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## The Study of Fantasy and Realism in Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*

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### ABSTRACT

The paper uses the term magical realism to examine the magical aspects of Erin Morgenstern's book *The Night Circus*. The novel intentionally blurs the lines between reality and fiction to transport readers to a place where fantastical wonders and everyday things coexist peacefully. A close reading of some of the magical elements of the novel such as the enchanted circus tents, the mysterious clock and the bizarre performances will show how the work perfectly embodies the ideas of magical realism. Ultimately, The novel captivates readers with its enchanting tapestry of magic and wonder, offering a compelling illustration of how magical realism can elevate the everyday to the extraordinary.

**Keywords:** Blurring boundaries, Magical elements, enchanting wonders, Reality and fantasy, extraordinary.

*The Night Circus* is a 2011 novel written by the American author Erin Morgenstern. Her writing skills are evident in this debut novel, which combines fantasy and realism in an unusual way. With this dreamlike creation, she has captured the heart of every reader around the world. The debut novel makes her a great figure in contemporary literature. Several magical elements in this novel combine the theory of fantasy and the realistic human nature and emotions, which confirms the theory of realism in this novel. Fantasy is a type

of genre in literature that deals with unreal and imaginative circumstances. It doesn't consist of logical and rational thoughts. Realism is another genre that deals with the truthfulness and reality of life.

The enchanted circus called *Le Cirque Des Reves* was considered a significant magical element in this novel. *Le Cirque Des Reves* literally means "The Circus of Dreams". It is not an ordinary circus, but a circus full of magic and wonder. There are several tents, each contains a unique imaginative

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dreamlike world, and the existence of realism in such circumstances makes the novel special and magnificent.

The novel revolves around the magical rivalry between two young illusionists, who have been trained by two great magicians since their childhood. Celia was trained by her own father, Prospero the Enchanter (Hector Bowen), and an orphan boy named Marco was trained by Mr. A.H., who appeared as a man in a grey suit throughout this novel. Through this competition, the elements of fantasy and realism were shown as extraordinary. The novel's timeline spans several decades, and Morgenstern employs a realistic depiction of time's passage. By addressing these timeless dilemmas, Morgenstern infuses the narrative with a sense of realism that transcends the magical elements.

“The circus arrives without warning. No announcements precede it, no paper notices on downtown posts and billboards, no mentions or advertisements in local newspapers. It is simply there, when yesterday it was not.”(Morgenstern 8).

From these lines, it is clear that the circus opens without warning and only at night. Reveurs are the serious followers and fans of the circus. The Reveurs follow a unique dress code. They wear black-and-white costumes with a red touch. The circus is not situated in a permanent place; it jumps everywhere around the globe. The reveurs only knew the locations of the circus previously, except the illusionists.

The logic and reasoning were totally blurred and went beyond the boundaries of reality. The examples of blurring boundaries were the Ice Garden and the Wishing Tree. The Ice Garden was the creation of Marco. The smell of flora and fauna attracts the audience as real, but it's all unreal. The tent was filled with ice and glaciers; by the look, it seems to be a land of ice, but the temperature was not cold; the same temperature present outside the circus is maintained in the tent too.

The design of the Ice Garden showcases the artistic and imaginative elements of the circus. Delicate and intricate ice sculptures, frozen pathways, and ethereal lighting contribute to the overall aesthetic appeal. The Ice Garden is not just a visual spectacle; it also holds symbolic significance in the narrative. It represents the creative and magical expressions of the characters, particularly the illusionists and performers who contribute to the ever-evolving beauty of the circus.

Celia was one of the important characters in this novel. The wishing tree is her creation, where the patrons place candles that carry their wishes. In order to light a new candle, the old candle has to pass its igniter. By sacrificing the old wish, the patrons can make a new wish. Through this act, the patrons can see their wishes coming true in their illusions. It is a magical and ethereal experience for those who visit that circus.

While the Wishing Tree may not be a central plot device, it contributes to the overall theme of magic, interconnectedness, and the power of collective imagination. The wishes tied to the tree subtly add layers to the narrative, emphasizing the significance of dreams within the world of the circus. The Wishing Tree serves as a symbol of the dreams and aspirations associated with the circus. It reflects the idea that the Night Circus is a place where fantasies come to life, and the wishes tied to the tree contribute to the overall magical energy of the circus.

