

Zafira's Conflicts in Hafsah Faizal's *We Hunt the Flame* through a New Criticism Approach

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Abstract:

This study examines the character Zafira in the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsah Faizal using the New Criticism approach, which focuses on analyzing the internal conflicts and external conflicts experienced by the main character. The purpose of this study is to reveal how Zafira's struggles reflect her inner battles as well as the environmental pressures that become sources of conflict for her. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a close reading of the text. The analysis focuses on intrinsic elements such as conflict, characterization, and theme without considering external factors such as the author's background or historical context. Through this method, the study seeks to identify textual evidence that shows how Zafira confronts her own fears and the social restrictions placed on women in Arawiya. The findings show that Zafira's internal conflicts between fear and courage is closely related to her external conflict against social norms. The interaction of these two conflicts creates a unified meaning that highlights the theme of perseverance and the search for self-identity in the novel.

Keywords: character motivation; *We Hunt the Flame*; psychoanalysis theory; qualitative method; journey.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini membahas tokoh Zafira dalam novel *We Hunt the Flame* karya Hafsah Faizal dengan menggunakan pendekatan New Criticism yang menitikberatkan pada analisis konflik internal dan eksternal yang dialami tokoh utama. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkap bagaimana perjuangan Zafira menghadapi pergulatan batin dalam dirinya sendiri serta tekanan lingkungan yang menjadi sumber konflik bagi dirinya. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pembacaan mendalam terhadap teks. Analisis difokuskan pada unsur-unsur intrinsik seperti konflik, penokohan, dan tema tanpa mempertimbangkan faktor eksternal seperti latar belakang pengarang atau konteks sejarah. Melalui metode tersebut, penelitian ini berupaya menemukan bukti-bukti tekstual yang memperlihatkan bagaimana Zafira berhadapan dengan rasa takutnya sendiri dan batasan sosial terhadap perempuan di Arawiya. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa konflik internal Zafira antara rasa takut dan keberanian—berkaitan erat dengan konflik eksternalnya terhadap norma sosial. Keterpaduan dua konflik tersebut membentuk makna yang menonjolkan tema ketekunan serta proses pencarian jati diri dalam novel tersebut.

Kata kunci: motivasi tokoh; *We Hunt the Flame*; teori Psikoanalisis; metode kualitatif; perjalanan

INTRODUCTION

Every main character in a literary work inevitably experiences conflict, just as humans do in real life. According to (Kennedy & Gioia, 2010) conflict serves as the main driving force of the plot that reveals the true nature of the characters through their actions and decisions. Conflict plays an important role in developing the structure of the story, connecting the characters, and strengthening the theme. Therefore, understanding conflict in a literary work is essential to uncover deeper meanings and the development of the characters.

The novel *We Hunt the Flame* tells the story of the land of Arawiya, which has lost its magic, causing several of its regions to become uninhabitable due to extreme environmental and climatic conditions. In the beginning, six sisters brought magic to Arawiya to bring balance and harmony to the land. However, when a great problem arose, they were forced to take the magic back in order to solve it. Since then, they never returned, leaving Arawiya in a cursed state without magic, which later caused various environmental problems.

Zafira, a young woman from a region called Demenhur, is determined to become a mysterious hunter. Her decision is driven by the harsh conditions in Demenhur, which is constantly covered in snow, preventing crops from growing and making food difficult to obtain. Because women in her society are considered weak and unfit to perform certain roles, Zafira hides her identity and disguises herself as a man whenever she hunts in the Arz forest. She later becomes known by the title The Hunter.

The aim of this study is to analyze the internal conflicts and external conflicts experienced by Zafira in Hafsah Faizal's novel *We Hunt the Flame* through the New Criticism approach. This research aims to examine how Zafira's struggles, both within herself and against her society, contribute to the unity of meaning in the novel and reveal the main themes of perseverance and the search for self-identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research employs New Criticism theory. In this study, the researcher focuses on the internal conflicts and external conflicts experienced by Zafira in the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsah Faizal. New Criticism views a literary work as something that can be understood through the elements found within the text itself, without considering the author's background or external context. In conflict studies, internal conflict refers to

the emotional struggles faced by a character, such as fear, doubt, or contradictory desires (Kennedy & Gioia, 2010). Meanwhile External conflict occurs when a character faces opposing forces outside themselves, such as society, the environment, or other people (Mayer, 2019). Through these two types of conflict, this research aims to examine how Zafira's journey contributes to the unity of meaning within the story.

