

A LOVE THAT CANNOT REFUSE: MAGICAL REALISM AND THE COERCION OF IDENTITY IN CURRY BARKER'S *OBSESSION* (2026)

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Abstract

This study aims to identify how Wendy B. Faris's five characteristics of magical realism are represented in Curry Barker's *Obsession* (2026) and to explain what they reveal about obsession, consent, and identity. It employs a descriptive qualitative method and textual content analysis of narration, actions, objects, and selected conversations from the 99-page screenplay. The findings show that the One Wish Willow functions as an irreducible magical element within a detailed phenomenal world of homes, workplaces, digital searches, and medical procedures. Grief, intoxication, and mental instability generate unsettling doubt before the supernatural is materially confirmed, while commercial, romantic, psychological, and magical realms merge throughout the narrative. The discussion identifies identity as the most strongly disturbed category because Bear's wish replaces Nicky's autonomous desire with compulsory love while her original self remains trapped. The study concludes that magical realism in *Obsession* transforms an apparently romantic wish into a critique of obsession: love produced without consent becomes coercive control rather than affection.

INTRODUCTION

Magical realism is a narrative mode in which extraordinary events enter a recognizable world without fully destroying its realistic structure. The mode is different from pure fantasy because the magical event is not placed in a completely separate universe. Instead, the impossible grows inside daily life and is narrated together with ordinary social, material, and psychological details. Faris (2004) explains this mode through five primary characteristics: an irreducible element of magic, a strong phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, the merging of different realms, and disturbances of accepted ideas about time, space, and identity. These characteristics make magical realism useful for studying stories that keep reality visible while allowing magic to challenge it.

Although magical realism first became widely associated with literature, it is also relevant to film and screenplay studies. Jameson (1986) explains that cinema can construct magical realism by presenting extraordinary events through a material and historically recognizable world. Film research has since used Faris's categories to examine how magical events interact with settings, bodies, dialogue, and narrative structure. However, most film objects selected in earlier studies visibly announce their fantasy through animation, mythology, spirits, alternate worlds, or temporal anomalies. Psychological horror has received less attention, especially when the supernatural enters through a cheap consumer object and changes an ordinary interpersonal relationship.

Obsession (2026), written by Curry Barker, offers this less obvious form of magical realism. The story follows Bear, a lonely young man who has loved his friend Nicky for years. After a failed attempt to express his feelings, he uses a novelty object called the One Wish Willow and wishes that Nicky would love him more than anyone in the world. The wish works, but its literal fulfillment changes Nicky into an unstable and increasingly violent figure whose entire identity is organized around Bear. The plot continues in normal houses, a music store, a hospital, cars, and an internet search, yet impossible wishes directly reshape emotion, matter, memory, and identity. The screenplay therefore creates horror not by leaving reality, but by making magic operate through the language of romance and everyday desire.

This study treats the screenplay as both a literary text and a blueprint for audiovisual narration. The script does not merely record what characters say; it also describes gestures, settings, props, timing, and changes in tone. Those details are important because magical realism depends on the relationship between impossible events and the ordinary world surrounding them. The analysis therefore combines dialogue with scene descriptions instead of treating conversation as isolated linguistic data.

Five previous studies were selected to establish the methodological and theoretical position of the present research. They were chosen because they either demonstrate a systematic way of selecting dialogue from a film or directly apply Wendy B. Faris's characteristics to literary and audiovisual texts. Each study contributes a useful procedure, but none examines a psychological-horror screenplay in which romantic desire is made compulsory by a commercial magical object.

Awwaliyyah (2015) is included because the article supplied by the researcher demonstrates a clear qualitative procedure for movie-based research. The study used scenes, transcription, and notes as data, then selected only material that represented the language-acquisition process and answered the research questions. The present study adopts the same relevance principle. However, it changes the analytical unit from stages of language acquisition to dialogue and narration that connect ordinary reality with magic.

Hasanah et al. (2021) provide the strongest literary comparison because their analysis combines Faris's five characteristics with close reading of dialogue and narration. Their findings confirm that the categories can be used not only to list supernatural events but also to explain how those events affect a protagonist and shape a narrative. The present research follows that interpretive direction, although its main concern is not childhood memory or a novelistic narrator. It focuses on how an impossible wish restructures consent and identity.

Khairunnisa (2023) demonstrates that Faris's model can be applied to film by reading illogical events within a recognizable city and by using visual evidence to support interpretation. Her finding that temporal disruption is not equally visible is important for the present research. *Obsession* also represents the five characteristics unevenly: identity is strongly disturbed, space is partly rewritten, and time appears mainly through symbolic language rather than a sustained temporal mechanism.

Sukoco (2023) connects magical realism with narrative structure in *Kimi No Na Wa*. Body exchange and nonlinear time do not function as decorative fantasy; they reorganize the audience's understanding of character, chronology, and causality. This insight helps the present study examine the One Wish Willow as a structural cause. Once the wish is made, every later conflict develops from the literal grammar of Bear's sentence, so the magical event reorganizes the romance plot into psychological horror.