The Mysterious Clock is one of the magical elements in this novel. It was named the Wunschtraum clock, and it's a large black clock with a white surface and a silver pendulum. The clock represents no escaping time out of the circus, and the time is divided by the magic done by the illusionists in the circus. The clock is seen as the central piece of the circus, which is controlled by Celia and Marco. Herr Friedrich Thiessen was the clockmaker and founder of Reveurs. Once the visitors get into the circus, they can't get out of it because of the illusions made by the illusionists.

The enchanting wonders of Tsukiko amazed the readers. Tsukiko is a character in *The Night Circus*. She works for *The Night Circus* as a contortionist. She is capable of twisting her body at an extreme angle, which is physically impossible. Being an extremely old woman, she can do such wonders because of her experience in doing illusions. At one point, she expresses to Marco about her experience in the circus of more than eighty years. She also possesses the ability to manipulate time. Her magical power is related to temporal manipulation, allowing her to affect and alter the passage of time in various ways within the confines of the magical competition depicted in the novel.

The Carousel was another magical element in this novel. It's a magical ride that helps the patrons ride through time and space. It gave the riders a dreamlike experience. This also conveys the concept of time travel. Here, the element of science fiction was proven through such magical wonders. Its design is not ordinary, featuring magical creatures and intricate details.

Morgenstern intricately explores the dynamics between characters, presenting love, friendship, and rivalry with a nuanced realism. The romantic tension between Celia and Marco, while imbued with a touch of magic, unfolds in a way that mirrors the intricacies of real-life relationships. The expression of love between the two young competitors, Celia and Marco, was one of the elements of realism. When Celia visits the tent of the Ice Garden, she feels connected to the creator of that tent. Similarly, Marco also feels the same when he visits the tent of the Wishing Tree. Through feelings, the human sense is proven in this novel. At the end of this novel, Celia proves her love by saving Marco's life during the competition. Even though Marco is her competitor, she saved him because of her love for him. The following lines explain their love:

“Which tent is your favorite?” he asks.  
 “The Ice Garden,” Celia answers, without even pausing to consider. “Why is that?”  
 Marco asks. “Because of the way it feels,”

she says. “It's like walking into a dream. As though it is someplace else entirely and not simply another tent.”(Morgenstern 215).

Even though the plot and the elements revolve around magic and illusions, the experience of real life emerges throughout the novel. The bond between Celia and Hector was always seen as rude, and there is no affection between them as daughter and father. When Celia was a child, Hector ignored her, and he doesn't accept her as his child. When Celia does some magic trick of her own, Hector accepts her only as a student. Even after his death, Hector appears as a ghost, monitors Celia, and also masters her cruelly.

The emotional dilemma between Theissen and Celia, Tsukiko's care towards orphan Marco, and the concern of Isobel Martin towards the whole circus are some of the manifestations of the human sense presence of reality in the illusion world. Herr Theissen was a non-illusionist; he met Celia and became a good friend to her. Until his death, he was the best companion to Celia. Tsukiko is a senior old illusionist; she took motherly care of the orphan Marco, who was cruelly mastered by Mr.A.H. Isobel Martin is a fortune teller; she knew the hazards of the circus earlier on. Isobel made a severe effort to rescue the circus, and finally, with the help of the main characters, she rescued the circus and demonstrated her concern for the circus.

The rivalry between Hector Bowen, Prospero the Enchanter, and Mr. A.H., a man in a grey suit, was the main theme of this novel. They both fight to gain a name as great magicians. They train an individual for each to win the battle, even knowing that the death of one competitor will be the success of the other. Hector Bowen trains his own daughter, who is well aware of the cruelty of the competition. The worldly battles and fights for name and position have been the major parts of this novel.

*The Night Circus* is a novel that incorporates reality into a magical world. Through this, the genres of fantasy and realism are evident in this novel. The setting, characters, relationships, conflicts, and

sensory experiences such as the taste of caramel apples and the smell of bone fire make the readers feel connected to the real world. The elements such as Wishing Tree, Ice Garden, and Mysterious Clock have proven pure fantasy. Those elements brought the readers to a fantastical world, and at the same time, they were related to the simple reality of life.

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