

Escapism and Social Reality in Urban Novels: Supernova (Dewi Lestari) vs Less (Andrew Sean Greer)

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Abstract

This study discusses escapism and social reality in urban novels through a comparative literary study of Dewi Lestari's *Supernova* and Andrew Sean Greer's *Less*. Both novels represent modern urban life characterized by identity complexity, social pressure, and individuals' tendency to escape reality through the search for self-meaning. This study aims to uncover the main characters' forms of escapism in facing existential crises and how urban social reality shapes their inner conflicts. The study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative literary approach and textual analysis. The theoretical framework used includes Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernist theory, escapism theory in popular culture studies, and Stuart Hall's representation theory to interpret the construction of urban identity. The research data consist of narrative excerpts and dialogues that represent the phenomena of escapism, alienation, and social criticism in both novels. The results show that *Supernova* represents escapism through the exploration of spirituality, science, and metaphysics as a form of resistance to the emptiness of modernity, while *Less* presents escapism through physical journeys and satirical humor as coping mechanisms for social failure and personal identity crises. Both novels depict urban social realities of alienation, social competition, and the pressures of a cultural achievement culture, but offer different forms of escapism based on their Indonesian and American cultural backgrounds. This research contributes to the development of modern comparative literary studies by emphasizing that escapism is not merely an escape, but rather a narrative strategy for critiquing urban social structures. Thus, this study strengthens the understanding that urban novels function as a space for ideological reflection on modern global life.

Keywords: Escapism, Social Reality, Comparative Literature, Urban Novel

Introduction

Modern literature functions not only as an aesthetic medium but also as a representation of social reality, capturing the dynamics of human life within specific spaces, including urban life, which is fraught with social and psychological complexity (Wellek & Warren, 1956). Urban life is often depicted as a space that combines modernity, technology, social mobility, and rapid identity change, often leading individuals to experience psychological pressures such as alienation and a loss of meaning in life (Simmel, 1903). In this context, urban literature serves as a reflective medium, depicting how modern humans strive to survive amidst social pressures shaped by a culture of capitalism, individualism, and increasingly demanding achievements (Harvey, 2005). Therefore, urban novels often depict the clash between personal idealism and social realities that individuals cannot always control, giving rise to a tendency toward escapism in response to these pressures (Baumeister, 1991).

The phenomenon of escapism in literature can be understood as a mechanism for individuals to escape from oppressive realities, whether through imagination, travel, spirituality, or the construction of alternative identities that provide space for individuals to survive psychologically (Baumeister, 1991). From a popular cultural perspective, escapism often emerges as a narrative strategy that not only depicts escape, but also a

form of social critique of less-than-ideal realities (Storey, 2018). Escapism in modern literary works is often associated with identity crises, alienation, and the failure of individuals to build stable social relationships in urban spaces (Giddens, 1991). Competitive urban life makes modern humans experience existential anxiety that drives them to seek escape spaces, both physical and symbolic, so that urban novels become narrative spaces that show the conflict between social reality and individual psychological needs (Sennett, 1990). Thus, escapism in literature cannot be understood as mere entertainment, but as a social phenomenon that represents the condition of modern humans in facing the pressures of urban life (Barker, 2012).

Comparative literary studies are a relevant approach to examining escapism and social reality because they allow for cross-cultural analysis of literary works that share similar themes but are shaped by different social contexts (Damrosch, 2003). Comparative literature considers that literary texts can be compared to identify similarities and differences in the structures, themes, and ideologies developed by each author (Bassnett, 2014). In a modern context, comparative literary studies focus not only on the historical relationships between works but also emphasize how literary works from various nations represent global issues such as urbanization, modern identity, and social pressures (Moretti, 2005). By comparing Indonesian and American literary works, this study demonstrates how escapism and social reality are constructed through different narrative strategies, yet remain universally relevant to modern human experiences (Damrosch, 2003). Therefore, this study positions Dewi Lestari's *Supernova* and Andrew Sean Greer's *Less* as research objects to understand escapism in urban spaces across cultures. Dewi Lestari's novel *Supernova* (2001) is a work of Indonesian urban literature that combines themes of modernity, spirituality, and the search for identity through a complex narrative with postmodern nuances (Dewi Lestari, 2001). This novel presents the lives of urban figures who are in complex intellectual, professional, and social relationship circles, so that they experience an existential crisis and try to find the meaning of life through science, spirituality, and the construction of alternative identities (Faruk, 2012). In the context of modern Indonesian literature, *Supernova* is seen as a work that represents postmodern tendencies, because it combines various discourses such as science, philosophy, and popular culture to depict an urban reality full of uncertainty (Lyotard, 1984). The presence of metaphysical elements and philosophical narratives in this novel also shows a form of escapism of the characters who try to escape the limits of urban social reality that is considered limiting (Barker, 2012). Therefore, *Supernova* can be understood as a literary text that not only represents Indonesian urban life, but also shows how escapism becomes a narrative strategy to respond to the modern identity crisis (Giddens, 1991).