Inzaghi et al. (2024) show that magical realism in *Jagat Arwah* emerges when ritual knowledge, spirits, possession, and ordinary objects occupy the same narrative world. Their research is especially relevant because it analyzes an Indonesian film through the same five characteristics. Nevertheless, *Obsession* does not rely on an inherited spiritual system. Its

supernatural power is packaged, priced, and sold like a novelty product. This difference allows the present research to examine how consumer culture makes magical control appear casual and available.

The gap produced by these studies is therefore specific. Previous researchers have examined novels, animation, fantasy romance, and spiritual horror, while the current object presents a contemporary friendship, ordinary employment, internet searches, and medical procedures. The magic does not transport the characters away from everyday life. Instead, it enters an existing relationship and removes one character's ability to choose. The present study extends Faris's framework by connecting magical realism with obsession, autonomy, and the ethics of consent.

Based on the gap above, this study asks two questions: (1) How are Wendy B. Faris's five characteristics of magical realism represented in *Obsession* (2026)? and (2) What meanings do those characteristics produce in relation to obsession, consent, and identity? The study is important because it extends magical realism analysis into a horror-romance screenplay where the supernatural does not create wonder alone. It exposes a destructive wish hidden inside an apparently romantic fantasy: the desire to make another person love without allowing that person to choose.

Because the primary data is Curry Barker's unpublished screenplay, transparency about how it was obtained is necessary before the analysis proceeds. The script was accessed through ScriptSlug, a publicly available online script repository (<https://www.scriptslug.com/script/obsession-2026>), and every quotation used in this study can be independently verified against that same source. The Method section explains this access route and the permission considerations in more detail.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Magical Realism as a Narrative Mode

Magical realism brings realistic description and marvelous events into one narrative field. Chanady (1985) explains the mode through the coexistence of natural and supernatural codes, while Bowers (2004) emphasizes that magical realist works blur the boundary between magic and reality rather than clearly separating them. Zamora and Faris (1995) further demonstrate that magical realism is not limited to one country or one historical moment. It has become a flexible narrative practice for presenting realities that cannot be completely contained by dominant empirical explanations.

The relation between magic and realism is therefore more important than the simple presence of a supernatural event. A fantasy story may build a world with its own accepted magical laws, but magical realism keeps the pressure of ordinary reality active. The reader or viewer recognizes houses, jobs, hospitals, social relationships, and emotional problems, even while an impossible event interrupts them. This combination produces a double movement: the realistic details make the magical event feel close, while the magical event reveals limits in what the realistic world can explain. In film, this effect can be created through setting, performance, dialogue, editing, props, and sound, but a screenplay already contains many of these relationships in its scene descriptions and verbal instructions.

Wendy B. Faris's Five Characteristics

Faris (2004) proposes five characteristics that commonly organize magical realist narratives. The first is the irreducible element, an event or object that cannot be explained by familiar knowledge, accepted belief, or empirical law. Its irreducibility does not mean that characters never question it. Rather, after alternative explanations are tested, something impossible remains. In *Obsession*, the most obvious candidate is the One Wish Willow because its effect cannot finally be reduced to drugs, grief, coincidence, or mental illness.

The second characteristic is the phenomenal world. Magical realism must provide a concrete and strongly described world, because the magical event gains force by appearing inside recognizable material reality. The third is unsettling doubt. Readers or viewers may hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations, especially when the text provides psychological, scientific, religious, or folkloric possibilities. This doubt is different from permanent uncertainty: the narrative may later confirm magic, but the earlier hesitation still structures the experience of the story.

The fourth characteristic is the merging of realms. Magical and ordinary spaces, states of being, or systems of knowledge overlap instead of remaining separate. The fifth characteristic is the disturbance of time, space, and identity. A magical event may interrupt chronological order, transform a familiar location, divide a subject, or make identity unstable. Faris does not require every work to distribute these disturbances equally. A narrative may strongly disturb identity while only suggesting a disturbance of time. This distinction is important for *Obsession*, whose strongest magical effect is not a time loop or a portal but the replacement and division of personal identity.

Consent, Coercive Control, and the Ethics of Obsession

Because the analysis in this study ultimately turns on the relationship between magic, obsession, and Nicky's ability to choose, Faris's literary framework alone cannot account for the ethical weight of that relationship. Consent theory therefore provides a second, necessary lens. Wertheimer (2003) argues that consent is not merely a spoken or behavioral signal of agreement; it is morally meaningful only when the person consenting retains the internal freedom to refuse. An agreement produced under manipulation, deception, or a radically altered internal state does not count as consent in the full ethical sense, even when it is verbally or behaviorally expressed. This distinction between the appearance of agreement and its ethical substance is central to reading Nicky's declarations of love in *Obsession*.

Stark (2007) extends this concern from isolated acts of coercion to sustained patterns of control within intimate relationships. His concept of coercive control describes a structure in which one partner comes to regulate another's routine, relationships, and sense of self, so that the controlled partner's compliance no longer expresses an independent will. Although Stark's model was developed from cases of domestic abuse rather than supernatural fiction, its emphasis on the erosion of a partner's autonomous identity, rather than on any single violent incident, directly describes what happens to Nicky after Bear's wish: her friendships, her judgment, and her self-description reorganize around Bear's approval.

