

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**



www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Interplay of Reality and Fantasy in David Almond's *Skellig*

P. Jakin Prince

Post Graduate Student in English,
Department of English,
PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore.

&

Dr. R. Kumara Sethupathi

Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14977408>

Article History: Submitted-05/02/2025, Revised-10/02/2025, Accepted-26/02/2025, Published-28/02/2025.

Abstract:

The novel *Skellig* by David Almond is a blend of realism and fantasy to learn the nuances of human struggles, especially those of childhood, trauma, and revolt. This article studies the oscillation between fact and fantasy in the novel, arguing that the appearance of the fictional character Skellig revolves as both a supernatural being and a psychological display of hope. Almond addresses the concept of ailment, domestic pressure, and emotional resilience, highlighting the ways in which children navigate personal hardships through the journey of Michael. *Skellig* is a blend of magical realism and recent issues replicates the space between certainty and creativity. The portrayal of human suffering and repossession is highlighted in the novel. The study dwells into how *Skellig* connects the gap between the tangible and the mystical. The transformative power of belief and human connection is well projected. The

relationship between Michael and Mina changes him into a free-spirited boy, while Mina serves as a device in the story to elucidate the power of imagination.

Keywords: Realism, Fantasy, Psychological manifestation, Emotional Resilience, Human Suffering.

Introduction

David Almond, is an eminent British children's writer, received critical commendation for his various works. He was born and brought up in Felling and Newcastle in post-industrial North East England, he graduated from the University of East Anglia. His passion for writing arose at a young age when his short stories published in a local magazine. At first writing for an adult audience, he eventually discovered his position in young adult literature.

Almond received the Whitbread Children's Novel of the Year Award and the Carnegie Medal for his first children's novel *Skellig*. His future works include *Kit's Wilderness* (1999), *Heaven Eyes* (2000), *Secret Heart* (2001), *The Fire Eaters* (2003), and *Clay* (2005). In the other works, he experimented by writing plays. *Wild Girl, Wild Boy* a play for young people exploring in 2001 before its release in 2002.

Almond's works reverberate with both children and adults. Philosophical in nature and habitual themes in his writing explore the interplay of opposites like life and death, reality and fiction, past and future as well as education, personal growth, and the developing sense of self. His writing was inspired by the English Romantic poet William Blake.

David Almond's style is excitingly free of the prurient and gratuitous. His depiction of the kids and their world is elevating and fascinating. The writer offers a purpose and a space to think and revisit the young characters he has created with extraordinary sensitivity.

The theme of Reality in *Skellig*

Realism and fancy are the crucial factors to human existence. The facts blend with the mortal world, social concepts, and the day-to-day hardships of life, while non existing ideas fuels creativity, objectives, and imaginings. A composed relationship between these elements is important for a sustaining life, as imagination allows individuals to picture solutions to real-world challenges. In literature and art, reality and imagination serve as the fundamental concepts. The authors initially debate the ideas in their minds before converting them into works with such collaboration. They try really hard to give shape and life to their imagination. They present plots that vibrate with the readers. In *Skellig* by David Almond, the author skillfully textures reality and imagination to express his ideas and engage readers, demonstrating the profound impact of both elements on storytelling.

Skellig is a unique novel, the core character, Skellig, is at no time fully elucidated. He could be considered as a delicate angel to an ancient bird species. David Almond is particular not to reveal us exactly "who" or "what" Skellig is, leaving it to the reader's interpretation.

The most fascinating thing about the work is that it belongs to a new genre, where reality fuses with fiction and where everyday life collides with a with a mystical element. While we never get to understand Skellig fully. The readers are hinted that, Skellig is a superpower and a heart of gold.

The Role of Imagination in *Skellig*

Though the novel was classified as a children literature, some elements in the book may be scary to young children, such as a ghost-like creature eating live insects and children growing wings and dancing in the air with a supernatural being. The book might be apt for children who are at their teens, adults or more mature audience.

The concept magical realism originated in Latin American, combines elements of fantasy fiction with everyday details of reality. The reason what makes it magical realism and not fantasy fiction is that reality imposes itself on the fantasy, not the other way around. There is an intended lack of description in magical realism about why the magic exists, has less of a traditional plot structure, and uses magical elements as more of a sequential metaphor. Nevertheless, more than that, magical realism does more than simply infuse stories with elements of fantasy much of magical realism is about folk tales, mythology, and fairy tales.

