
Research Article

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When reality and fantasy merged: A magical realism perspective in *A Kiss for Cinderella*

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Abstract

A Kiss for Cinderella is a literary work whose narrative combines elements of reality and fantasy, reflecting the characteristics of magical realism. Magical realism is essential in "*A Kiss for Cinderella*," as it intertwines reality and fantasy, making the extraordinary feel ordinary. The narrative centers on a young woman enduring difficulty, who finds solace in a dreamlike realm inspired by the Cinderella fairy tale. The novel tells the story of a young woman who experiences hardship while escaping to a dream world inspired by the fairy tale of Cinderella. Through the dream world that she creates, she not only escapes from the harsh reality, but also builds an inner space where she finds meaning, magnificence, and the strength to survive. This study is conducted by reading carefully and thoroughly to the text, and then begin to isolate the part which shows how magical realism exists in the text of the play. This study also highlights how the fusion of real and imagined elements deepens the emotional and thematic impact of the play. This article explores how the interaction between imagination and reality shapes the story's themes and character development. By analyzing key scenes, we examine how magical realism is used to blur the boundaries between the protagonist's struggles and her fantasies. By using this approach, it is hoped to be able to deeply reveal how magical realism plays an important role and is able to strengthen the messages and human values which are contained in the play.

Keywords: Cinderella; magical realism; imagination; reality

1. Introduction

Salman Rushdie state that, many people misunderstand "magic realism," focusing solely on the "magic" and ignoring the "realism." However, the essence of magic realism lies in the integration of the fantastical within a realistic framework. It's not simply fantasy; it's a surreal quality that emerges from everyday reality. Magical realism is a literary style that blends the real with the fantastic, making extraordinary events feel like a natural part of everyday life. The term was first introduced by German art critic Franz Roh in 1925 to describe a style of painting that mixed realistic imagery with surreal elements. Later, writers—especially in Latin America—adopted the concept in literature, using it to reflect the complex and often contradictory nature of their societies. Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, for example, described magical realism as a way of capturing a reality that includes both the rational and the mystical, challenging the idea that the world can be understood purely through logic (Suma, 2018).

Magical realism merges the ordinary with the extraordinary, making the fantastic appear as a natural extension of everyday life. This blending of realism and fantasy, along with the integration of diverse cultural traditions, mirrors the hybrid nature of postcolonial societies. As a result, magical realism inherently possesses a multicultural essence. Notably, it achieved this status before the widespread use of the term "multiculturalism," playing a pivotal role in shaping a multicultural literary perspective. Additionally, its narrative diversity and stylistic flexibility have significantly contributed to the evolution of postmodern literary sensibilities.

In literature, magical realism is known for its matter-of-fact tone—supernatural events happen, but they're treated as normal, without shock or explanation. This technique blurs the line between what is real and what is imagined, inviting readers to question the nature of reality itself. Many writers use magical realism not just to tell stories, but also serves as a tool for social and political critique in a way that feels both grounded and dreamlike.

The fusion between reality and fantasy in "A Kiss for Cinderella" shapes its themes in a profound way, allowing the narrative to explore the complexity of human emotions and resilience. As the protagonist navigates her challenges, the fantasy elements allow her to confront her fears, aspirations, and dreams. Key scenes in the play clearly demonstrate how magical realism influences the protagonist's growth, facilitating the transformation of his inner world and offering new insights into the real-life hurdles he faces. This article will discuss these key moments and explore how the interplay between reality and imagination enriches the emotional depth and thematic complexity of the play, ultimately enhancing the audience's appreciation of the protagonist's journey.

2. Methods

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach with literary analysis method. This analysis focuses on identifying the elements of magical realism in J.M. Barrie's *A Kiss for Cinderella*. The main character in this play is portrayed as someone who wants to escape from the reality that is actually very miserable for her. This study is conducted by reading carefully and thoroughly to the text, and then begin to isolate the part which shows how magical realism exists in the text of the play. By using this approach, it is hoped to be able to deeply reveal how magical realism plays an important role and is able to strengthen the messages and human values which are contained in the play.

3. Results

Magical realism is essential in *A Kiss for Cinderella*, as it intertwines reality and fantasy, making the extraordinary feel ordinary. The narrative centers on a young woman enduring difficulty, who finds solace in a dreamlike realm inspired by the Cinderella fairy tale. This interplay between reality and imagination is not merely escapism; it is integral to the story's progression and shapes how the audience perceives her journey.

*3.1. Magical Realism Perspective According to the Scene of the Play *A Kiss for Cinderella**

POLICEMAN. Aha! What's the party's name?

BODIE. Cinderella.

(The POLICEMAN writes it down unmoved. MR. BODIE twinkles.)

Haven't you heard that name before?

POLICEMAN. Can't say I have, sir. But I'll make inquiries at the Yard.

