realism and postcolonialism are closely related, with magical realism serving as a crucial literary strategy in many countries in the postcolonial era. Magical realism combines elements of fantasy with the realistic, allowing postcolonial writers to challenge and change the dominant colonial histories that appear to have been imposed by the West. Bowers explains that "They combine the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath" (Bowers, 235).

One of the literary genres that combines elements of magic and the supernatural with realistic elements that blur the distinction between the two is magical realism (Marquez, 1970). The binary opposition of inner and outside obscures the coextensive nature of inner and exterior, which is buried within one another (Faris 2004). According to Juschka (2003), magical realism "makes visible as an illusion the separation imposed by the concept of boundary, generated by the inside/outside binary". It is frequently employed to impart a sense of the extraordinary or fantastical in routine or ordinary circumstances. In magical realism, the mythical themes that modernism's realistic texts alluded to manifest as magical components (Faris, 2004)

Magical realism is an artistic and literary genre that integrates fantastical or magical components into real-world settings. This style encourages audiences to view extraordinary events as a normal part of life by presenting them in an understated, straightforward, and non-exaggerated fashion. The genre has been adopted across many narrative forms, including anime. For instance, "The Tunnel to Summer, the Exit of Goodbyes" (Natsu e no Tunnel, Sayonara no Deguchi), a 2022 anime film based on Mei Hachimoku's comic and novel, uses magical realism. The movie was a global box office success, earning over \$1.3 million, and received considerable praise in the film industry, winning the esteemed Paul Grimault Award during the 2023 Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

The anime "The Tunnel to Summer, Exit of Goodbyes" centers on Kaoru Tono, who learns of a rumor about the Urashima tunnel. According to the rumor, anyone who finds the tunnel can retrieve something they have lost, but at the cost of their own time, as the tunnel alters the laws of time for those inside it. Tono's own family is troubled, following the death of his younger sister and his parents' divorce. Motivated by this, Kaoru decides to enter the tunnel to seek answers about his family's situation. He is joined by Hanashiro Anzu, who shares a similar objective. Anzu's goal is to gain an extraordinary talent for drawing comics by entering the tunnel. The two of them explore the tunnel together in pursuit of their individual goals..

This research aims to examine the magical realism in the anime "*The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes*" (2022) and its effect on the story's structure. The film's narrative contains unique qualities that arise from its combination of reality and fantasy, specifically through the contrast between the world inside the tunnel and the world outside. The analysis will focus on these elements and their impact on how the story is constructed.

This topic has been discussed in several previous studies. For example, Danang's study on *Encanto* (2021) analyzes the elements of magical realism and how they are depicted in the film. The research employs Wendy B. Faris's theory of magical realism to explore how the movie blends fantasy into its narrative about a magical village in the Colombian mountains. Ultimately, the study finds that all five characteristics of Faris's magical realism are identifiable in the film, which illustrates how real phenomena and magical powers are combined to tell an extraordinary story.

In another study, Aqila Khairunnisa examines magical realism in the Disney film *Enchanted* (2007) by applying the theory of Wendy B. Faris. The purpose of this research was to identify Faris's defined characteristics of magical realism and to analyze how the magical elements impact the characters' viewpoints. Focusing on the story of Giselle, who is transported from her magical kingdom to New York City, the study determined that the film shows a majority of Faris's characteristics and that these elements affect how the main character sees the world.

A study by M. Bagus Wira Pradika and Tri Mulyani analyzes the personality of Kaoru Tono, the main character in the 2022 anime "The Tunnel To Summer, The Exit Of Goodbyes."

This qualitative research applied Sigmund Freud's psychological theory of the id, ego, and superego to analyze its representation in the anime. The study pinpoints Kaoru's id as the origin of his desires and traumas. This is reflected in his powerful desire to reunite with his deceased sister, Karen, which compels him to enter the Urashima Tunnel. Furthermore, due to trauma from his sister's death, his id makes him uneasy in his daily life and causes him to be socially passive. His id also manifests when, after being scolded by his father, he feels immense pressure and guilt, leading him to run away. The study's results describe Kaoru Tono's personality as having a dominant id and ego.