Meanwhile, Andrew Sean Greer's novel *"Less"* (2017) is an American urban novel that tells the story of Arthur Less, a writer experiencing an identity crisis, social failure, and psychological distress due to the realities of modern life (Greer, 2017). This novel depicts the main character's escapism through a cross-country journey undertaken as a form of escape from feelings of failure and an inability to face his emotional reality (Greer, 2017). In American literary studies, *"Less"* is understood as a novel that combines satirical humor with social criticism, particularly of the modern world that demands success and social recognition (Jameson, 1991). Urban life in this novel is depicted not only as a physical space, but as a social system that oppresses individuals through standards of success, romantic relationships, and the expectations of modern society (Baumeister, 1991). Thus, *"Less"* demonstrates how escapism can be both a coping mechanism and a narrative strategy to critique the stressful realities of modern society (Storey, 2018).

Both novels share similarities in depicting urban individuals experiencing alienation and social pressure, leading to escapism as a response. However, the differences in Indonesian and American cultural backgrounds allow for variations in the forms of escapism presented, both through the metaphysical exploration in *Supernova* and the physical journey and satirical humor in *Less* (Bassnett, 2014). Urban life in both novels is characterized by modernity, individualism, and the complexity of social relations, which is in accordance with the view that modernity creates an identity crisis due to the collapse of traditional values and the emergence of new demands in social life (Giddens, 1991). In the context of postmodernist theory, this phenomenon can be understood as the impact of social fragmentation and the loss of grand narratives that previously served as a guide for modern society (Lyotard, 1984). Therefore, escapism in both novels is not only an individual escape, but also a symbol of the inability of modern society to provide a stable psychological space for individuals (Jameson, 1991).

Previous research on *Supernova* has focused heavily on postmodernism, intertextuality, and identity construction in modern Indonesian literature, particularly in relation to Dewi Lestari's pluralistic discourse (Faruk, 2012). Other studies have also explored how *Supernova* represents existential crisis and urban spirituality as a reflection of modern Indonesian society experiencing a shift in values due to globalization (Barker, 2012). Meanwhile, research on *Less* has emphasized satirical humor, travel as a symbol of identity, and critiques of the culture of achievement in contemporary American society (Jameson, 1991). Several studies of modern American literature have positioned *Less* as a work that demonstrates the anxiety of modern individuals facing social demands and unstable emotional relationships (Greer, 2017). However, studies linking these two novels within a comparative literary framework are still very limited, particularly in examining escapism as a cross-cultural phenomenon arising from the pressures of urban social reality (Damrosch, 2003). The research gap in this study lies in the lack of comparative literary studies that discuss escapism in Indonesian and American urban novels using the theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and social representation simultaneously. Most studies on *Supernova* focus more on aspects of narrative structure and philosophical discourse, while studies on *Less* emphasize satire and the journey of the main character, without comparing it with the phenomenon of escapism in other literary works from different cultures (Bassnett, 2014). In fact, escapism as a narrative strategy has the potential to be analyzed as a global representation of the pressures of modernity, so that cross-cultural studies can enrich the understanding of how urban novels produce social meaning (Hall, 1997). Thus, this study is important because it presents a comparative analysis that places escapism at the center of the study, not merely an additional element in the narrative (Storey, 2018).

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to compare escapism and social reality in two urban novels from different cultural contexts, namely Indonesia and America, by integrating French postmodernism theory and the theory of cultural representation, widely used in American studies. This research examines escapism not only as a psychological escape but also as a social critical strategy that reveals the pressures of modernity in urban life (Lyotard, 1984). Through comparative literary studies, this research offers a new contribution in the form of mapping different forms of escapism that share common social roots: alienation, social pressure, and identity crises in modern society (Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, this research demonstrates how narrative structures and cultural symbols in literary texts shape different meanings of escapism based on the social ideologies of each culture (Hall, 1997). Thus, this research not only enriches comparative literary studies but also contributes to the study of global urban literature.

Theoretically, this research utilizes several main foundations. First, Jean-François Lyotard's theory of postmodernism emphasizes that postmodern society is experiencing the collapse of grand narratives, causing individuals to live in social fragmentation and an unstable search for meaning (Lyotard, 1984). This theory is relevant to reading *Supernova*, which displays a plurality of discourses, and *Less*, which depicts modern individuals who have lost their orientation in life. Second, Stuart Hall's theory of representation is used to understand how literary texts represent social reality through symbols and language, and how meaning is shaped by specific cultural contexts (Hall, 1997). This theory helps explain how urban life is represented as a space of social pressure that encourages characters' escapism. Third, Roy Baumeister's theory of escapism is used to interpret escapism as an individual's psychological mechanism to avoid negative self-awareness due to social pressure, failure, or identity crisis (Baumeister, 1991). These three theories are used integratively to understand escapism as a social and narrative phenomenon in both novels.