(p. 11)

When the police asked about the name of the woman in question, Mr. Bodie answered, "Cinderella." This name refers to a fairy tale character, but the police simply noted it without surprise. The unsurprised reaction of the police to the name indicates the acceptance of magical elements in the real world.

BODIE. It was really I who gave her that name, because she seemed such a poor little neglected waif. After the girl in the story-book, you know.

POLICEMAN. No, sir, I don't know. In the Force we find it impossible to keep up with current fiction.

BODIE. She was a girl with a broom. There must have been more in the story than that, but I forgot the rest.

(p. 11)

Mr. Bodie mentioned that he gave the girl the name "Cinderella" because of her similarity with the fairy tale character. However, Cinderella herself began to identify herself completely with the story, blurring the line between the real world and the fairy tale world.

BODIE. The only other relatives she seems to have mentioned are two sisters of unprepossessing appearance.

BODIE. I understand there is something about her father having married again, and her being badly treated. She doesn't expect this to last. It seems that she has reason to believe that some very remarkable change may take place in her circumstances at an early date, at a ball for which her godmother is to get her what she calls an invite. This is evidently to be a very swagger function at which something momentous is to occur, the culminating moment being at midnight.

POLICEMAN (writing). Godmother. Invite. Twelve P.M. Fishy! Tell me about them boards now.

(p. 13)

Mr. Bodie's statement about a girl living with two older sisters and a story about her father remarrying and then he also added about a Godmother who could take her to a ball. This makes the reader think that we are caught between the world of magic and reality. The merging of the real world and the magical world is seen in the interaction between the characters with supernatural elements such as the godmother and the expectation of extraordinary events at the ball. The boundary between these two worlds becomes blurred, reflecting the hallmark of magical realism.

(She prepares the table for the feast. Eyes sparkle from the boxes.)

CINDERELLA (shining). This is the first party we've ever had. Please keep an eye on the door in case there's a knock.

(She darts into her bedroom, and her charges are more at their ease.)

(p. 62)

In this scene, Cinderella prepares for the party with enthusiasm. The existence of magical elements is seen in the description “Eyes sparkle from the boxes,” which gives the impression that there is something extraordinary or mysterious in ordinary objects. This reflects the characteristic of magical realism, where magical elements appear in the middle of the real world without logical explanation.

GODMOTHER. I am not very powerful in these days, Cinderella; but what are your wishes?

CINDERELLA. I would like fine to have my ball, Godmother.

GODMOTHER. You shall have your ball.

CINDERELLA. I would like to nurse the wounded.

GODMOTHER. You shall nurse the wounded.

CINDERELLA. I would like to be loved by the man of my choice, Godmother.

GODMOTHER. You shall be loved by the man of your choice.

(p. 74)

Cinderella expresses her wishes to have a ball, care for the injured, and find love with the person she chooses. These desires highlight her yearning for change, not just in her social standing but also in her capacity to make a real difference. The Fairy Godmother's granting of these wishes emphasizes the idea of gaining power through magical help, a common element in magical realism.

Nearly everything in the ball-room is of gold: it was only with an effort that she checked herself from dabbing gold on the regal countenances. You can see that she has not passed by gin-palaces without thinking about them. The walls and furniture are so golden that you have but to lean against them to acquire a competency.

(p. 75)

Real-world elements (such as ballrooms, dance parties) are portrayed in an exaggerated and magical way—walls can give wealth just by leaning against them. But the characters in the story are not surprised, instead taking it as a normal thing.

(The KING and QUEEN are attired like their portraits on playing cards, who are the only royalties CINDERELLA has seen, and they advance grandly to their rocking chairs, looking as if they thought the whole public was dirt, but not so much despised dirt as dirt with good points. LORD TIMES fixes them with his eye, and the KING hastily crosses and shakes hands with him.)

(p. 79)

Here, the King and Queen appear in Cinderella's imagination not as real figures, but based on the pictures on playing cards. This creates a blend of the real (playing cards) and the magical (“kingdom in a dream”), which is the hallmark of magical realism.

....and for a moment the whole scene rocks, the street lamps wink, and odd shadows stalk among the courtiers, shadows of MR. BODIE, MARION, and the party in an unfinished coat, who have surely no right to be here. This is only momentarily; then the palace steadies itself again.

(p. 79)

This scene shows how Cinderella's imagination is being disrupted by elements from the real world. The transition is seen through visuals and atmosphere, showing that the world is no longer stable and begins to mix between fantasy and reality-which is the essence of magical realism.

The ball-room is growing dark. The lamps have gone out. There is no light save the tiniest glow, which has been showing on the floor all the time, unregarded by us. It seems to come from a policeman's lantern. The gold is all washed out by the odd streaks of white that come down like rain. Soon the PRINCE'S cry of 'CINDERELLA, CINDERELLA' dies away.