M. Bagus Wira Pradika and Tri Mulyani also authored an article that examines the depiction of the main character Kaoru Tono's optimistic personality in the anime "Natsu e no Tunnel, Sayonara no Deguchi." Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study analyzes the anime's dialogue and visuals through the lens of optimism theory. The analysis is founded on Seligman's theory of optimism—which centers on permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization—and is supported by the theory of believability in animation, considering factors like appearance, personality, goals, emotions, and social connections. The research results indicate that Kaoru Tono has an optimistic character demonstrated by three traits: a refusal to give up, strong determination, and realistic thinking. In the animation, this optimistic personality is visually represented across five aspects: appearance, personality, objectives, emotions, and social relationships.

Overall, previous studies provide a useful framework for understanding aspects of magical realism and cover each component of magical realism in literature and film. This study aims to analyze the presence of magical realism elements in *The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes* (2022). The researcher examines the influence of magical realism elements on the structure of the film to further enrich this study.

METHOD

This research will employ a descriptive qualitative method to examine the portrayal of magical realism in the anime "*The Tunnel To Summer, The Exit Of Goodbyes.*" (2022). The analysis will concentrate on important scenes and character dialogues. Furthermore, the study will focus on character interactions and other elements that demonstrate how magical realism is depicted in the movie.

The primary data source for this research is the anime "*The Tunnel To Summer, The Exit Of Goodbyes,*" (2022) directed by Tomohisa Taguchi. The analysis will include screenshots, timestamps, and character dialogues from the film. In addition, this study will utilize secondary resources such as various books and journals concerning magical realism, with a specific focus on Wendy B. Faris's 2004 book, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*.

To collect data, this study will conduct deep research on the storyline and characters of the anime, examining the application of Wendy B. Faris's theory and using screenshots and dialogue for evidence. The subsequent analysis will involve two main steps: first, a careful observation of each scene, and second, the categorization of all evidence based on the five characteristics of magical realism from Wendy B. Faris, which are irreducible elements, the phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realms, and the disruption of time, space, and identity (Zamora & Faris, 1995).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Magical realism manifested in “*The Tunnel to Summer, the Exit of Goodbyes*”

Irreducible element

According to Faris, an "irreducible element" is a magical story component that defies logical explanation. The Urashima Tunnel in the anime “The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes” is the primary example of this concept. It functions as an anomaly that changes time and reality without a rational basis. It is believed that the tunnel can return something that has been lost, but only by taking a significant amount of time from a person's life in exchange.



Figure 1. Tono finds Urashima Tunnel (15:54)

Tono: “*The Urashima Tunnel*”

Figure 1 shows the main character, Kaoru Tono, journeying through a dark forest until he reaches a watery cave. Upon entering, he discovers trees covered in photos, the shoes of his deceased younger sister, and a bird that had escaped from his home. At this point, he understands he is in the legendary cave from his local area. Kaoru reacts with a sense of amazement rather than confusion, even though he is in an unfamiliar place. He does not question where he is or why he is there, simply stating, “The Urashima Tunnel.” His acceptance of the tunnel without further questions demonstrates that he accepts its magical elements as part of his world instead of questioning them. This reaction represents the irreducible element within the anime.



Figure 2. They plan to explore The Urashima Tunnel (22:33)

Anzu: “*then isn't it convenient in many ways to master this tunnel together?.*”

The irreducible element is further demonstrated in Figure 2. In this scene, after discovering the Urashima Tunnel, Anzu and Tono decide to explore it to find out everything they can. Their response is not passive; rather than doing nothing, they actively seek to research the tunnel. This decision is another clear indication that the main characters in the anime have accepted the fantasy element of the tunnel as a genuine part of their world.



. Figure 3 They found the tunnel's time rules (25:41)

Anzu: "At 3 seconds, that's 2 hours..."

