

The relevance and use of reality and the fantastic in Literature

Student:

Professor:

Course title:

Date:

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Reality and fantasy are two genres commonly used in literature. This essay exhaustively discusses the relevance and usage of reality and the fantastic in literature and the way in which it impacts people's lives including the lives of children. In this discussion, *The Paper Bag Princess*, a fictional text is used along with one non-fiction text, *Hana's Suitcase*. The essay particularly focuses on the role of the reality and the fantastic relative to tone, setting and character literary devices.

Fantasy comments on social reality by means of indirections such as parable, allegory and metaphor hence could deal with intricate moral questions in a manner that is more exaggerated and playful. Furthermore, the fantastic prompts children to play at seeing the world in various dissimilar ways and hence teaches the young readers to construct meaning by making connections between ostensibly unconnected things or concepts. Equally important, the fantastic is not only for children. Becoming a teen, coming to terms with disappointment and betrayal, rites of passage – everything of emerging adult life also have to be encountered and dealt with. Even though counselling and psychoanalysis have their place, one of the most crucial tools that people can utilize in tackling reality is without doubt the creation of the allegorical story by using metaphor.

One children's text that particularly employs the fantastic is *The Paper Bag Princess* by Munsch published in the year 1980. The main characters here include Prince Ronald, Princess Elizabeth the protagonist and the dragon which is the antagonist. The story, which is

set in a forest, commences like a usual fairy tale with Prince Ronald and his beautiful Princess Elizabeth. Unluckily, “a dragon smashed Princess Elizabeth’s castle burning all her clothing with his fiery breath and carried Prince Ronald off” (Munsch 3). Princess Elizabeth does not get dejected and hopeless. Rather than waiting for somebody to come and rescue her prince Ronald, she decided to rescue her prince by herself wearing a paper bag, which was the only thing that was not burnt by the dragon’s fiery breath. The author employs ghastly details. The princess manages to follow the dragon easily since the dragon “left a trail of horses’ bones and burnt forests” (Munsch 5). In addition, children might be scared and terrified when the dragon declares that he loves “to eat princesses!” (Munsch 9). In spite of the fact that the dragon refuses to speak with Princess Elizabeth and has a fierce appearance, this princess continues banging on the dragon’s door to make the dragon listen.

The courageousness and determination of Princess Elizabeth pay off. After the dragon’s door opens, Princess Elizabeth makes use of flattery in outsmarting the dragon. Elizabeth asks, “Is it true that you are able to burn up 10 forests with using your fiery breath?” (Munsch 11). The dragon then burns 150 forests with his fiery breath until he went out of breath. On the whole, the Princess flattered the dragon and tricked it into expending all of its fiery breath by showing Princess Elizabeth what it is able to do, and then all she did was to go and take Ronald away. Even so, Ronald demonstrates appreciation by telling the princess that “You are a mess! You are wearing a dirty old paper bag and your hair is all tangled. You smell like ashes. Go dress like a real princess and come back” (Munsch 21). The energetic and valiant princess Elizabeth does not stand for the ingratitude of her prince. She tells Ronald that he looks “like a real prince, but you are a bum” (Munsch 23). Making use of her intelligence and wits, she brings out the theme that a beautiful princess could outwit a dragon as well as a bum prince, although she is dressed in a paper bag. Although the

theme of a princess saving her prince is good, this narrative could be a little too scary and horrific for young children considering that all pictures in the book have bones cluttered on the ground, left over from animals and persons who have been eaten by the dragon.

The use of fantasy such as in *The Paper Bag Princess* is very important in literature as it has the capability of working people's emotions with the same vividness and clarity as a dream. Fantasy can also develop a capacity for belief, and it casts light on life's realities in the same way as metaphor can be used to illustrate truth in general communication. As illustrated in *The Paper Bag Princess*, fantasy literature brings the irrational or the illogical into the child's given world. For instance, when the princess asks the dragon if it is able to burn 10 forests, the illustration shows a horrifying dragon and an enormous tower of flames. Fantasy confronts the ordinary, empirical and realistic world with a world of inexplicability and irrationalities in that the unusual occurs. Fantasy is recognized as the source of social damage and catastrophic psychic. It is also really important for a child's social adjustment and psychological well-being.