Practices classified as magic include prophecy, fortunetelling, charms, pseudo science, magic, spirit mediation, and black art. The term magic is used in Western popular culture to refer to acts of trickery and sleight of hand for entertainment. The purpose of magic is to acquire knowledge, power, love, or wealth; to heal or ward off illness or danger; to guarantee efficiency or success in a desired field; to cause harm to an opponent; to reveal data; to induce spiritual transformation; to trick; or to amuse. The efficiency of a magician often depends on the state and his performance. He is believed to access the invisible forces and acquire superior knowledge of the appropriate chants and actions to apply those forces.

The interconnection between Reality and Imagination

Skellig, the novel details the concept of fact and fantasy to justify the challenges encountered by the human beings with reference to the children's atmosphere, ailment, and belief. Michael, the protagonist undergoes agony due to his baby sister's health condition and his frustrations. Michael finds a mysterious, man-like creature in his garage, whom he later learns is called Skellig. As Michael and his friend Mina in secret care for Skellig, they discover his supernatural assets that he has wings and seems to be some form of an innocent being or an ancient, mystical figure. Mina portrayed as a smart child, makes Michael William Blake's poetry and to experience the beauty in nature and creative learning. She motivates him to understand a world beyond conservative knowledge. Almond takes his readers to a world realism and magical elements with the key elements of resilience, optimism, and belief.

Michael's family encounters immense emotional chaos due to his baby sister's perilous health condition. "They took her away in an ambulance. I watched from the window as they lifted her inside and my mother went with her" (Almond 4). His parents, confusion with worry, inadvertently avoids Michael, unfortunately giving space to his sense of isolation. Almond captures this trauma brilliantly. As Michael's parents are busy attending his hospitalized sister and arranging the new house, he experiences isolation. The author details the readers with emotional and the physical plea underwent by Michael through various incidents in the novel.

The disoriented Michael encounters Skellig and leads him to a confused state. Skellig's strange look with wings and human characteristics forces Michael to feel difficult to connect with the world. Almond highlights this uncertainty.

I FOUND HIM IN THE GARAGE ON A Sunday afternoon. It was the day after we moved into Falconer Road. The winter was ending. Mum had said we'd be moving just in time for the spring. Nobody else was there. Just me. The others were inside the house with Dr. Death, worrying about the baby. He was lying there in the darkness behind the tea chests, in the dust (Almond 9)

Skellig, at initial appearing decrepit and lifeless, gradually transforms, paralleling Michael's own emotional therapeutic. This fantastical element suggests that faith in the unknown can provide comfort during hardship.

I shined the flashlight onto one and saw that it came from nearly fifty years ago. I moved so carefully. I was scared every moment that the whole thing was going to collapse. There was dust clogging my throat and nose. I knew they'd be yelling for me soon and I knew I'd better get out. I leaned across a heap of tea chests and shined the flashlight into the space behind and that's when I saw him. (Almond 14)

The monsters in fictional novel are often presented with supernatural power to attract the children and succeeds creating fear in the readers. Michael as a young boy is curious but feels scary when he encounters Skellig in his basement. He becomes nervous and has nightmares. "I HARDLY SLEPT THAT NIGHT. EVERY time I did drop off I saw him coming out of the garage door and coming through the ragged backyard to the house. I saw him in my bedroom. I saw him come right to the bed. He stood there all dusty and white with the dead bluebottles all over him" (Almond 16).

Michael's only hope in the novel seems to be his friend named Mina. She plays a critical role in briefing Michael on fact and fantasy. She believes in progress, poems, and eccentric

learning. Mina motivates Michael to understand miracle and possibility. She proclaims, “What humans don’t understand, they make up. That’s why we have angels and ghosts and all the rest” (Almond 61). Her perspectives tasks Michael to understand beyond the tangible, reinforcing the idea that certainty itself can be transformative. Though a small girl, Mina had an inspiring soul in her and unique idea about the world with the knowledge imparted from her mother. Her understanding about classrooms makes Michael awestruck. “My mother educates me,” she said. “We believe that schools inhibit the natural curiosity, creativity, and intelligence of children. The mind needs to be opened out into the world, not shuttered down inside a gloomy classroom” (Almond 45). By the novel’s end, Michael’s perception shifts Skellig is no longer just a paradox but a symbol of hope and retrieval.