Time operates differently inside the tunnel, where spending mere minutes can mean that years have passed in the external world. This magical quality is accepted without question by the characters. They treat it as an irreducible element, which is consistent with how Faris defines magical realism.

Phenomenal World

The setting of The Tunnel to Summer is primarily grounded in realistic locations and ordinary life. According to Faris (2004), the "phenomenal world" represents the realism within magical realism, which separates it from many fantasy and allegorical works. In contrast to fantasy genres that often feature a separate magical realm, this anime embeds its magic within everyday surroundings. The purpose of this phenomenal world aspect is to prevent the anime from crossing fully into a fantasy world and leaving reality behind. Several scenes within this anime serve as proof of the phenomenal world's existence.



Figure 4 An ordinary Japanese school (7:08)

The location of the Urashima Tunnel illustrates how magic is a part of the characters' everyday lives, rather than existing in another dimension. Rather than being in a fantasy world filled with magical objects, the tunnel is located near a normal high school that the characters

pass by every day. This mundane location makes the Urashima Tunnel feel less special, reinforcing the idea that magic is part of the ordinary.



Figure 5 Tono's father said that they live in Kouzaki (50:30)

Tono's Father: *"I've decided we're going to leave Kouzaki and live in Tokyo."*

Figure 4 shows the moment when Tono's father announces their intention to move from Kouzaki to Tokyo. Kouzaki is depicted as a small, quiet town in Chiba Prefecture, about 60 km from Tokyo. The choice of Kouzaki as the setting for the story is crucial, as it is intended to showcase the town's identity and culture. The town is known for its large fermentation industry, with one of its main products being the traditional Japanese alcoholic beverage, "Sake." This detail is important because Tono's father is depicted as someone who often gets drunk on "Sake," resulting in him being often abusive towards Tono. This is strong evidence of the existence of elements of The Phenomenal World based on Faris' explanation that "realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, often by extensive use of detail" (Faris, 2004).

Unsettling Doubts

The third element Faris identifies in magical realism is the Unsettling Doubt. This concept relates to the feelings of doubt and uncertainty that arise when magical events in a story are presented as real, but the narrative refuses to explain them rationally or logically. "A third quality of magical realism is that before categorizing the irreducible element as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events, and hence experience some unsettling doubts" (Faris. 2004).

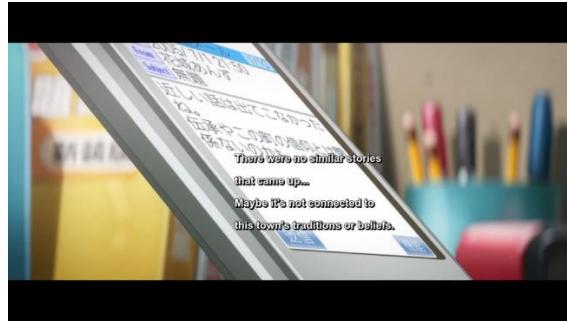


Figure 6 Anzu sent a message that she had found out about the tunnel (28:05)

Anzu: “*There were no similar stories that come up... Maybe it's not connected to this town's tradition or beliefs.*”

In the anime, the characters try to investigate the strange tunnels by seeking explanations from local history or folklore. This search yields no results, as implied by the passage about the tunnels having no connection to the town's traditions. Had they found a story, the mystery would have been solved. Instead, the lack of prior narration means no one knows where the tunnels originate or how they work. This situation creates ambiguity that aligns with Faris's theory of Unsettling Doubts, where the characters must interpret magic on their own because no rational explanation is provided.

Merging Realms

Magical realism is defined by how the magical and real worlds integrate. The two blends so naturally that the boundaries between them disappear, and magic is seen as a normal feature of everyday life.