Based on this background, the formulation of the research problem is: (1) how is the form of escapism of the main characters in the novels *Supernova* and *Less* represented through narrative structure and cultural symbols, and (2) how urban social reality is constructed as a factor that encourages escapism in both novels. The purpose of this study is to describe the form of escapism in both novels and analyze the relationship of escapism with urban social reality in the context of Indonesian and American culture (Damrosch, 2003). The theoretical benefit of this study is to expand the study of modern comparative literature by strengthening the analysis of escapism in cross-cultural urban literature, while the practical benefit is to provide readers with an understanding that urban novels can be a medium for reflection on modern social pressures and individual strategies in surviving the reality of urban life (Storey, 2018). Thus, this study confirms that escapism in literature is not only a form of escape, but is a representation of social criticism that shows the psychological condition of modern humans in facing the pressures of urban social reality (Hall, 1997).

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method because it aims to understand and describe in depth the phenomenon of escapism and social reality represented in urban novels without using statistical measurements. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to interpret the meaning, symbols, and narrative structures that form social messages in literary texts contextually (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Descriptive research is used to systematically present findings through detailed descriptions of the forms of character escapism and depictions of urban social reality in the two literary works being compared. According to Sugiyono (2022), descriptive research aims to factually and accurately describe a phenomenon based on available data, making it relevant for literary text studies that emphasize the interpretation of meaning. Furthermore, this study adopts a comparative literature approach because the objects of study consist of two novels from different literary traditions, namely Indonesian and American, which share the same theme of urban life and the search for self-identity. Comparative literature is used to examine thematic relationships and differences in narrative structure in two texts from different cultural backgrounds in order to discover universal patterns and ideological distinctiveness of each work (Bassnett, 2014).

This type of research is library research with a textual analysis design because the primary data comes from written texts in the form of novels as literary documents. Library research is relevant in literary studies because literary texts are positioned as primary sources containing symbolic meanings and social representations that can be

analyzed through critical reading (Zed, 2014). Textual analysis is used to identify narrative elements that show the characters' escapism, urban social realities, and criticism of modernity in both novels. This analysis technique is in line with the concept of document analysis which states that written documents can be used as primary data in qualitative research because they contain messages, values, and social structures that can be interpreted scientifically (Bowen, 2009). Thus, this study positions the novels *Supernova* by Dewi Lestari and *Less* by Andrew Sean Greer as cultural documents that represent modern social phenomena through language, symbols, and narratives. In addition, this study also uses an interpretive approach because literature is understood as a text whose meaning is shaped by the social context and the reader's perspective that is bound by a certain theoretical framework (Ratna, 2015).

The subjects of this research are not humans, but rather literary texts analyzed as the objects of study. The research sample was determined using purposive sampling, which involves selecting data based on specific considerations consistent with the research objectives. Purposive sampling was used because the researchers selected two novels that thematically share a common depiction of urban life, identity crises, and escapism as a response to social pressure, yet originate from different cultural contexts. According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), purposive sampling in qualitative research allows researchers to select the most relevant and information-rich data, resulting in in-depth analysis. The novel "*Supernova*" was chosen because it is known as a work of Indonesian urban literature that contains elements of postmodernism through a combination of science, spirituality, and the search for the meaning of life in the context of modern society (Faruk, 2012). Meanwhile, the novel "*Less*" was chosen because it represents the experience of an urban American individual facing an existential crisis through travel, a form of escapism and social critique of modern achievement culture (Greer, 2017). The selection of these two novels was made to demonstrate the similarities in the patterns of escapism as a global phenomenon, while also highlighting the differences in its representation based on their respective cultural backgrounds. The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher themselves (human instrument) because the researcher acts as a critical reader who collects data, interprets it, and draws conclusions based on the theory used. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasize that in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument because data analysis relies on interpretive skills in understanding the meaning of the text. To maintain analytical consistency, this study used a supporting instrument in the form of a text analysis sheet (coding sheet) containing categories of escapism and social reality. The coding sheet was used to group important quotations from the novel based on themes, symbols, character conflicts, and social representations that appear in the narrative. The use of coding in qualitative research helps researchers organize data more systematically and facilitates thematic interpretation (Saldaña, 2021). The primary categories used in coding include forms of escapism (psychological escape, symbolic escape, physical journey, and spiritual quest) and urban social realities (alienation, achievement pressure, capitalism, and social relations crisis). Thus, this research instrument allows for directed analysis in accordance with the problem formulation and theoretical framework used.