Michael experienced hope after encountering Mina in the garden and wanted to be in touch with her. He describes Mina as “She put the book and the pencil in her mouth. She swung over the branch and dropped into the garden. She stood looking at me. She was little and she had hair as black as coal and the kind of eyes you think can see right through you” (Almond 27). The charm and confidence in Mina seem to be lacking in Michael due to his personal and his face off with the different creature Skellig. Mina had the courage to encounter the different creature in the room. She was able to touch and treat him.

Mina came in beside us. She crouched, stared at his face as dry and pale as plaster, at the dead bluebottles and cobwebs, at the spiders and beetles that scuttled across him. She took the flashlight from me. She shined it on his thin body in the dark suit, on the long legs stretched out on the floor, on the swollen hands that rested at his side. She picked up one of the dark furry balls from beside him

“Who are you?” she whispered.

“Nobody.”

She reached out and touched his cheek (Almond 66).

The author brilliantly sketches the innocence in childhood by presenting Michael and Mina. The kids beyond their capability gels with Skellig without an idea of what he is or the place he belongs. Michael was scared and could not reach Skellig but with the help of Mina, he becomes close and connects with the creature. He becomes emotional as he felt with his sister. The incident gives the readers a hope of purity in young minds and their caring nature.

“What are you?” she whispered.

No answer.

He sat there with his head lowered, his eyes closed.

“We can help you,” she whispered.

No answer.

I felt the tears running from my eyes (Almond 67)

The kids offer their help to retrieve their friend. They try to seek shelter and move him to a safer place. They have no idea but Michael assisted by Mina does a great job. He finds hope and confidence. Their innocence is once again proven as they compare the size of Skellig with their dad. The transformation in Michael is progressive.

His joints creaked as he struggled to rise from the floor. He whimpered in pain. He leaned against us. He tottered and wobbled as he rose. He was taller than us, tall as Dad. We felt how thin he was, how extraordinarily light he was. We had our arms around him. Our fingers touched behind his back. We explored the growths on his shoulder blades. We felt them

folded up like arms. We felt their soft coverings. We stared into each other's eyes and didn't dare to tell each other what we thought we felt (Almond 72).

Michael feels relieved by watching his sister at home. The appearance of Skellig and his superpower creates the change in Michael and Mina. The kid's belief in reality and fantasy is accepted.

“Look how beautiful your sister is,” she said. “Look how strong she is.”

I lifted the baby higher. She arched her back like she was about to dance or fly. She reached out and scratched with her tiny nails at the skin on my face. She tugged at my lips and touched my tongue. She tasted of milk and salt and of something mysterious, sweet and sour all at once (Almond 142)

The family is ready celebrate the baby's discharge with good health. They get ready to name the baby and deeply in that discussion, enters Mina but now with a different attitude. She feels shy and never before like this says Michael. She comes with a gift for the baby, which excites Michael and his mother.

She unrolled a picture of Skellig, with his wings rising from his back and a tender smile on his white face.

Mum caught her breath.

She stared at me and she stared at Mina. For a moment, I thought she was going to ask us something. Then she simply smiled at both of us.

“Just something I made up,” said Mina. “I thought the baby might like it on her wall.” (Almond 143)

Conclusion

Almond's *Skellig* beautifully reveals how fact and fantasy entwine to reflect human resilience. One of the dominant human struggles in the novel is the conflict with fear and loss. Michael's struggles with his sister's ill fate, his isolation, and his urge for certainty are rooted in reality, yet *Skellig*'s mystical existence serves him ease and strength. Almond balances the story with faith and imagination, suggests that while hardship is inevitable, the human creativity provides a shelter one should themselves to navigate suffering with hope and courage.

Works Cited:

Almond, David. *Skellig*. United States, 1999.

Johnston, Rosemary Ross. *David Almond*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Almond, David. *Half a Creature from the Sea: A Life in Stories*. Candlewick Press, 2014.

Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Oxford University Press, 1970.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature*. Scarecrow Press, 2000.

Hunt, Peter. *Understanding Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005.

McGillis, Roderick. *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. Routledge, 2000.

"David Almond: United Kingdom Author." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, vol. 48, no. 2, Apr. 2010, p. 52. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.0.0232>.

Bullen, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Parsons. “Risk and Resilience, Knowledge and Imagination: The Enlightenment of David Almond’s *Skellig*.” *Children's Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2007, pp. 127–144.

Reality of Imagination: An Inquiry into Human Creativity. 1981.

<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350916432>.

Johnston, Rosemary Ross. “Introduction: David Almond and Mystical Realism.” *David Almond*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-30117-8_1.