Fantasy is very important for the human mind. Fantasy starts as the psychological process through which children learn the gaps between experience, reality and knowledge, and become an important adult coping mechanism. Children are generally born with the full range of human emotions, vigorous, passionate, exciting, wild, completely irrational and raring to go. Moreover, children are also inexperienced and they long to explore their feelings. For this reason, children need to be scared and a safe way of doing this is through fantasy such as the fantastic literature *The Paper Bag Princess*. Fantasy provides a child with a rehearsed exploration of the too dangerous, too wide, and too big world which is getting more real and closer daily. Nonetheless, the fantastic should not only be about dragons and

dungeons like *The Paper Bag Princess* – it could also be about whichever aspect of pretend. This is why as children grow up, they need stories which include falling in love, bereavement, war, becoming a hero and saving the world, and even divorce. These offer the children's developing emotions a contextual framework wherein to awaken and prepare, all set for real life when it hits.

In literature such as children's literature, reality or non-fiction texts provide information regarding a large number of topics and help children to relate facts to concepts, usually with drawings and diagrams. In essence, the stories which children read early in their lives would have a significant influence on them, and therefore the fantastic literature could be considered as false view of reality in the souls of children. One particular non-fiction, real story is Karen Levine's *Hana's Suitcase* and the themes of World War 2 and the Holocaust are apparent throughout this text. In the book's opening part, concentration camps, Adolf Hitler and World War 2 are briefly explained for readers who are not conversant in these terms. The text is essentially the moving account of the way in which Fumiko Ishioka, a director of the Tokyo Holocaust Centre in Japan, strived to find out information regarding a Jewish Czech girl known as Hana Brady whose suitcase had been sent by the Auschwitz Museum to the Tokyo Holocaust Centre. The key characters include Hana Brady, her brother George Brady. The setting is Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

Large letters have been used to label this suitcase with the name of Hana, the German word for orphan, and Hana's date of birth which was 16th May, 1931. Fumiko was informed by the Museum that this girl had arrived there from a place called Terezin/Theresienstadt. "Fumiko was sent 4 of Hana's drawings by the Terezin museum and when he visited this museum, he came across a listing of prisoners which contained the name of Hana and the

name of George, Hana's older brother" (Levine 25). A mark on Hana's name signified that she had "died at Aushwitz" (Levine 29). Nonetheless, Fumiko was given the address of George and he managed to trace his address in the Canadian city of Toronto where was a successful businessperson, had married and had grandchildren. George informed Fumiko the account of his blissful early days. Moreover, George gave Fumiko the dazzling family photos which grace the pages of this touching paperback. "Hana in costume for a school play. George and Hana making a snow fort. Hana hanging laundry with her mother. Hana skiing and skating" (Levine 66). It is worth mentioning that these personal photos are very touching and would enable young people to understand the holocaust's brutal reality. The photographs have been put sensibly in the book and they bring the story to life.

On the whole, this reality book is a compelling, but simple reading. It is highly accessible to young children and at the same time, the text is sufficiently in-depth to get the attention of older children and even adults. Through the use of reality rather than the fantastic, the real story of the life of Hana is mixed together with the thrilling story of Fumiko Ishioka's search for the relevant information so that the Small Wings, who are the author's grouping of children, would be able to understand more as regards the Holocaust of the 1930s and early 1940s and work in a more diligent manner for peace in the world. *Hana's Suitcase* reality story successfully introduces the Holocaust to children. The haunting pages in this text would bring tears to the readers' eyes and make people's determination for sustaining a peaceful world stronger.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of the fantastic like in *The Paper Bag Princess* is very important in literature given that it has the capability of working people's emotions with the

same vividness and clarity as a dream. By effectively employing reality and not the fantastic, the narrative in *Hana's Briefcase* by Karen Levine is universal in its appeal. *Hana's Briefcase*, in telling the narrative, brings the face of one little girl into sharp focus. In essence, the book turns one more Holocaust victim into a blood-and-flesh human being whom people of all ages including young children and adults could relate to.

Works cited

Levine, Karen. *Hana's Suitcase*. Second Story Press. 2002.

Munsch, Robert. *The paper bag princess*. Toronto: Annick Press. 2006.