GENDER STEREOTYPING: ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *THE PRINCESS COMPANION*

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Abstract: Gender normativity and stereotyping are introduced to children at a young age through storybooks and movies. In many fairy tales, male chauvinism and patriarchy are at the forefront, with unethically delicate damsels who need saving. This creates an idealization of how the genders must behave in the minds of children, who internalise these ideas and often manifest insecurities when they do not fit these ideals. This can lead to anxiety, depression, and a whole host of other mental health problems. Not only does the overbearing focus on gender appropriateness limit children, but it can also actively harm them. The societal norms for genders are different and often unfair. Men usually have more opportunities, while women are pushed into more traditional roles. The story of *The Princess and the Pea* is just one example of how gender norms and stereotypes are perpetuated through popular culture and have been for generations. This paper aims to provide a distinct perspective on The Princess and the Pea through a comparative analysis of the retelling of *The Princess Companion* with Hans Christian Anderson's *The Princess and the Pea.*

Keywords: gender roles, gender stereotypes, fairy tales, female, The Princess and the Pea, The Princess Companion,

Gender is one of the most prevalent and frequently discussed issues in our society today. Gender is a broad concept that includes both the sociocultural aspects of being male or female as well as physical sex characteristics. In this heteronormative society, as the roles and behaviours are assigned, one develops the norm of what is deemed appropriate behaviour, language, and attitudes for a specific gender.

In our society, gender stereotyping is a major problem that can be seen in a variety of media, including literature. The media has both direct and indirect effects on the psychology of the consumer. It is the most important factor in changing a person's attitude and beliefs about the world around him. Certain types of media, particularly those with entertainment value, captivate consumers.(Sreedhran and Kumar 2) As a result, the messages about gender roles, for example, portrayed in media are internalised by individuals and can shape how they see themselves and other genders. One is not born, but becomes a woman.(Beauvoir 330)

The belief that men and women played different social roles is particularly clear in the writings of ancient authors like Homer and Hesiod. Gender stereotypes are evidently widespread in society, especially in popular culture. Because it has influenced every aspect of our lives, we are unable to recognise how it has affected our perspectives and beliefs (Lizbeth Goodman)

It begins with young children, who are being influenced from an early age to conform to gender roles and stereotypes, and this finally gets registered in them as normal. These stereotypes have been greatly shaped and moulded by fairy tales, which frequently promote the notion that a woman's "happily ever after" depends on her marriage to a prince. Reading fairy tales helps kids understand the cultural standards of the society they live in.(Uzma Shaheen et al.) It is widely represented in the media and in the books we read as children.

The traditional fairy tale upholds gender stereotypes and the notion that a woman's value is inextricably linked to marriage. The 'passivity 'that essentially characterises the 'feminine' woman is a trait that develops in her from earliest years (Beauvoir).A pea is used in "The Princess and the Pea" to test whether the young woman is truly a princess by being placed under 20 mattresses and 20 feather beds, which illustrates this theme in a straightforward but culturally substantial manner. A true princess is one who can feel the pea. The legend states that only a princess would possess the delicacy necessary to feel the pea, and a princess must possess delicacy.

In his tale, Andersen suggests that real princesses are unique from everyone else due to their extreme physical sensitivity (Heiner) During the time of Hans Christian Andersen, women's delicacy was assumed and valued. The story reinforces the idea that women must be delicate, which is an example of gender appropriateness in action. Many different versions of the tale have disputed this. The main character in Melanie Cellier's book, "The Princess Companion," acts rather than waiting to be saved by a hero. She isn't portrayed as fragile but as capable and strong. This challenges the notion that women must be delicate to be princesses and provides a new perspective on what a princess can be.

This paper examines *The Princess Companion*, a contemporary retelling of *The Princess and the Pea*, using gender stereotypes to better understand such a framework in the contemporary age. The research analyses the novel *The Princess Companion* and its characters using comparative study and gender theories related to stereotyping to examine how gender roles and positioning have been imposed in the classic Princess and the Pea story.