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation study, namely by intensively reading both novels, noting the narrative sections, dialogues, and descriptions that are relevant to the themes of escapism and social reality. Documentation study was used because novels are written documents that can be analyzed as cultural texts that represent certain social values and ideologies (Bowen, 2009). The data collection procedure was carried out in several stages, namely: (1) reading the entire *Supernova* and *Less* novels thoroughly to understand the plot, characters, and main

conflicts; (2) marking quotations that contain elements of escapism and urban social reality; (3) classifying quotations based on categories in a coding sheet; (4) identifying symbols, metaphors, and narratives that contain social criticism of modernity; and (5) noting the context of the quotations so that interpretations are not separated from the overall structure of the story. This technique is in line with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) who stated that qualitative data collection must be carried out systematically to produce rich and relevant data. Furthermore, this study utilized secondary data in the form of journal articles, literary theory books, and previous research on postmodernism, escapism, and urban literature to strengthen the analytical interpretation (Ratna, 2015).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. Data reduction was achieved by selecting the quotations most relevant to the research focus, namely escapism and urban social reality in both novels. Data presentation was carried out by organizing the quotations into a thematic table to facilitate comparison between *Supernova* and *Less*. Furthermore, conclusions were drawn through interpreting the meaning of the quotations using Lyotard's postmodernist theory, Stuart Hall's theory of representation, and Baumeister's theory of escapism to identify patterns of representation in each novel. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) explain that interactive analysis is cyclical because researchers can return to the data when they discover new patterns during the interpretation process. To strengthen the results, this study also applies a comparative literature approach by comparing the narrative structure, character conflicts, and symbols of escapism in the two novels, thus producing a cross-cultural understanding of modern urban phenomena (Bassnett, 2014).

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through theoretical triangulation and diligent observation. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interpretations based on several different theories to prevent subjective analysis. Patton (2015) stated that theoretical triangulation is important in qualitative research to strengthen the credibility of the findings because it allows researchers to view phenomena from various conceptual perspectives. Diligent observation was carried out by repeatedly rereading the text and checking the consistency of coding categories to avoid misinterpretation. In addition, the researcher also double-checked quotations to ensure they fit the narrative context and are not separated from the overall story structure. With these procedures, this study is expected to produce a systematic and credible analysis of escapism as a narrative strategy and urban social reality as an ideological setting in the novels *Supernova* and *Less* (Creswell, 2018).

Results

1. Synopsis of *Supernova* (Dewi Lestari)

The novel "*Supernova: Ksatria, Putri, dan Bintang Jatuh*" by Dewi Lestari depicts the lives of urban characters who live amidst the complexity of social relations, intellectualism, and the search for self-meaning amidst urban modernity. The story centers on a married couple, Dhimas and Reuben, who appear socially established, intellectual, and successful in city life. However, beneath this social stability, they experience existential anxiety and emotional emptiness due to the routine and standards of success established by urban social reality. Urban life in this novel is portrayed as a space that oppresses individuals through demands for achievement, professional identity, and alienation from interpersonal relationships, thus pushing the characters to seek a way

out of these social pressures. This demonstrates that modern social reality does not always bring happiness, but instead gives rise to hidden inner crises.

The escapism in *Supernova* is evident through the search for alternative meanings of life through metaphysics, spirituality, and the exploration of knowledge. The characters in this novel attempt to transcend the boundaries of social reality by constructing a broader world of thought, as if seeking to escape the rigid urban social system. The narrative then develops through the interconnectedness of other characters such as Diva, a high-class prostitute experiencing identity struggles, and Gio and Elektra who represent the search for self through spiritual and scientific symbols. With a postmodern style, this novel combines social reality with philosophical discourse, showing that escape is not always physical, but can be present as a symbolic escape through the ideology of knowledge and spiritual search. Thus, *Supernova* presents escapism as a strategy for urban characters to face the pressures of urban social reality full of fragmentation and uncertainty.

2. Synopsis of *Less* (Andrew Sean Greer)

Andrew Sean Greer's novel *Less* focuses on the life of Arthur Less, an American writer entering middle age and experiencing an identity crisis amidst modern urban life. Arthur faces social pressures in the form of career failure, failed romantic relationships, and feelings of inferiority due to his inability to meet society's standards of success. The city is depicted as a social space that fosters competition, public recognition, and demands for productivity, easily causing individuals to feel alienated and lose their meaning in life. This situation demonstrates how urban social realities not only impact economic aspects but also create strong psychological pressures in the lives of modern individuals.