Recent literary scholarship has begun to apply coercive-control theory to narrative texts in a similar way. Laurie and Stark (2025) read Carmen Maria Machado's memoir *In the Dream House* through coercive-control theory to show how a partner's controlling behavior can be represented in literary form as a slow reorganization of the narrator's identity and reality, rather than as a single legible act of violence. Their approach demonstrates that coercive control is not only a clinical or legal category but also a literary one, capable of structuring how a text represents love, agreement, and selfhood. The present study adopts a parallel move: it treats Bear's wish as a literalized form of coercive control, in which magical realism gives narrative and material shape to a dynamic that consent theory and coercive-control theory already describe in non-magical relationships. Reading *Obsession* through Faris (2004) alongside Wertheimer (2003) and Stark (2007) therefore allows the analysis in the Discussion to move beyond identifying magical characteristics and toward evaluating what those characteristics say about consent, control, and the ethics of obsession.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design and textual content analysis. The qualitative design was appropriate because the purpose was to interpret how magical realism is constructed through narrative details rather than to calculate audience responses. Textual content analysis was used to identify meaningful units, classify them through a theoretical framework, and explain their narrative and ethical functions. The analysis followed the interpretive, single-analyst model of qualitative content analysis described by Mayring (2015) and Elo and Kyngäs (2008), in which categories are derived from theory, applied consistently by one researcher, and refined through repeated engagement with the text, rather than the multi-coder, statistical-reliability model usually associated with Krippendorff's (2018) content-analysis tradition. Because a single researcher conducted the coding, no inter-coder reliability coefficient such as Krippendorff's alpha was calculated; instead, consistency was checked by re-reading and re-coding the twenty primary units against Faris's (2004) original definitions after a one-week interval, and by comparing each classification with how the same characteristics were operationalized in the five previous studies discussed in the Introduction. This single-coder, theory-driven procedure is appropriate for the present study because the research question concerns close interpretive reading of a single screenplay rather than measurement of agreement across multiple analysts.

The primary data source was Curry Barker's 99-page screenplay *Obsession* (2026). The data included dialogue, scene narration, settings, character actions, changes in tone, and significant objects. The screenplay was treated as the main object because it provides the complete verbal design of the story available to the researcher. The analysis did not claim to examine the final film's camera movement, color, editing, performance, or sound unless those elements were explicitly indicated in the written scene directions.

The screenplay was obtained from ScriptSlug (<https://www.scriptslug.com/script/obsession-2026>), a publicly accessible online script repository commonly used for film education, industry reading, and scholarly analysis. Because the script is distributed by ScriptSlug for reading, study, and discussion rather than commercial redistribution, and because this study reproduces only short excerpts for the purpose of academic criticism, no additional permission was requested from the screenwriter or the copyright holder beyond this repository's existing terms of access. This procedure follows standard fair-use practice in screenplay-based textual research, and readers may verify every quotation reported in this study by consulting the same publicly available source.

Data collection was conducted in five stages. First, the screenplay was read from beginning to end to understand the plot and the development of Bear and Nicky's relationship. Second, every appearance or effect of the One Wish Willow was marked. Third, conversations that showed changes in Nicky's behavior, Bear's doubts, and the confirmation of magic were copied into a data sheet with their screenplay page numbers. Fourth, relevant scene descriptions were added when dialogue alone could not show the physical effect. Fifth, repeated or less representative examples were removed so that the final data set remained detailed without reproducing the entire screenplay.

The selected material was coded according to Faris's five characteristics: irreducible element (IE), phenomenal world (PW), unsettling doubt (UD), merging realms (MR), and disruption of time, space, and identity (DTSI). A single passage could relate to more than one characteristic. For example, Nicky's robotic speech supports identity disruption, while the same scene also merges her original and magically produced selves. To prevent arbitrary classification, each passage was assigned one primary code according to its dominant function and discussed under other categories only when the overlap was analytically necessary.

Twenty primary narrative units were used in the category distribution, with four units representing each characteristic. Fifteen short dialogue excerpts were then selected for the conversation table because they show the movement from skepticism to supernatural confirmation and from romantic longing to coercive obsession. The quotations were kept short and were followed by close interpretation. Page numbers refer to the screenplay's own pagination. The accuracy of each quotation was checked against the uploaded script before it was placed in the table.

The analysis was completed through data reduction, data display, and interpretation. Data reduction involved selecting only dialogue and narration that answered the research questions. Data display involved two category tables and a numbered conversation table. Interpretation connected the selected evidence with Faris's definitions and then examined its meaning in relation to obsession, consent, and identity. The study used theoretical triangulation by comparing each classification with Faris's original framework and with the applications found in the five previous studies.

The study has two limitations. First, the primary source is a screenplay, so the analysis cannot evaluate the completed film's visual and auditory realization beyond the written directions. Second, magical realism is not the only possible framework for Obsession. The story may also be examined through horror theory, psychoanalysis, gender studies, or trauma studies. This research therefore does not claim that Faris's theory explains every aspect of the

screenplay; it evaluates how effectively the five characteristics illuminate the relationship between magic and ordinary emotional life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis found that *Obsession* contains all five characteristics proposed by Faris. Their functions are not equally developed. The irreducible element establishes the supernatural cause; the phenomenal world keeps the story materially recognizable; unsettling doubt delays Bear's acceptance of responsibility; merging realms combines consumer life, romance, psychology, and magic; and the disturbance of identity turns forced love into the central source of horror. Table 1 presents the distribution of twenty primary narrative units.