Figure 7 Tono found his lost parakeet in the tunnel (15:43)

Tono: “*Kii? You're supposed to be dead!*”

At the moment depicted in Figure 6, the Urashima Tunnel transforms into a space where boundaries disappear. Tono is holding his parakeet, a creature that should be dead, but is actually alive and physically present. The image of a real-life figure holding a fantasy creature

suggests a world that is completely blurred. Two opposing states, life and death, are presented as coexisting in this one place.



Figure 8 Tono brought his parakeet home (16:38)

Tono: "Are you really Kii?"

Figure 7 further illustrates the element of the merging of realms. This aligns with Faris explanation "Ghosts and texts, or people and words that seem ghostly, inhabit these two-sided mirrors, many times situated between the two worlds of life and death, they enlarge that space of intersection where a number of magically real fictions exist" (Faris, 2004). This scene is significant because it demonstrates that the barrier between the magical and the real world can be permanently breached. The strongest evidence is the backdrop of Tono's ordinary bedroom, which is devoid of any other magical objects. His parakeet, Kii, has been successfully removed from the tunnel and is now in a cage at home, proving that the two realms can coexist. Tono's hesitant question, "Are you really Kii?", demonstrates his initial reaction to comprehending the impossible event before him. Therefore, this scene confirms for both Tono and the audience that the tunnel's power is real, its effects are lasting, and the boundary between life and death is indeed permeable.



Figure 9 Tono was able to see both of his parents before they divorced (1:01:27)

This scene serves as another example of the merging of worlds, blurring the boundaries between past and present, and between physical and psychological space. The Urashima Tunnel evolves from a magical location into the embodiment of the world Tono desires. He, a character from the present, can physically see and witness scenes from his past life, such as memories of his parents' happiness before their separation. These are not flashbacks, but rather

immediate events, magically merging "past" and "present" into a coexisting reality. Furthermore, Tono's experience represents a merging of physical and psychological space, driven by his deep longing for his family's past. The tunnel's atmosphere reinforces this, as the trees filled with photographs visually suggest that this magical event is constructed from fragments of lost moments and memories.

Disruption of Time, Space, and Identity

The fifth element of the theory of magical realism is the disruption of time, space and identity. In her book, Faris explain that "In addition to merging different worlds, these fictions disturb received ideas about time, space, and identity" (Faris, 2004).



Figure 10 They found the tunnel's time rules (25:41)

Anzu: "At 3 seconds, that's 2 hours..."

Time disruption is the concept that time is no longer as constant, linear, and universal as it is in reality. This image illustrates this change, showing that time has a fixed conversion value. The phrase, "At 3 seconds, it's 2 hours...", is used by Tono and Anzu as a direct, almost scientific measurement of the tunnel's time dilation effect. Unlike our world, where three seconds is always three seconds, this scene depicts a place where the fundamental laws of physics are completely changed, with time inside the tunnel passing much slower than outside.

Their measurement is not just to prove the strange feeling they have about time passing unnaturally. Tono and Anzu use the stopwatches on their phones to measure the phenomenon. This specific time disruption that they have measured is what creates the great risk they must take in the story, forcing the characters to count every moment they spend in the tunnel and also weigh it against how much time they have already passed in the real world.



Figure 11 The tunnel takes Tono back home and meets his sister that has passed away (1:05:09)

Tono: “I had like a weird dream.”

While the scene in this image may appear to be a dream or a time disruption, it also depicts a spatial disruption due to where and how it occurs. In this scene, the tunnel transforms Tono's memories of his deceased sister, Karen, and their old house into a tangible, physical environment that he can explore. He is not simply dreaming; he is physically present in a space entirely created by his own thoughts and desires. The disruption, therefore, is that the physical location behaves like a subjective mental landscape. The boundary between the real world and memory dissolves, and the space becomes a place that reflects Tono's deepest desires. In this scene, the tunnel takes Tono's memories of his late sister, Karen, and their old house and transforms them into a tangible, physical environment that he can explore and interact with. This isn't just a dream in his head; he's physically present and living in a space entirely constructed from his own thoughts and desires. Therefore, a spatial disruption occurs when this physical location functions like a subjective mental landscape. The boundary between the physical world and the world of memory dissolves, and the space itself becomes a place that reflects Tono's deepest desires.