The book starts by offering a general critique of the conventional fairy tale: "Every good story I've ever heard has involved a prince. And usually a handsome, intelligent one. Now I have nothing against being handsome or intelligent, but I don't want my life to be a story. I want to be free to make my own choices. Not to be governed by the magical whims of some godmother" (Cellier 3)

The fairy godmother archetype is used to weave magic and hopes into the story. But the main character in this story is up against it and sees the godmother as an outside force that affects his decisions in life. Although the structure of this retelling is like that of most fairy tales, the plot hasn't changed much; instead, the actions and perspectives of the characters have been updated to reflect today's culture better.

Max's viewpoint is interspersed with Alyssa's as we watch the well-known tale develop. Alyssa is independent, self-motivated, and strong-willed, unlike the princess in Anderson's story. She is aware of her family's history as a woodcutter and recognises that it is unusual for someone to rise through the ranks to become a Princess Companion so quickly. She is honest about all the drawbacks of being a royal, cares about the royals, and works to raise the girls to be excellent princesses. She graciously teaches the girls to have humility and respect for servants while acknowledging the wealth and luxury of being a royal family member. She also acknowledges her advantages over the girls, such as not being pressured to marry for alliances. If a princess is the main character in a typical fairy tale, she usually must spend some time learning more about the challenges that her people face; if she is a commoner, she probably never stops to think about the advantages of being a commoner because she is so intrigued by the monarchy. Alyssa manages to walk this line and makes moving insights about privilege, riches, and societal norms. (Catherine)

The following question arises: Is the patriarchal model followed in the retelling? The answer would be yes and no. The most crucial step for such a change still involves the necessity of being re-cultured. Patriarchal normative writings are still relevant in the modern era, where ingrained social norms are upheld. As a result, it is impossible to nullify the same completely. Therefore these responses emerge. The social expectations of men and women's behaviour are reflected in stereotypes related to the gender factor.

Regardless of their unique traits and ages, people of a certain gender continue to transmit preconceptions about the ideal of a man and a woman which has accumulated over time. The patriarchal ideology that underpins the fairy-tale subgenre normalises women's servitude in a society where men predominate. As a result, androcentricity is always used in the creation and replication of fairy tales.(Anna Knyazyan 172)

We shall first focus on aspects that are not stereotypical. The traditional prince-rescuing-the-princess plot line is not present in this story. An honest, delicate, and compliant princess remains the ideal in the original. Many moments in the retelling raise the issue of why such a conforming woman is necessary. One such moment is illustrated here:

"Excuse me!" I said quickly. "I'm standing right here and can speak for myself, Your *Highness*. Just because I was raised in a woodcutter's cottage, doesn't mean I don't deserve some basic courtesy. Which someone raised in a Palace Should know!" (Cellier 22)

Fairy tales become a tell-tale instruction manual or a script for acceptable forms of feminine and masculine behaviour, and they facilitate production of such behaviour by "creating positions to occupy" (Linda T Parsons)

Unlike the stereotypical princess, Alyssa speaks out confidently. She develops into a character that the readers can identify with strongly, and as a woman, she deviates from the stereotypical role of the princess in fairy tales. She says "Sometimes I have good ideas, sometimes I have bad ideas, and sometimes I have colossally bad ideas" (Cellier 8)

She is acutely aware of her status as an ordinary person. The story does not adhere to the patriarchal paradigm, even though it is a retelling of the "rags to riches" or "commoner to princess" tale. When Max is threatened with being shot, Alyssa emerges as the hero. This circumstance brings out her modest character. She exhibits aptitude as well as a desire to grow. She is portrayed as a bookworm who uses literature to avert a devastating war for the kingdom.