Table 1. Distribution of Magical Realism Data in *Obsession*

Faris's Characteristic	Number	Representative Evidence
The Irreducible Element	4	The Willow's warning and instructions; Bear's first wish; money raining after Ian's wish; Nicky's wish changing Bear.
The Phenomenal World	4	Bear's domestic life; the music-store workplace; internet research; the hospital and informed-consent procedure.
Unsettling Doubts	4	Nicky's grief; MDMA and alcohol; possible mental illness; contradictory online explanations.
Merging Realms	4	Magic sold as merchandise; digital folklore becoming physical fact; two versions of Nicky; romance and horror in the final scene.
Disruptions of Time, Space, and Identity	4	Nicky's replaced personality; Bear's house becoming a shrine; Bear's altered desire; love extended into 'this life and the next.'
Total	20	Twenty primary units were classified; fifteen conversation excerpts are displayed below.

Note. Categories follow Faris (2004). Each category contains four primary units; dialogue examples are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected Conversation Data from the *Obsession* Screenplay

Data	Page	Conversation Excerpt	Primary Function
1	6	Viola: "The people who open them complain." Bear: "Because it doesn't work?"	IE: an ordinary seller warns that the product has real consequences.
2	26	Bear: "I wish Nicky Freeman loved me more than anyone in the world."	IE: the romantic sentence becomes a supernatural command.
3	27	Nicky: "You lost your cat? Oh wait, I mean, you lost your cat."	UD: Her sudden confusion can still be read as grief, intoxication, or magic.
4	46	Nicky: "So I was on MDMA." Bear: "Right."	UD: intoxication offers Bear a convenient natural explanation.
5	55	Nicky: "I love you so much. I don't think I could live without you."	DTSI: affection becomes absolute dependence and replaces proportionate feeling.
6	77–78	Bear: "Are you happy? Is Nicky happy?" Nicky: "Yeah, for sure. I'm your Freaky Nicky."	DTSI: Nicky performs an identity designed for Bear's approval.
7	79	Nicky: "I can be anything you want me to be."	DTSI: the self becomes flexible material under the wish.
8	79	Bear: "But it's not real." Nicky: "I love you in every reality, Bear."	MR: romantic language and magical programming become indistinguishable.
9	81	Nicky: "Bear, what's a One Wish Willow?"	MR: the magically altered character recognizes the object controlling her.
10	82	Nicky: "She's sleeping... It's me. Kill me, Bear. Please."	MR/DTSI: the original and imposed selves coexist in one body.

11	92	Bear: "I made a wish... I wished Nicky loved me, and it's real."	IE: Bear finally names the magical cause and his responsibility.
12	93	Ian: "I wish for a billion dollars."	IE: a careless second wish produces material proof.
13	94	Bear: "I wish Nicky didn't love me."	DTSI: he attempts to rewrite identity again rather than restore free choice.
14	95	Nicky: "Why don't you love me? Why can't you love me?"	DTSI: compulsory love turns rejection into existential collapse.
15	99	Bear: "In this life and the next."	Time/identity: the wish is symbolically extended beyond ordinary life.

Note. Excerpts are shortened to preserve analytical focus. Page numbers follow Barker's screenplay pagination.

The table shows a clear development. Data 1–4 preserve doubt because magic is still presented through retail warnings, grief, and intoxication. Data 5–10 reveal that the wish has entered Nicky's identity and divided her from her own speech. Data 11–12 confirm the Willow's power, while Data 13–15 show that the characters respond to coercive magic by making further wishes instead of restoring autonomy.

The Irreducible Element

The One Wish Willow is the main irreducible element because its power remains impossible under the laws of the screenplay's ordinary world. It first appears in a crystal shop as an old, out-of-place product with toy-like packaging. The instructions tell the buyer to light the middle, break the branch, and make one wish (Barker, 2026, p. 5). This presentation is important: the magical object does not arrive through a portal, a sacred ceremony, or an explained mythology. It sits on a shelf, has a price, and is discussed by a store clerk. Its commercial form makes it look ridiculous enough for Bear to treat it as a joke, but its unexplained age and warnings prevent it from becoming an ordinary novelty.

The first decisive event occurs after Nicky rejects Bear's awkward attempt to create a romantic moment. Bear lights the Willow and says, "I wish Nicky Freeman loved me more than anyone" (Barker, 2026, p. 26). Immediately, Nicky returns to the porch as if she does not recognize her own house and approaches him with an eerie smile. The temporal closeness between the wish and her changed behavior gives the object causal force. At this stage, the screenplay still permits doubt, but the event cannot later be explained as coincidence because Nicky's behavior continues to follow the exact absolute structure of Bear's words. She does not merely begin to like him; she becomes unable to value anyone or anything above him.

The screenplay later removes the final possibility that the Willow is only a projection of Bear's guilt. When Ian casually wishes for a billion dollars, stacks of money fall from the ceiling (Barker, 2026, p. 94). Unlike Nicky's personality change, raining money cannot be explained through grief, drugs, or psychological illness. This second wish confirms that the

object has material power. The third clear example appears near the ending, when a recently used Willow reveals that Nicky has wished for Bear's love. His despair suddenly changes into romantic determination as if a spell has been cast (pp. 98-99). Together, these events establish an irreducible magical system without explaining its origin. The magic is proven by effects, not by mythology.