Figure 12 Tono saw a difference in his appearance from the reflection in the mirror (1:07:11)

Karen: “Well, I'm the one who's adding the hot water”

This scene presents Tono as existing in two forms simultaneously: his present self, with his unaltered consciousness, exploring the tunnel, alongside a younger version of his past

memories, who converses normally with his supposedly deceased sister. The tunnel's magical space disrupts his present identity by reviving his past self. In this moment, he is no longer the "grieving brother" but simply Karen's older brother, living in the present. Karen's casual remark, "Well, I was the one who added the hot water," is powerful because this everyday statement confirms the return of his past identity. Thus, the tunnel does more than simply represent memories; it uses them to embody a different sense of who Tono is by allowing both versions of his identity to exist in the same time and space.

How Magical Realism Shape The Narrative Structure of The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes

Magical realism shapes the narrative structure of The Tunnel to Summer, the Exit of Goodbyes, which serves not only as a literary device but also as a means of conveying emotional truth, character development, and depth. According to MasterClass (24, 2021), "magical realism does not follow a typical narrative arc with a clear beginning, middle, and end like other literary genres.". Rather than simply integrating magical elements into the real world, the anime builds its entire narrative form on the coexistence of magical elements in the real world. This coexistence is achieved by manipulating time, place, and the characters' identities. In "The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes", the two main characters, Kaoru Tono and Hanashiro Anzu, were originally just ordinary high school students, they didn't even know each other before Tono and Anzu met at the station and not long after that, Anzu transferred to Tono's school. It looks like a typical school anime storyline, but that changes when Tono finds a mysterious tunnel called Urashima Tunnel for the first time.

The opening scenes of the anime serve to establish the initial foundation of the narrative, introducing the "phenomenal world" that is essential for the other elements of magical realism to be accepted and understood by the audience. The opening scenes of the anime are presented at a slow and calm pace typical of the drama genre in general. We are introduced to Kaoru Tono, a high school student living in the coastal town of Kouzaki, whose life is filled with the pain and sadness that he carries with him every day. The narrative slowly details where his pain comes from. Tono's sadness is caused by the mysterious death of his younger sister Karen and the separation from his mother, culminating in a tense home life and many emotional conflicts with his angry, alcoholic father. The background of the school, the seemingly normal railroad crossing, and the seemingly strange social scene are all presented with a natural and easy-to-understand realism. The establishment of this phenomenal world serves an important purpose. Rather than simply being a backdrop, it serves as a necessary explanation of basic reality. It provides the story with its emotional stakes, which become Tono's motivation later on and not in his desire to adventure and explore the tunnels, but in the pain he feels and can understand from his past life experiences. The explanation and introduction of this world is what is important, because the power of the narrative lies in the changing ground rules of the real world that will occur in the future.

In the second act of the anime, the narrative shifts from a mystery of "what" to a question of "why" and "at what cost." The main conflict in the anime is not with fighting a villain or enemy of the main characters, but with the consequences of the magic they have uncovered. After realizing the true cost of using tunnel magic is "being abandoned by the world," Tono and Anzu must fight against their own desires. Furthermore, the film uses one of the magical realism concepts of "merging realms" as a medium for character development. Rather than using the usual flashbacks, the narrative allows Tono to physically enter a place constructed from his own memories and desires, living out his past with his parents and sister as a real

event. This depicts his internal struggle, making his psychological journey a literal place to go and giving him the main motivation to continue his journey into the tunnel. The climax of this chapter is not a physical fight, but their struggle to make the most correct choice in an intense moment, as Tono and Anzu commit to a plan they have devised based entirely on the magical rules of the tunnel that they now understand.