Previous study on this novel has been conducted by Andani and Kristanto (2025) entitled "*Identity Concealed: Gender Dynamics in We Hunt the Flame (2019) by Hafsa Faizal*", which discusses the gender dynamics experienced by the two main characters, Zafira and Nasir, in the novel *We Hunt the Flame*. However, their study does not specifically analyze Zafira's internal conflicts and external conflicts, leaving a gap that this research aims to address.

Internal Conflict

Internal conflict refers to the emotional or psychological struggle that takes place within a character. This type of conflict usually appears when a character is confronted with fear, doubt, difficult choices, or conflicting desires. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2010) internal conflict represents an inner struggle that makes a character feel more vivid, as readers can see how they weigh values, emotions, and possible consequences before making a decision.

In the context of this study, internal conflicts play an important role in shaping Zafira's character. Her emotional struggle—between fear and courage, and between her desire to be herself and the social pressures that restrict her—forms the core of her emotional development. This inner conflict not only affects how Zafira views herself but also influences the key decisions she makes throughout the story, revealing how she grows and changes as the narrative progresses.

External Conflict

External conflict refers to the struggles a character faces from forces outside themselves. This conflict arises when a character must deal with obstacles that come from outside themselves, such as social pressure, environmental conditions, or clashes with other characters. Kirsznner and Mandell (2020) explain that external conflict occurs when a character is confronted with external forces that hinder their goals, and these situations often drive the plot forward. In Zafira's case, she not only battles the extreme cold of Demenhur and the dangers within it, but she also faces the social injustices

that belittle women—especially people of Demenhur, the community she lives in. These pressures push her to take greater risks as she navigates the challenges around her.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method in this research. According to Abdussamad (2021), The qualitative research method, based on postpositivist philosophy, studies natural settings rather than experiments. The researcher acts as the main instrument who directly collects and analyzes the data. It focuses on understanding meaning rather than generalization. Therefore, the researcher applied a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the experiences and psychological dynamics of the characters in the novel.

The data source of this research is the novel *We Hunt the Flame* by Hafsa Faizal. The data are presented in the form of quotations and narrative descriptions from the text. The researcher conducted a close reading of the novel to understand its structure and meaning. During the second reading, the researcher focused on collecting textual evidence related to the internal conflicts and external conflicts experienced by the main character, Zafira. The data were then analyzed descriptively to interpret how these conflicts contribute to the unity of meaning within the novel.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Zafira bint Iskandar is the main character in the novel *We Hunt the Flame*. *We Hunt the Flame* is a fiction novel written by Hafsa Faizal, set in a fictional world called Arawiya, which is divided into several caliphates and surrounded by a cursed forest named the Arz. Although the novel is fictional, its atmosphere strongly reflects Arab or Middle Eastern culture. This can be seen from Hafsa Faizal's use of several Arabic words, such as sand *qit* meaning desert cat," *wallah*, a common expression used by Arab or Middle Eastern people, and *kharra*, which is a form of profanity.

In this novel, it is told that Arawiya lost its magic because it was taken away by the Six Sisters to fight the Lion of the Night. Unfortunately, the Six Sisters never returned to restore the magic to Arawiya. In one of the caliphates called Demenhur, women are greatly underestimated because the disappearance of magic in Arawiya was caused by women — the Six Sisters. The people believe that if the Six Sisters had been men, they would have been stronger, even though it was the Six Sisters who originally brought magic to Arawiya.

Due to the loss of magic in Arawiya, several caliphates experienced climate instability, especially Demenhur, where Zafira lived. In the past, Demenhur was a desert region that only received a small amount of snow each year. However, after the magic disappeared, the area turned into an extremely cold land where the snow never stopped falling. This caused widespread famine among the people of Demenhur. Because of the extreme temperatures, they could no longer farm or raise livestock. This situation also motivated Zafira to continue hunting in the Arz for her people, ever since her first hunt at the age of ten, as she believed that no one else could come out of the cursed forest alive except her — even though she also had to conceal her identity as a woman.