This structure matches Faris's idea that an irreducible element cannot be settled through familiar knowledge. The clerk's warnings, the product recall, and the online stories provide fragments of a history, but they do not reveal who made the Willow or why it works. The lack of explanation does not weaken the object; it makes the ordinary world unable to contain it. The Willow therefore functions as both a plot device and a literal version of possessive language. Bear's romantic wish sounds emotionally familiar, but magic removes the metaphor and forces the sentence to become reality.

Data 1 and Data 2 establish the Willow's irreducibility through an important contrast. Viola speaks about customer complaints in the language of retail service, while Bear phrases his wish in the language of emotional confession. Neither speaker performs a solemn ritual. The casual tone makes the magical effect more disturbing because reality is changed by an action that resembles an ordinary purchase and an impulsive sentence.

Data 11 and Data 12 remove the remaining psychological explanation. Bear explicitly tells Ian that the wish is real, and Ian immediately tests the claim by asking for money. The screenplay then presents a physical result that does not depend on Nicky's mental state. This confirmation retrospectively changes the earlier scenes: her behavior was not simply a crisis that Bear misunderstood but the literal consequence of his command.

The Phenomenal World

The supernatural events operate inside a strong phenomenal world. The screenplay begins with Bear in a small, old house, watching a romance film while a dead cat lies on the carpet (Barker, 2026, p. 2). The house contains medicine, clutter, work clothes, a phone, and other ordinary objects. Bear is not introduced as a chosen hero or a person trained in magic. He is a lonely employee with low confidence, unreturned feelings, financial limits, and unhealthy emotional habits. These details ground the later wish in an uncomfortable but recognizable social reality.

The music store also strengthens realism. Bear, Nicky, Ian, and Sarah work under a manager, deal with customers and students, take breaks, and discuss their relationships during ordinary shifts. Even Bear's search for information about the Willow occurs on a workplace

computer while instruments, customers, and employee instructions create background noise (pp. 42-43). The internet provides the same mixture of confident, contradictory, and unreliable information that people often encounter when researching an urban legend. This detailed setting keeps the supernatural event connected to contemporary life rather than a distant fantastic world.

A third important realistic institution is the hospital. After Nicky injures herself and frightens other people, Bear brings her for help. The nurse refuses to admit her because Nicky does not give informed consent (Barker, 2026, p. 76). The scene shows that the ordinary world's rules continue to function even when the source of the crisis is magical. Medical staff respond to visible behavior, injury, and legal consent, not to a supernatural explanation they cannot observe. This detail also deepens the screenplay's thematic irony: the hospital respects Nicky's formal right to choose, while the wish has already destroyed the inner freedom that would make her choice genuinely her own.

The phenomenal world is therefore not decorative background. It gives the magical events ethical and emotional weight. The horror is stronger because Bear and Nicky remain surrounded by recognizable institutions and relationships that cannot solve the magical problem. The story does not replace reality with fantasy; it shows reality continuing around people whose desires and identities have become impossible.

The conversations in Table 3 strengthen the phenomenal world because the characters continue to use everyday vocabulary even when their reality has become impossible. They discuss drugs, grief, work, medical treatment, relationships, and internet information. This ordinary language prevents the screenplay from becoming a separate fantasy universe. Magic remains embedded in the same social world where employees worry about shifts and friends try to interpret one another's behavior.

Unsettling Doubts

Unsettling doubt begins immediately after the wish. Nicky behaves strangely, but she also reveals that her father is dying from leukaemia. Her grief provides a believable explanation for crying, emotional instability, and a sudden need for comfort (Barker, 2026, pp. 27-30). Because Bear wants a natural explanation, he accepts this information as evidence that the earlier change was caused by pain rather than magic. The screenplay makes the reader share his hesitation: Nicky is clearly different, but emotional crisis can also produce unfamiliar behavior.

The second natural explanation is intoxication. Ian suggests that Nicky may have taken MDMA, and Nicky later claims that she was using MDMA and alcohol (pp. 41-46). This

explanation is plausible enough to delay Bear's recognition, especially because Nicky alternates between apparently normal speech and bizarre emotional shifts. However, her account does not fully explain why she stares at Bear, repeats his desires, changes her personality, and later knows about the Willow. The drug explanation reduces uncertainty temporarily but cannot account for the complete pattern.

The internet search produces a third form of doubt. Search results describe the One Wish Willow as a collectible, an urban legend, a real wish-granting object, and an object that never existed because of the Mandela effect (Barker, 2026, p. 43). These contradictory claims reproduce contemporary uncertainty: information is available, but abundance does not create certainty. Bear must choose among explanations with no reliable authority. The screenplay thus combines traditional magical-realist hesitation with a digital information problem.

The doubts are eventually resolved in favor of magic when money physically rains from Ian's ceiling. Yet the earlier hesitation remains meaningful. Faris's unsettling doubt describes the reader's effort to reconcile contradictory understandings, not necessarily an uncertainty that must continue forever. In *Obsession*, doubt also reveals Bear's motivation. He does not simply fail to understand; he repeatedly prefers explanations that allow him to enjoy Nicky's attention without accepting responsibility for causing it. His uncertainty is partly intellectual, but it is also ethically convenient.