(p. 100-101)

The scene that was originally in the fantasy world of the grand ballroom suddenly turns into the harsh reality which is the snowy street of Cinderella's house. Cinderella was not actually attending the magnificent ball, but she was lying on the street in a dying condition. The world of the ballroom is the result of her hopes and fantasies, a place where she can forget her miseries. This transition is not logically explained, but feels natural, which is the hallmark of magical realism that is the subtle shift between dream and reality.

CINDERELLA (*in some awe*). The first time I woke in hospital, an angel with streamers was standing there holding a tray in her hand, and on the tray was a boiled egg. Then I thought it was the egg you get the day before you die.

CINDERELLA (*who in the course of a troubled life has acquired much miscellaneous information*). In the Workhouse you always get an egg to your tea the day before you die. (*She whispers.*) I know now I'm not the real Cinderella.

CINDERELLA (*gravely*). It's come to me. The more I eat the clearer I see things. I think it was just an idea of mine; being lonely-like I needed to have something to hang on to.

(p. 111-112)

Cinderella recalls an experience that seemed odd but truthful, when she woke up in the hospital and saw an angel offering her a hard-boiled egg. For Cinderella, it was not just a dream or hallucination, but was deeply connected to her past in the hospital, where it was believed that whoever got the egg would die the next day. The combination of mystical images (angels) and dark reality makes the line between fantasy and reality blurred. This is a concrete example of magical realism where magical things are treated as ordinary, because for Cinderella, these small miracles are part of how she survives the harshness of life.

4. Discussion

A captivating element of magical realism in this play is the seamless integration of the protagonist's imagined world with her actual circumstances. She does not just fantasize about a better life; her dreams become so vivid that they feel as tangible as her daily struggles. The distinction between reality and fantasy blurs, enhancing the narrative's allure. For instance, when she pictures herself at a lavish ball, it transcends mere wishful thinking, becoming a substantial part of the story without questioning its feasibility—this acceptance is characteristic of magical realism.

Key moments in *A Kiss for Cinderella* highlight the presence of magical realism. A notable instance occurs when the protagonist, referred to as "Cinderella" vividly describes her transformation into a princess, detailing her exquisite gown and the ballroom's splendor. Despite being in a bleak environment, dressed in rags, the scene's execution makes both realities feel equally valid. This reflects how magical realism allows extraordinary elements to coexist within everyday life without requiring justification.

Another instance showcasing magical realism is when Cinderella interacts with objects that transform before her eyes. In one scene, she arranges common items as if they were part of a royal setting—an old shoe morphs into a glass slipper, and a rag becomes an elegant train. Her dialogue reinforces this transformation, suggesting an authentic change: "Do you see how it sparkles? Fit for a queen." To an outsider, it might seem like mere playacting, but within the play's context, these items embody dual meanings—they represent both their physical forms and her imaginative visions. The narrative presents this duality straightforwardly, exemplifying magical realism in action.

The fusion of reality and fantasy serves an emotional function beyond creating a dreamlike atmosphere. The protagonist's fairy tale realm is not just an escape from adversity; it helps her understand her life. Her imagination grants her agency that reality often denies. This theme resonates with magical realism: fantasy is not separate from real life but rather an extension of it. Here, her dreams enable her to cope with suffering without succumbing to despair, allowing her to view her challenges through a lens of hope and wonder.

The strength of magical realism in this play lies in its portrayal of the extraordinary as commonplace. Unlike traditional fantasy that adheres to specific rules or explanations for magic, magical realism presents these elements as inherent to the narrative. There is no pause for justification regarding why her imagined world coexists with reality; it simply does. The supernatural aspects are accepted parts of her experience rather than sources of shock or skepticism, allowing audiences to connect with her emotions and resilience without getting bogged down in questions about authenticity.

Additionally, the play employs magical realism to underscore broader themes. It offers social commentary through Cinderella's story arc. Like many characters in magical realist works, she occupies a marginalized position—overlooked and powerless. Her ability to envision a world where she can transcend her limitations reflects a deeper notion: imagination can serve as an act of resistance. In a society that undermines her autonomy, she reclaims it through storytelling, making her journey even more poignant.

5. Conclusions

Magical realism offers a unique narrative approach that seamlessly blends the fantastic with the real. It does not escape from reality but rather embraces its complexity by allowing the surreal to emerge from ordinary life. This blending encourages readers or audiences to reconsider boundaries between logic and imagination, between what is and what could be. In *A Kiss for Cinderella*, magical realism is not merely a stylistic flourish; it becomes a vital part of the protagonist's emotional and psychological reality.

The play presents Cinderella's imagined world not as a distraction, but as a genuine response to her social position and personal hardships. Her transformations, visions, and dreamlike experiences are portrayed as natural extensions of her inner life. What might seem delusional in another context becomes, here, a form of emotional truth. Rather than separating fantasy from the real world, the narrative allows both to coexist. It invites the audience to view Cinderella's resilience, pain, and hope through a dual lens. By presenting the extraordinary as ordinary, *A Kiss for Cinderella* reminds us that imagination can be both a sanctuary and a source of strength; an essential part of what it means to endure.

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