Finally, the third act provides the answers given by the consequences of their belief in the tunnel's magic. The main climax of the story is not the battle that Kaoru and Anzu win, but the price they pay by surrendering themselves to the tunnel's magic to achieve their desires. The narrative structure of the anime suggests that victory is not about defeating the tunnel's magic, but about building the strength and resolve to endure the consequences of its magic. The ending of the anime is thus an exploration of the "identity disorder" that results from this choice. The centerpiece of the final act is the reunion between the teenage Tono and the thirty-year-old Anzu, now a grown woman, due to Tono's journey through the tunnel. Their realities have been irreversibly altered, and the narrative that is used to make the anime end not with a clear, happy ending, but with their decision to build a new future across the gap in time that caused the gap that the magic created between them. By leaving the plot unresolved, it emphasizes that the real purpose of Tono and Anzu's journey is their character development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis provided in the previous chapter, detailed conclusions can be drawn regarding the function of magical realism in the anime "The Tunnel to Summer, The Exit of Goodbyes." This anime serves as an example of the genre, not because it contains magical events alone, but because it uses the principles of magical realism as the basis for its entire story. This approach, carefully outlined through Wendy B. Faris' theoretical framework, shows how the anime's narrative structure, character development, and story depth are all direct results of the application of the principles of magical realism elements.

This analysis first establishes the basic elements present in the anime's narrative. The main 'irreducible element' or magical aspect that cannot be explained by logic is identified as the Urashima Tunnel itself. This tunnel is an anomaly that can restore what is lost but at the cost of one's time, a fact that is accepted rather than questioned by the main characters, Kaoru Tono and Anzu Hanashiro. This acceptance of the impossible is made acceptable through the story's setting in a highly detailed 'phenomenal world'. The story is set in the realistic everyday environment of a regular high school and the Japanese city of Kouzaki, which also exist in the real world, preventing the anime's narrative from delving too deeply into pure fantasy. This phenomenal world element also ensures that magic feels like a part of the characters' everyday lives, despite its mysteriousness.

From this encounter between the magical and the real world, the analysis shows how 'unsettling doubt' and 'merging realms' emerge naturally. Doubt arises because the story does not provide a plausible explanation for the tunnel, Tono and Anzu investigate its history but find no local legends or similar stories to explain its existence. This ambiguity forces the characters and the audience to interpret the magic in their own way. This, in turn, allows for 'merging of realms', where the boundaries between life and death, and past and present disappear. A prime example is when Tono finds his supposedly dead parakeet alive in the tunnel and manages to bring it back to the real world, proving that both realms can coexist. The merging becomes even more pronounced when Tono physically enters a space constructed from his own memories, witnessing his past as a real and present event.

The magical realism phenomenon in this anime is mostly found in the last characteristic: 'disturbance of time, space, and identity'. The analysis shows how time is precisely distorted by the rules of the urashima tunnel, the basic laws of physics that are completely changed inside the tunnel. Space is disrupted when the physical location of the tunnel turns into a subjective psychological space that embodies Tono's deepest memories and desires. Finally, Tono's identity is disrupted when the tunnel brings him back to the past, forcing his current identity to coexist with his past identity as a boy with a living sister, Karen. Both versions of his identity are made to exist in the same time and space, illustrating the application of this element.

Ultimately, this study concludes that these five characteristics are the elements used to form the anime's unique narrative structure. The story abandons the usual plotline and instead builds its entire form on the coexistence of magic and reality. Its primary conflict is not with the villains, but with the profound consequences of the magic they have uncovered. Rather than using conventional flashbacks, the narrative allows Tono to physically enter a space constructed from his own memories, making his psychological journey a place to go. Victory is depicted not as defeating magic, but by how Tono and Anzu have the strength and determination to endure its consequences. The film's emotional climax is the reunion between the teenage Tono and the adult Anzu, an event that occurs due to the direct impact of the disruption of time and identity. By prioritizing this more emotional closure over a neat plot resolution, the anime displays a powerful and precise use of magical realism to explore the depths of grief, memory, and the power of human resolve.

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