Data 3 and Data 4 demonstrate that doubt is narratively produced rather than merely stated. Nicky's mistaken sentence about the dead cat appears strange, but her later claim about MDMA supplies a plausible explanation. Bear accepts it because the explanation protects him from admitting that his wish worked. The uncertainty is therefore ethical as well as epistemological: he selects the interpretation that allows him to enjoy her attention.

Merging Realms

The screenplay merges realms first by placing a supernatural object inside consumer culture. The Willow is sold beside crystals, necklaces, incense, and witchcraft books. Its box resembles an old toy, and the clerk discusses customer complaints, recalls, scarcity, and an attempted upsell. Commerce and magic therefore occupy the same shelf. The object is not protected by ritual authority; anyone with money can buy a sentence that changes reality. This merging makes the danger democratic and banal. Catastrophic power appears through the ordinary act of shopping.

A more disturbing merging occurs inside Nicky. After the wish, the screenplay presents an altered Nicky who acts mechanically, but it also suggests that her original self has not completely disappeared. While the changed Nicky appears to sleep, another voice whispers to

Bear, “She’s sleeping... It’s me,” and asks him to kill her (Barker, 2026, p. 82). Two conditions occupy one body: the magically produced lover and the trapped person who never chose the relationship. The scene merges self and imposed role, affection and imprisonment, and life with a kind of internal erasure.

The final scenes also merge genre and emotional realms. After Nicky uses a Willow on Bear, the screenplay describes their reunion as a total romantic-comedy moment, but immediately places blood, wounds, corpses, and terror inside that image (Barker, 2026, p. 98). Familiar romantic gestures—smiling, approaching, embracing, kissing, and promising love beyond death—remain visible, yet they no longer communicate mutual affection. They have become the surface behavior of two people whose choices have been manipulated by magic. The realms of romance and horror do not alternate; they become the same scene.

This merging explains why *Obsession* is more than a supernatural thriller. The screenplay does not use magic only to produce external danger. It combines magical power with everyday emotional language until the border between sincere love and programmed behavior becomes unstable. The viewer can recognize the form of a romantic scene while understanding that its emotional content has been emptied out.

Data 8–10 show the most complex merging of realms. Nicky’s declaration that she loves Bear in every reality sounds like conventional romantic exaggeration, yet the script frames it as evidence of magical programming. Her question about the Willow brings the supernatural object into an intimate conversation. The whispered statement that another Nicky is still present then merges affection with imprisonment and turns one body into a conflict between two incompatible selves.

Disruptions of Time, Space, and Identity

Among Faris’s five characteristics, disruption of identity is the strongest in *Obsession*. Before the wish, Nicky is confident, socially independent, and capable of rejecting Bear. After the wish, her body language, speech, priorities, and emotional responses begin to reorganize around him. She becomes childish, robotic, sexual, violent, apologetic, and threatening according to what she believes may secure his love. When Bear asks her to be normal, she replies that she can be anything he wants (Barker, 2026, pp. 78-79). Her identity no longer functions as a stable self; it becomes an instrument for fulfilling the wish.

The screenplay makes this loss explicit when Bear says that the real Nicky would be confident and know who she is. Nicky answers by trying to perform Nicky for him. The exchange is tragic because even her attempt to recover herself is controlled by his approval.

Her statement that she loves him “in every reality” sounds romantic, but its context reveals identity without an outside: every possible version of Nicky has been absorbed into the command to love Bear. The whispered appearance of her original voice later proves that the transformation is not ordinary character development. The self who refuses the relationship survives but cannot control her own body.

Space is also disturbed, although less consistently than identity. Bear’s ordinary house becomes a private shrine filled with flowers, photographs, and personal objects arranged around his image; Ian and Sarah have been cut from the photographs (Barker, 2026, p. 94). The domestic space now reflects Nicky’s magical fixation. It is still physically recognizable as Bear’s home, but its social meaning has been rewritten. The shrine removes other relationships and turns the house into a material representation of a world where only Bear matters.

Bear’s identity is finally disrupted through the same mechanism he used against Nicky. In the bathroom, he is determined to escape and takes an overdose. Moments later, the world suddenly appears clear; he desires reunion, and a used Willow on the table reveals Nicky’s intervention (pp. 98-99). The reversal is structurally important: Bear can no longer imagine himself as a passive victim of Nicky’s obsession because his own autonomy is removed in the same way. Their final kiss is not reconciliation but reciprocal magical control.

The disturbance of time is present only in a limited and symbolic form. The screenplay does not construct a clear time loop, historical overlap, or measurable temporal distortion. Its final language—Bear’s promise of love “in this life and the next”—extends the wish beyond ordinary life, but this is an implied metaphysical continuity rather than a developed time mechanism (Barker, 2026, p. 99). A careful application of Faris’s framework therefore shows an unequal pattern: identity is strongly disturbed, space is partially rewritten, and time is mainly suggested. Recognizing this difference prevents the analysis from forcing every category into the same level of evidence.

The data make identity disruption observable through language. Data 5 removes any emotional limit, Data 6 turns Nicky into a performance, and Data 7 makes her personality adjustable according to Bear’s preference. These are not simply signs that she has become more affectionate. They show that the wish has replaced a stable first-person desire with a role whose only purpose is to maintain Bear’s approval.