The escapism in this novel is demonstrated through Arthur's decision to travel the world, attending various literary events in several countries. The trip initially appears to be a professional endeavor, but is actually a form of escape from the reality of his ex-girlfriend's upcoming marriage. Arthur chooses physical movement to escape emotional pain, making the trip a concrete symbol of escapism. However, beneath the satirical humor that dominates the narrative, the novel conveys a social critique of the modern world that judges people based on reputation, achievement, and social status. In the context of postmodernism, Arthur's journey represents an individual living in a fragmented identity, moving from one space to another, but still unable to find a definitive meaning in life.

Throughout his journey, Arthur encounters various experiences that demonstrate identity instability, anxiety about aging, and an inability to build whole relationships. The humor in this novel functions as a defense mechanism to mask an existential crisis, while also serving as a narrative strategy that critiques the oppressive urban social reality. Thus, *Less* depicts escapism as a coping mechanism triggered by modern social reality, in which individuals attempt to escape but are ultimately forced to confront themselves.

The results of this study were obtained through a textual analysis of Dewi Lestari's novels "*Supernova: Ksatria, Putri, dan Bintang Jatuh*" and Andrew Sean Greer's novel "*Less*," focusing on forms of escapism and urban social realities. The analysis was conducted using a comparative literature approach to identify similar representational patterns and differences in narrative strategies emerging in both novels, based on Indonesian and American cultural contexts. The main findings indicate that escapism in both works functions not only as a psychological escape for the characters but also as a narrative strategy to critique urban social structures that oppress individuals through demands for identity, achievement, and fragile social relations. This finding aligns with the view that modern literary texts function as social representations that construct meaning through language and symbols that are not neutral but rather tied to specific

ideologies (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, the results of this study reinforce the argument that modern urban life tends to give rise to identity fragmentation, resulting in urban literary characters often experiencing existential anxiety that leads to the emergence of escapism in various forms (Giddens, 1991).

1. Urban Social Reality as a Trigger for Characters' Identity Crises

The results of this study indicate that urban social reality in *Supernova* and *Less* is represented as a system that creates psychological pressure, primarily through social competition, demands for success, and unstable interpersonal relationships. In *Supernova*, urban social reality emerges through the depiction of characters living in intellectual and professional environments that demand a stable image, yet harbor emotional emptiness. The city is depicted as a modern space that traps humans in routines, achievement standards, and performative social identities. This demonstrates how modernity builds pressure through social structures that force individuals to continuously project an idealized self-image in order to be recognized within their social community (Sennett, 1990). In *Less*, urban social reality emerges through social pressure on Arthur Less, who feels he has failed to meet standards of success as a writer and as an adult. He feels marginalized by a social system that judges people based on public reputation, career status, and relationship stability. These findings support Baumeister's (1991) argument that modern social reality often creates conditions in which individuals experience negative self-evaluations and a loss of control over their identities, leading to a need to escape these pressures.

2. Escapism in *Supernova*: Symbolic Escape through Knowledge and Spirituality

The analysis shows that escapism in *Supernova* is primarily represented in the form of symbolic escape, namely the characters' attempts to transcend social reality through knowledge, metaphysics, and spirituality. The characters in this novel do not choose physical escape, but rather construct a broader world of thought as a means of coping with the pressures of modernity. This form of escapism is evident through a narrative that combines science, philosophy, and spirituality as alternative spaces for understanding life. The demands of city life are no longer considered the sole center of meaning, but merely a small part of a broader reality. This pattern demonstrates postmodern characteristics that reject a single truth and present a plurality of discourses as a form of resistance to the dominance of modern values (Lyotard, 1984). Escapism in *Supernova* is also demonstrated through the characters' attempts to construct identities that are not constrained by urban social structures, thus viewing urban social reality as a false and deceptive space. These findings support the view that postmodernism often appears in literary texts as a response to the failure of modernity to create stable meaning for individuals (Jameson, 1991). Thus, escapism in *Supernova* is not merely an escape, but a form of critique of urban social realities deemed overly materialistic and suppressing the freedom of human identity (Hall, 1997).

3. Escapism in *Less*: Physical Escape through Travel and Satirical Humor

Unlike in *Supernova*, escapism in *Less* is predominantly represented through physical escape, in the form of Arthur Less's cross-country journey. The main character chooses to leave the oppressive urban space as a way to escape the emotional pain and social failure he experiences. The journey in this novel is not simply a change of location, but a symbol of escape from a psychological reality he cannot face directly. This finding aligns with Baumeister's (1991) concept of escapism, which explains that individuals often choose escape strategies by avoiding situations that trigger negative self-evaluations.