Internal conflicts and external conflicts

Internal conflicts experienced by Zafira

At the beginning of the story, it is shown that Zafira deeply hates the Arz because she considers it a cursed forest. However, without realizing it, she also feels a strange pull toward it—something she herself cannot fully explain. She is afraid of the Arz, yet at the same time feels challenged by it, as if the forest keeps calling her back. This tension between fear and fascination reflects the internal conflict within her, as seen in the following quotation, “Still. There was a pulse deep inside her that relished those visits into the depths of darkness. She hated the Arz. She hated it so much, she craved it (Faizal, 2019, p. 11)”. Here, it is clear that Zafira is struggling against her own feelings. She hates the cursed Arz for bringing suffering and for slowly consuming Arawiya, yet at the same time, she unconsciously enjoys it and finds herself drawn to its danger and challenges. This contradiction marks the beginning of the psychological conflict within Zafira.

Another internal conflict can be seen when Zafira receives a letter from the Silver Witch. She feels a strong sense of curiosity toward the letter, as if it is calling out to her. The letter contains an invitation for her to travel to Sharr, “The letter called from the satchel on her lap, but again, she made no mention of the silver-cloaked woman (Faizal, 2019, p. 56).” She wants very much to open the letter inviting her to Sharr, yet she is unsure of herself. She does not know whether the experience was a hallucination, whether the letter is real, or whether it truly came from the Silver Witch. Despite her uncertainty, the letter lingers in her mind, filling her thoughts with the possibility of going to Sharr and retrieving the Jawarat so that Arawiya might regain its magic.

Zafira's external conflict becomes even stronger when she must consider whether she should go to Sharr or not. She weighs the risks carefully, and her uncertainty is shown in the following quotation, "Could a book really restore magic? (Faizal, 2019, p. 59)" Zafira considers the immense risks she may face—whether she might never return to Demenhur or succeed in restoring Arawiya's lost magic. At the same time, she feels a sense of responsibility for the people of Demenhur who are suffering from hunger. This shows that the decision she must make is extremely difficult and triggers a deep internal conflict within her.

External Conflict Experienced by Zafira

In addition to her internal struggles, Zafira also faces significant external conflict, especially those related to her environment. The extreme climate of Demenhur once a desert but now frozen due to the curse—causes the people to suffer from hunger, as the severe cold makes farming and livestock raising impossible. This situation drives food prices to become extremely high, leaving many residents starving. These conditions force Zafira to continue hunting in the Arz, as she is the only one capable of returning alive from its dangers.

One of the external conflicts in this story is the gender inequality present in Zafira's environment, where women are consistently underestimated and seen as weak, making them forbidden from doing many things. This discrimination also becomes the reason why Zafira must hide her true identity, "[...] she wished, more than anything, that she could be herself. (Faizal, 2019, p. 29)" Zafira has to hide her identity as a woman because she fears society's judgment. She wishes she could be herself when hunting for the people of Demenhur, but that fear forces her to remain in disguise so she can continue hunting and prevent her community from starving.

The next external conflict appears when her father dies, "It was her fault Baba lay with blue lips beneath ice and snow (Faizal, 2019, p. 108)." Zafira feels that her father's death is her fault because she believes she should have been stronger. Due to the harsh conditions in Demenhur and their constant struggle for food, her father was forced to enter the Arz when Zafira herself was ill at the time. When he returned, he was no longer himself — he came back like a man who had lost his sanity and even nearly killed Zafira. In the end, it was Umm who killed Baba to save her. Zafira carries deep guilt for this incident, believing that she was the cause of everything that happened. Because of this, she is determined to travel to Sharr to restore Arawiya's magic as a form of redemption for her perceived sins.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis using the New Criticism approach, this study shows that Zafira's journey in *We Hunt the Flame* is shaped by both the internal conflicts and external conflicts she faces throughout the story. Her internal conflicts appear through her doubts, fears, and her desire to be herself without hiding. These struggles become clear when she feels both drawn to and afraid of the Arz, as well as when she hesitates to accept the invitation to travel to Sharr.

In addition to her inner struggles, Zafira also deals with several external conflicts that come from her surroundings. The extreme climate of Demenhur and the gender inequality in her society make her life even more difficult. She is forced to hide her identity as a woman in order to hunt, and the trauma of her father's death adds another burden she has to carry. These external pressures make the decisions she must take even more challenging. Both types of conflict internal conflicts and external conflicts to Zafira's character development and show how she grows stronger as the story progresses. Through these conflicts, readers can see how Zafira struggles, questions herself, and ultimately searches for her own purpose and hope.

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