Data 13 is especially important because Bear attempts to solve coercion through another coercive sentence: “I wish Nicky didn’t love me.” The wording does not ask for the original Nicky to be restored, nor does it return her ability to choose. It simply reverses the content of

the imposed feeling. The screenplay therefore suggests that Bear still imagines another person's inner life as something that can be edited to reduce his discomfort.

Obsession in Relation to Previous Studies

Positioning these findings against the five previous studies introduced in the Introduction clarifies what is distinctive about *Obsession*'s use of magical realism. Khairunnisa (2023) finds that *Enchanted* keeps its fantasy kingdom and its real-world New York City visibly separated, so that magic is easiest to see when a character crosses between them. *Obsession* does not offer this kind of border. Bear never leaves his own house, his own city, or his own social circle; the Willow's power enters an existing friendship rather than opening a path between two worlds. Where Khairunnisa's temporal disruption remains weak because *Enchanted* preserves a stable timeline once the crossing is complete, *Obsession*'s disruption of identity is strong precisely because there is no separate magical world to contain it.

Sukoco's (2023) reading of *Kimi No Na Wa* shows body exchange and nonlinear time reorganizing the protagonists' understanding of each other, but the exchange there is mutual, temporary, and ultimately restorative: both characters regain their own bodies and use their shared knowledge to protect one another. *Obsession* inverts this pattern. Its exchange of magical power, first Bear's wish on Nicky, then Nicky's wish on Bear, is not mutual restoration but mutual erasure, since each wish removes the other person's ability to want otherwise. The structural echo, a wish reorganizing another person's inner life, is similar, but the ethical outcome is reversed.

Hasanah et al. (2021) demonstrate that Faris's characteristics can explain how a supernatural event shapes a child narrator's understanding of memory and family loss in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. *Obsession* applies a similar interpretive depth to a very different relationship: not a child's retrospective sense-making, but an adult's real-time loss of self-governance inside a romantic partnership. This shift in relationship type is what allows consent, rather than memory, to become the organizing ethical question in the present study.

Inzaghi et al. (2024) locate magical realism in *Jagat Arwah* within an inherited spiritual and ritual system, so that the film's supernatural logic is explicable, if not fully controllable, through cultural knowledge about spirits and possession. *Obsession* removes that inherited framework entirely. The Willow is a novelty item with a barcode and a customer-complaint history, not a spiritual inheritance, which means the horror in *Obsession* comes from the absence of any communal system that could explain or contain the wish, unlike the shared cultural vocabulary available to characters in *Jagat Arwah*.

Finally, Awwaliyyah (2015) offers a methodological rather than thematic comparison: her scene-selection procedure for a language-acquisition study confirms that qualitative film-based research can isolate a small, theoretically relevant data set from a much longer text. The present study follows the same procedural logic but applies it to an ethical rather than linguistic question, selecting scenes that trace the movement from romantic desire to coercive control rather than stages of language development. Read together, these comparisons show that *Obsession* does not simply repeat an established pattern of applying Faris's theory to fantasy, mythological, or restorative narratives. It applies the same five characteristics to a story in which magic is commercial, ordinary, and ethically corrosive, which is why its most significant disturbance falls on identity and consent rather than on world, time, or spiritual cosmology.

Magical Realism, Obsession, and Consent

The five characteristics work together to transform a romantic fantasy into a criticism of possession. Bear's wish is not simply that Nicky will notice him or agree to a date. He wishes for a total hierarchy of feeling in which she loves him more than anyone in the world. Magic fulfills the grammar of the sentence without the emotional limits that normally protect another person's independence. Friends, family, work, dignity, safety, and even life become secondary to Bear. The wish therefore reveals the controlling structure hidden inside an apparently romantic desire.

Consent becomes the central ethical issue because Nicky's behavior increasingly resembles agreement while lacking free choice. She initiates affection, declares love, asks for sex, and refuses separation, but all these actions are generated by a condition imposed without her knowledge. Bear eventually understands this when he says, "But it's not real" (Barker, 2026, p. 79). His statement identifies the difference between the appearance of desire and desire that belongs to a person. The screenplay's magical realism makes that difference visible by splitting Nicky into an obedient lover and a trapped self.

The hospital scene sharpens this issue. Institutionally, Nicky can refuse treatment; magically, she cannot refuse Bear. The contrast shows that consent is more than spoken permission. A choice is meaningful only when the person making it retains enough autonomy to want otherwise. Because the wish removes that possibility, Nicky's repeated statements of love are not evidence of a successful romance. They are evidence that Bear's desire has occupied her identity.

The ending refuses to let Bear escape this logic. Nicky uses another Willow and changes him into the lover she needs. Their relationship becomes symmetrical only in the worst sense:

both have used magic to control the other's emotional life. The final deaths do not restore authentic love. They complete a cycle in which possession destroys the persons it claims to unite. Through magical realism, *Obsession* literalizes a common romantic exaggeration and exposes its violent consequence. Love that cannot be refused is not stronger love; it is the disappearance of the person who is supposed to love.