In the fairy-tale, the prince is looking for a wife. He has travelled the world in search of a wife but hasn't been particularly impressed by the women he has met. He wants to wed a real princess but based on the crude or impolite behaviour of the potential brides, he is unsure if any of them are real princesses. After she passes the test his mother gives her to prove she is a true princess, he eventually marries a woman who unexpectedly shows up at his castle one night.(*The Princess and the Pea Characters*) The prince in the retelling, however, has no desire to wed. He had no desire to emulate the archetypal prince from fairy tales. It is clear from his actions in the retelling that he is troubled by the idea of a godmother-led marriage in the first portion of the novel. Under such circumstances, he desires the liberty to make decisions for himself. Numerous events demonstrate that he is a conventional prince who saves the princess, but a few minor ones set him apart. The sad aspect of this rendition is that the prince is only 19 years old, making the princess's age much younger. The meetings the monarch holds to discuss official topics provide insight into the male-dominated culture. The patriarchal structure is also emphasised in the way that women are treated in the novel (such as the queen and the princess companion). The system remains the same, despite the female protagonist's attempts to deconstruct it in some respects.

The following illustrates two instances where the patriarchy appears to have been torn down:

"Look, Max," I replied, "I don't know why I offend you so much or why you can't seem to stand the sight of me but I've never done anything to you. "Don't you think you could at least try to give me a chance?" I was no longer nervous, instead, I felt invigorated by my anger and by the shocked surprise on his face. (Cellier)

"I thought you'd appreciate it," he said with a smug grin, "I figured if you could put aside your aversion to pain for me, I could put aside my pride for you. I actually think I make a pretty good prince-in-distress (Cellier)

The storyline, while different from traditional fairy tales, contains themes that describe gender roles and what is appropriate, which can result in prejudice and a lack of inclusivity. Until this point, I've been discussing how the narrative is the ideal retelling of "The Princess and the Pea," doing away with the patriarchal notion and shifting its ideals toward feminism. In this portion, I'll investigate the patriarchal, gender-appropriate nature that this book highlights. This is evident in the way that the king and queen, as well as the prince and princesses, are represented in the plot.

Alyssa is consistently praised for her beauty and is observed with an eye that ignores all her other qualities. Ella, the queen, is praised for her beauty as well. The rough behaviour of the boys in general is described in the book's first chapter, which is not typical of real-life. As the story goes on, the idea that 'boys will be boys' becomes more and more apparent: The queen laughed, a deep, musical sound. "Boys, my darling. Who can hope to understand them?" (Cellier)Alyssa is referred to as "soft" for getting hurt, which is a demeaning term and a common taunt directed at women by men. It is a representation of the stereotypical patriarchal man berating a woman.

Here, Max is portrayed as a fun, laid-back prince who, like everyone else, detests people longing for him. He naturally assumes that the princess companion is like the woman who is only attracted to beautiful faces or wealth. Alyssa's character and Max's initially dismissive attitude towards her are reflective of the power dynamics in society that exist between men and women, which can often lead to women being silenced and ignored by their male counterparts.

Alyssa puts herself and the prince in danger in chapter eight of the narrative, setting up the well-known "hero rescuing damsel" theme that will appear in chapter nine as well as chapter twenty-seven. These are the few examples that draw attention to the typical gender roles that fairy tales portray. In this book, Alyssa's polite behaviour sets up the scenario that is revealed at the climax of the narrative.

It is necessary to rethink the role of fairy tales in one's life. According to Alami, gender emerges in relation to social categories such as language. These retellings highlight the fact that these fairy-tale serve as one of the main sources for gender roles and the modelling of gender appropriate behaviour in children. Such works are carriers that help confirm this hierarchy in the little girl's eyes (Beauvoir). It is crucial that people remain cognizant of factors that affect children's development and are aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of fairy tales. Gender is the most important lens through which we view people and life(Alami). The story is bold and distinctive, and it is written in the style of Anderson's Tales. It progresses into a teen-friendly tale with an engaging plot. It criticises the lifestyles of the wealthy in an ambiguous way. The princess and the pea emphasise a person's delicacy, while the princess's companion emphasises the delicate wit and diplomacy a ruler needs. The Princess Companion develops into a potent example of the notion that a female character can support and mentor a male protagonist without compromising his agency or autonomy, and the book turns into a critique of the function of people who lead fanciful lives. I think the novel is a better modification of the original fairy-tale because it breaks many tropes, even if others still pertain. The choice of what to read is always personal, but in my opinion, fairy tales that encourage children to behave in a gender specific way should be avoided. The Princess Companion is the perfect piece of literature to combat this patriarchal paradigm.

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