Furthermore, the satirical humor in *Less* functions as a form of narrative escapism, namely the use of comedy to mask the existential crisis experienced by the main character. Humor becomes both a coping mechanism and a tool for social critique of the modern world that judges humans based on public success. This pattern demonstrates that American urban novels often employ satire as a strategy to highlight the absurdity of modern life and the instability of individual identity within it (Storey, 2018). Thus, escapism in *Less* serves a dual function: as a means of escape for the characters and as an authorial strategy to critique the competitively stressful urban social structure (Hall, 1997).

4. Similarities in Escapism Patterns: Alienation and Identity Fragmentation

The comparison shows that, although the forms of escapism differ, both novels demonstrate that escapism arises from alienation and identity fragmentation in modern life. In *Supernova*, alienation arises through the disconnection of emotional relationships despite the characters being in a bustling social environment. In *Less*, alienation emerges through feelings of failure, loneliness, and the main character's inability to establish a stable identity within the social world. This situation suggests that urban modernity creates individuals trapped in fluid and uncertain identities, leading them to experience recurring existential anxiety. This finding aligns with the concept of reflexive modernity, which states that modern society produces individuals who must continually construct their own identities without a stable foundation of values (Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, both novels demonstrate that escapism is not merely a personal act, but a reflection of broader social structures, namely the pressures of capitalism, the culture of achievement, and the demands of self-image in urban society. This confirms that urban social reality is not neutral but rather creates a system of domination that influences individual psychological experiences (Harvey, 2005). Thus, escapism in both novels can be understood as a universal social phenomenon in modern urban life.

5. Differences in Narrative Strategy: Metaphysical Postmodernism vs. Realistic Satire

The research also found significant differences in narrative strategy between the two novels. *Supernova* employs a metaphysical and fragmentary postmodern structure, combining various discourses to construct a complex narrative world. This strategy demonstrates that escapism in the novel is represented through the search for alternative meanings that transcend social reality. This pattern aligns with the characteristics of postmodernism, which rejects a single narrative and constructs meaning through a plurality of perspectives (Lyotard, 1984). Meanwhile, *Less* employs a more realistic narrative strategy, with satirical humor dominating the narrative style. The narrative journey serves as the primary structure, showcasing the characters' escapism as a concrete form of escape. Satire is used to expose the absurdity of modern life, so that escapism appears as a response to social realities that demand success and public recognition. This finding reinforces the view that contemporary American urban literature often uses satire as a form of social critique of capitalist modernity (Jameson, 1991). Thus, these differences in narrative strategies indicate that escapism is shaped by cultural context: in the Indonesian context it emerges more through spiritual exploration and metaphysical discourse, whereas in the American context it emerges through physical journeys and humor as forms of modern coping (Bassnett, 2014).

6. Summary of Findings in a Comparative Table

To clarify the research results, the following table summarizes the forms of escapism and urban social realities in both novels. This table shows that escapism shares similar

patterns as a response to social pressure, but differs in its symbolic forms and narrative strategies. This finding supports the view that representations in literature not only reflect reality but also shape how society understands certain social experiences (Hall, 1997).

Table 1. Analytical Aspect

No.	Analytical Aspects	Supernova (Dewi Lestari)	Less (Andrew Sean Greer)
1.	Urban Social Reality	The pressure of intellectual imagery, fragile relationships, materialistic modernity	Achievement culture, career failure, and social reputation pressures
2.	Dominant Form of Escapism	Symbolic escapism through spirituality and knowledge	Physical escapism through cross-country travel
3.	Main Character Conflict	Existential emptiness in urban relations	Identity crisis and social failure
4.	Narrative Strategy	Metaphysical and fragmentary postmodernism	Realistic satire with travel humor
5.	Meaning of Escapism	Critique of modernity's limiting meaning of life	Coping mechanisms and social critique

7. Conclusions and Main Research Findings

Overall, the research findings confirm that escapism in *Supernova* and *Less* is a narrative strategy that represents the identity crisis of modern humans due to the pressures of urban social reality. Both novels demonstrate that urban social reality creates individuals who experience alienation, identity fragmentation, and existential anxiety, thus escapism emerges as a response to these pressures. While the escapism in *Supernova* is more symbolic and metaphysical, the escapism in *Less* is more physical and satirical, both contain social critiques of urban modernity. These findings reinforce the view that literature functions as a space for ideological representation that constructs social meaning through symbols, language, and narrative (Hall, 1997). Thus, this research demonstrates that escapism in urban novels is not simply an individual escape, but a form of social reflection that reveals the tension between the individual and the modern social structures that continue to oppress human life (Giddens, 1991).