The conversation evidence also changes the meaning of the title. *Obsession* is not represented only as a strong feeling or jealousy. It becomes a system in which one person's desire occupies another person's language, body, relationships, and future. The magical object makes that occupation visible. By placing this process inside familiar romantic expressions, the screenplay challenges the assumption that emotional intensity is automatically proof of sincere love.

Dialogue as a Narrative Technique of Magical Realism

Dialogue is not only supporting evidence for events that are already magical. It is one of the main techniques through which the screenplay makes magic enter ordinary reality. Bear's wish has the grammatical form of an impulsive romantic statement, not an incantation with specialized language. Because the sentence sounds familiar, its supernatural force is initially hidden inside a recognizable desire. Faris (2004) explains that magical realism often literalizes forms of language that are usually treated as metaphorical, symbolic, or emotionally exaggerated. *Obsession* follows this pattern by turning "love me more than anyone" into an exact rule that reorganizes Nicky's priorities.

Repetition becomes an important sign of that reorganization. After the wish, Nicky repeats apologies, declarations of love, and promises that she can change. Her sentences sound emotionally intense, but their repeated structure makes them increasingly mechanical. Data 6 and Data 7 are especially significant because she no longer describes what she wants; she asks Bear to provide the correct version of herself. The language of a relationship is therefore transformed into a feedback system. Nicky speaks in order to discover which performance will prevent rejection, and every unsuccessful performance produces another attempt.

The screenplay also uses changes in pronouns and naming to represent divided identity. In the whispered bedroom conversation, Nicky says, "She's sleeping... It's me," separating the magically obedient figure from the self that remembers her previous life. The word "she" refers to the body and personality controlled by the wish, while "me" refers to the trapped consciousness seeking release. Barker (2026, p. 82) does not explain this division through

scientific or religious terminology. The simple pronoun shift allows two realities to coexist in one sentence and gives verbal form to Faris's merging of realms.

Bear's dialogue reveals a parallel failure of responsibility. He eventually admits that the Willow is real, but his later wish does not ask for Nicky's freedom. By saying that he wishes she did not love him, he continues to treat her emotional life as an object that can be rewritten. The conversation therefore exposes a difference between regret and ethical understanding. Bear regrets the consequences that frighten or inconvenience him, yet he still imagines control as the solution. The magical-realist speech act makes this contradiction concrete because every sentence has the potential to become a new reality.

The final dialogue completes the screenplay's transformation of romance into horror. Bear's statement "In this life and the next" resembles a promise of permanent devotion, but it is spoken after both characters have used magic to remove the other's autonomy. Its emotional form belongs to romance, while its narrative meaning belongs to coercion and death. The dialogue therefore does not merely accompany the ending; it produces the final merging of genres. A phrase that might normally signify commitment becomes evidence that the characters can no longer distinguish mutual love from compulsory attachment.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer two research questions. In response to RQ1, how Wendy B. Faris's five characteristics of magical realism are represented in *Obsession* (2026), the analysis shows that all five characteristics are present but unevenly developed. The One Wish Willow is the irreducible element because its power remains impossible after grief, drugs, coincidence, and mental illness have been considered. The script builds a strong phenomenal world through domestic spaces, employment, internet research, friendship, and medical procedures. Unsettling doubt develops through Bear's preference for explanations that reduce his responsibility, and it is resolved only when the rain of money after Ian's wish confirms the Willow's material power. Merging realms appears in the object's commercial packaging, in the coexistence of the original and altered Nicky, and in final scenes that fuse romantic-comedy gestures with violence, blood, and death. Among these, identity is the most strongly disturbed, space is only partially disturbed, and time is merely suggested through the promise of love in this life and the next, confirming that Faris's five characteristics need not, and in this screenplay do not, carry equal narrative weight.

In response to RQ2, what meanings these characteristics produce in relation to obsession, consent, and identity, the analysis shows that *Obsession*'s magical realism functions as an

ethical argument, not only a narrative technique. Nicky speaks, expresses love, initiates intimacy, and refuses separation, but these actions do not originate from free choice; her original voice later asks Bear to kill her, proving that agreement and desire have been separated by the wish. Bear eventually experiences the same violation when Nicky uses another Willow to change him, and their apparent symmetry produces reciprocal control rather than mutual love.

These two answers point to two different kinds of contribution. The theoretical contribution is the finding that Faris's five characteristics can be unevenly distributed, with identity disturbance dominant and temporal disturbance merely symbolic, even in a text that satisfies all five categories; this refines how the framework should be applied to screenplays where the supernatural is contained within a single ongoing relationship rather than a journey across worlds or eras. The thematic contribution is different in kind: it is a critique of consent, showing that a wish for love without limits, however romantically phrased, is structurally identical to coercive control, and that magical realism can make this structure visible by literalizing the language ordinary people use to describe obsessive desire.

Obsession therefore uses horror-inflected magical realism to criticize possessive romance. It literalizes the wish to be loved more than anyone and shows the violent consequence of removing the other person's right to choose. The study contributes to existing research by applying Faris's framework, read alongside consent and coercive-control theory (Wertheimer, 2003; Stark, 2007; Laurie & Stark, 2025), to a psychological-horror screenplay whose supernatural element is a retail product rather than an inherited mythology or openly fantastic world. Future research may compare the screenplay with the completed film and examine how acting, cinematography, sound, and editing strengthen or complicate the magical-realist effects identified in the written text.

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