Discussion

This research discussion confirms that escapism in urban novels cannot be understood simply as a form of individual escape, but rather as a social representation reflecting the pressures of urban modernity on human identity. The results show that *Supernova* and *Less* both depict modern individuals experiencing existential crises due to urban social realities, making escapism a primary strategy for the characters to survive psychologically. This finding is relevant to Hall's (1997) argument that literary texts are not merely reflections of reality but constructions of social meaning through language and symbols that shape readers' perceptions of certain phenomena. In this context, escapism becomes a cultural sign that represents the tension between the individual and modern social structures. Furthermore, the results of this research also reinforce Giddens' (1991) view that modern society creates unstable, reflexive identities, leaving individuals in a constant process of self-discovery. Therefore, escapism in both novels can be understood as a narrative response to the identity uncertainty that arises from modern urban life.

The results indicate that urban social realities in both novels serve as a primary trigger for escapism, as cities are depicted as competitive social spaces, demanding achievement, and prone to alienation. This finding aligns with Simmel's (1903) theory that modern urban life creates a psychological condition of "blasé attitude," a mental attitude that arises from the pressure of excessive social stimuli. In *Supernova*, the

characters live in an intellectual and professional world that appears established, but is actually emotionally fragile because social relations are shaped by the performativity of self-image. Meanwhile, in *Less*, urban social reality is present in the form of a culture of achievement and social evaluation that makes the main character feel like a failure and marginalized. This condition aligns with Harvey's (2005) thinking that modern capitalism constructs a social space that oppresses individuals through the logic of productivity and competition, so that human identity is at stake in an unstable social system. Thus, the urban social reality in both novels is not only a setting for the story, but also becomes an ideological structure that shapes the characters' conflicts and gives rise to escapism as a survival mechanism.

The discussion of escapism in *Supernova* shows that the characters' escape is symbolic, primarily through the exploration of knowledge, metaphysics, and spirituality. This finding suggests that escapism in the novel is constructed through a postmodern strategy that combines various discourses, such as science and philosophy, to create an alternative world beyond urban social reality. This pattern aligns with Lyotard's (1984) thinking, which states that postmodern society is characterized by the collapse of grand narratives, allowing individuals to construct meaning through fragments of plural knowledge. In this context, escapism in *Supernova* is not manifested in the form of physical travel, but rather in the search for meaning that transcends the limits of modern rationality. This also aligns with Jameson (1991), who stated that postmodernism in literature often displays symbolic forms of escape as a response to the emptiness of capitalist modernity. Thus, escapism in *Supernova* functions as a critique of overly materialistic urban life, while also demonstrating that spiritual pursuits are one of the strategies Indonesian urban characters employ to cope with modern social pressures.

In contrast, escapism in *Less* is predominantly physical escape through Arthur Less's cross-country journey. The journey serves as a strategy to escape the emotional pain and social failure experienced by the main character. This finding aligns with Baumeister's (1991) theory of escapism, which states that escapism often occurs when individuals experience negative self-evaluation and lose control of their social identity. Furthermore, the satirical humor in this novel serves as a dual-purpose mechanism of narrative escapism: masking an existential crisis while simultaneously conveying social critique. In popular culture studies, humor is often used as a strategy to cope with social pressures through irony and satire that expose the absurdity of the modern system (Storey, 2018). Therefore, escapism in *Less* can be understood not only as the character's escape, but also as the author's strategy to demonstrate that urban American society tends to create emotionally fragile individuals due to living within unrealistic standards of achievement. Thus, escapism in *Less* demonstrates the close relationship between physical travel and the psychological need to escape oppressive social realities.

The main findings of this study also indicate a similar pattern of escapism in both novels: escapism emerges as a response to the alienation and identity fragmentation created by modern life. Alienation in *Supernova* emerges through emotional disconnection and a crisis of meaning, despite the characters' presence in a dense social space. Alienation in *Less* emerges through feelings of loneliness, social failure, and anxiety about aging. This similarity reinforces Giddens' (1991) view that modernity creates individuals who continually construct their own identities reflexively due to the lack of stable values. Furthermore, this alienation aligns with Sennett's (1990) assertion that modern urban life tends to weaken authentic social relationships and replace them with functional ones. Thus, escapism in both novels can be understood as a form of individual resistance to urban social realities that force people to live with fluid identities, fragile relationships, and increasing pressures of achievement.

Compared with previous research, these findings expand on studies that focused primarily on the structural aspects and narrative styles of each novel separately. Research on *Supernova* generally emphasizes postmodernism and plurality of discourse as key characteristics of Dewi Lestari's work, particularly in relation to the representation of modern Indonesian urban identity (Faruk, 2012). Meanwhile, research on *Less* focuses more on satire, humor, and travel as symbols of identity crisis in contemporary American literature (Greer, 2017). However, these studies rarely connect the two novels within a comparative literature framework to view escapism as a universal, cross-cultural phenomenon. From a comparative literature perspective, Bassnett (2014) asserts that cross-cultural comparison is important for discovering common global patterns, while also highlighting differences in cultural ideologies in literary representation. Thus, this study fills a research gap by connecting *Supernova* and *Less* in a single comparative analysis to map escapism as a narrative strategy born from the pressures of urban social reality.

This discussion also shows that the different forms of escapism in the two novels are closely related to their cultural contexts. The escapism in *Supernova* tends toward spirituality and metaphysics, while the escapism in *Less* focuses on travel and satirical humor. This difference suggests that the characters' escape strategies are shaped by their respective cultural meaning systems. Urban Indonesians still engage with the spiritual dimension as an alternative means of finding meaning, while urban Americans tend to emphasize mobility and individual expression as forms of coping. This finding aligns with Hall's (1997) view that cultural representations are shaped by distinct sign systems within each society, so the meaning of escapism is not singular but is influenced by ideological and symbolic contexts. Furthermore, Damrosch (2003) emphasizes that world literature allows for cross-cultural reading to understand how universal themes are adapted to local social structures and values. Thus, this study demonstrates that escapism is a global theme, but its representation is strongly influenced by the cultural ideologies surrounding the author and characters.

While this study yields significant findings, there are limitations that warrant consideration. This study only analyzes the novel text as a cultural document without involving reader reception studies or interviews with the author. Hall (1997) emphasized that the meaning of a text can change depending on the audience's interpretation, so textual analysis does not fully explain how readers understand escapism in real life. Furthermore, this study only used two literary works as samples, so generalizing the findings to all Indonesian and American urban novels is not possible. In qualitative research, sample limitations are not a major weakness because the primary goal is depth of interpretation, not statistical generalization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, this limitation opens up opportunities for further research to expand the number of literary works, compare urban novels from different decades, or integrate the analysis with a reader reception approach for more comprehensive results.

Overall, this discussion confirms that escapism in *Supernova* and *Less* is a narrative response to urban social realities that suppress the identity of modern humans. This study shows that escapism is not only an individual escape, but also a social representation strategy that critiques urban modernity that gives rise to alienation, identity fragmentation, and achievement pressures. This finding strengthens Lyotard's (1984) postmodernist theory on the fragmentation of meaning in modern society and Hall's (1997) theory of representation that literature constructs social meaning through symbols and language. Thus, this study contributes to comparative literary studies by showing that urban novels from two different cultures can share the same pattern of escapism as a global phenomenon, but display different narrative strategies according to

the cultural context. Therefore, escapism in urban literature can be understood as a space of ideological reflection that shows how modern humans negotiate with constantly changing social realities and demand difficult-to-achieve identity stability (Giddens, 1991).

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that escapism in urban novels is not merely a form of individual escape, but rather a narrative strategy that represents the pressure of urban social reality on the identity of modern humans. Through a comparative literary study of Dewi Lestari's *Supernova* and Andrew Sean Greer's *Less*, this study proves that both novels present characters experiencing an existential crisis due to alienation, social competition, and the demands of success created by urban life. In *Supernova*, escapism is represented primarily in the form of symbolic escape through the exploration of spirituality, metaphysics, and knowledge as an attempt to transcend the limits of social reality that is considered materialistic and limits the freedom of the meaning of life. Meanwhile, *Less* represents escapism through physical escape in the form of cross-country travel and the use of satirical humor as a coping mechanism for social failure, identity anxiety, and the pressure of achievement culture in modern society. This comparison shows that although the forms of escapism are different, the roots of its emergence remain the same, namely urban social reality that gives rise to identity fragmentation, unstable social relations, and a sense of individual alienation amidst modernity.

Thus, this study confirms that escapism in urban novels is a social reflection that shows the negotiation between individuals and modern social structures, while also being a medium for criticizing value systems that demand humans to always be successful, productive, and have a stable identity. Academically, this study contributes to strengthening modern comparative literary studies by showing that cross-cultural urban novels can contain universal patterns of human experience, while still giving rise to distinctive representations based on each cultural ideology. This study also expands the application of postmodernism and cultural representation theory by proving that narrative fragmentation, spiritual symbols, and travel satire in literary texts function as representational strategies to convey social criticism of modernity. However, this study has limitations because it only analyzes two novels through a textual approach without involving reader reception studies or interviews with the authors, so that the meaning of escapism remains interpretative based on the structure of the text. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop this study through a literary reception approach to understand how readers from different cultural contexts interpret escapism in urban novels, as well as expanding the research object by comparing more urban novels from various decades or countries to obtain a more comprehensive mapping of escapism as a global phenomenon in modern literature. Thus, this study confirms that escapism in urban novels is not a sign of character weakness, but is a narrative strategy that reveals the psychological tensions of modern humans while also showing urban social reality as a space that forms an identity crisis and the need to search for the meaning of life.

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