Hey Elle,

Thought you should know that Marigold has moved to Galeamos Secondary, and she's not going to formal with me anymore. I'm sure you heard about her transfer: she told me like a hundred times that she was gonna miss me, but I think she's already hooked up with some senior at Galeamos. But she was pretty hot and super flirty, and I think you would have liked her.

Anyways, I think I'm gonna take you to formal now. I know I stuffed up bad, but I think we'd look perfect together. I know you'd rather be out on the court, and you don't really put any effort into these things. I haven't ever even seen you in heels, so I don't care anymore that you're a bit taller than me. While Marigold had a pretty slick Fiat, I'm happy to get there in your, let's face it, Toyota corolla bomb that you drive around.

I know you think I kind of blanked you, but it was just a joke, I swear. You're really smart and great at basketball, I wasn't expecting you'd take it seriously. I'm not really expecting anything much. You can borrow my sister's dress if you want, but I'm pretty sure she's not your size. In fact, I've already bought a corsage, but Marigold didn't like it anyway coz the ribbon was really itchy.

Anyway, get back to me soon, coz my sister can alter the dress for you if it doesn't fit your big shoulders.

See ya,

Ian,

Thanks, I'm very flattered. While you're right, Marigold and I weren't close – she seemed to overexaggerate and complain far too much – but I'm sure she was nice to those who put up with her.

I'll admit, I was kind of surprised to hear from you. On the last day of school, your hilarious 'joke' was to call me a nerd and a loner in front of all of our friends, after they asked you if you'd ever ask me out. 'You're a nice chick El, but you're just not my type,' you said. Don't you remember?

Look, I'm glad that you've realised for yourself the benefits of girls who are both smart and sporty. And that you've seen the disadvantages of girls, who may look and play nice, but who are really irritating and whingy once you get to know them.

I am indeed great at basketball, and I am not only smart, but I work hard. I'm also independent. And, I'm sorry, this is why I can't go to formal with you.

You say that being smart and sporty are good things, but only when it's convenient for you. Maybe it's some weird biological or natural selection thing that you know you will need smart kids. But anytime I don't behave like 'typical girls', it's a criticism. So, if I'm going to formal with someone, it's not going to be someone who wants me to be their trophy, who will make them look good, or their 'perfect partner'. It'll be someone who values me as their equal, who appreciates my strengths AND flaws. I'm glad I'm not like typical girls.

In fact, I actually asked Nathan Long, who may be in the chess club and can't catch a ball, but who has engaged in *actual conversation* with me about science, and our movie and uni preferences. He doesn't expect to parade me around on his arm, either.

I chose who I wanted to go to formal with, and it was someone who will ask me for a dance, rather than demand it.

Good luck getting to formal in your car, Ian. At least my trusty 'bomb' Maggie actually exists.

Thanks anyways,

Elle.

Introduction:

Hans Christian Andersen's The Princess and the Pea is a fairy tale that has been told to millions of children since it was first published in 1835. On the surface, it appears to be a simple and harmless tale of a prince's search for the right wife. However, analysing the text using world-context-centred theories including Marxism and feminism and the text-centred theories in structuralism reveals a much darker meaning. The Princess and the Pea invites readers to accept a hegemonic view of the world in which women are dominated by men, where the epitome of femininity is extreme sensitivity/weakness, and where royalty and the class structure are the natural order of things. These key assumptions and values are further reinforced by textual features and language details. To challenge these ideologies in my transformation of the text, I changed the fairy tale genre to a conversation via social media in a modern high school setting. The first message provides an alternative reading that only challenges the portrayal of the ideal woman as weak. The second response challenges all hegemonic ideologies and offers a resistant reading that is socially responsible (Johnson, 2001, pg. 47-55).

Analysis of base text: world-centred theories

Using a world-centred approach to analyse The Princess and the Pea, the key question to ask is "whose interests are served by representations of the world in the text?" (QSA, 2011, pg. 15). The specific answer is the prince but, on a broader level, men and the ruling class, in this case royalty.

Marxist criticism, developed by Karl Marx, theorised that texts "reflected economic realities" (QSA, 2011, pg. 15). "Economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 51). A Marxist analysis of the base text reveals that the ideology of the superiority of royalty is presented as a "natural way of seeing the world" (Tyson, 2015 pg. 54). The main characters are the prince, the princesses, and the old Queen. Common people (peasants and servants) are so poorly valued they are absent from the text. This ideology is further understood using the lens of classism which "equates one's value as a human being with social class" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 56). Classism promotes the belief that the ability to sit at the top of the food chain is "in the blood" – these people are naturally more superior, and those at the bottom are a product of their own flaws, rather than the oppression of those at the top have inflicted on them. In this text, the princess is revealed to be "a real princess" because of her ability to detect a

pea beneath 20 mattresses – her superior quality is "innate" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 56). The Princess and the Pea reinforces that the ideology that royalty is superior, born and not made. Marxist critics believe that this was to keep the common masses in their place and not to aspire to a higher-class level.

The fact that weakness/sensitivity is presented as the most desirable characteristic of a woman is classist in itself. Only those who are privileged, who have never had to sleep on dirt floors and gone to bed hungry, have the luxury of being so sensitive they would notice a pea under 20 feather mattresses. For the higher-class princess, it is viewed as an example of her refined nature. A lower-class woman would have access to a pea but would never be in the position to access the feather mattresses to carry out the test.

Through the prism of feminist criticism, it is clear that the Princess and the Pea "reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological repression of women" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 79). In the base text, Andersen promotes the belief that men are dominant and will choose the wife they want and women will be compliant – even thankful – that the man chose them to marry. This is illustrated when he writes: "So the prince took her to be his wife, for now he was sure that he had found a real princess". The reader assumes the princess wants to be married to the prince, considering her effort to turn up on his doorstep and prove herself as a true princess. However, her consent is absent from the text.

The absence of the princess's consent to marriage is an example of Irigaray's theory of patriarchal language and that "women don't speak as active originators of their own thoughts". The prince defines femininity in terms of his "own needs, fears, and desires" and there is a pervading assumption that "women want the same things that men want" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 97).

Like the vast majority of fairy tales stemming from the 1800s, this is a patriarchal fairy tale, "serving the interests of men" (Moon, 2001, pg. 78). It promotes a culture that "privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles" (Tyson, 2015 pg. 81). In this text, the prince is strong and decisive and the princess is weak, submissive and needs saving. As Tyson says, patriarchal ideology is "pervasive" and "can program us without our knowledge or consent". In this case, millions of young girls over the centuries have been fed the line that they need to be sensitive/weak and that a man will make major life decisions for them.

Analysis of base text: text-centred theories

A text-centred analysis reveals how these ideologies are present in the structural features of the text. Structuralism is an approach to linguistics developed by Saussure in the early 20th century that analyses the structures, codes and conventions of language and ultimately reveals the shared cultural understandings. Semiotics applies structuralist insights to the study of sign systems. Contemporary semiotic approaches theorise that "meanings are in part made through social systems of signs" (QSA, 2011, pg. 9). A linguistic **sign**, the word, consists of a **signifier**, the visual image, and a **signified**, the mental picture or concept.

In this text, the **sign** of the "pea" gives us a critical insight. Its **signifier** – a green, small, round vegetable – conjures a mental picture (**signified**) of a common and insignificant object. Andersen places great stress on the importance of a single, common vegetable, that would have been grown in the field of peasants. He presents a familiar item to the common masses as the determinant of true royal blood. The pea is accessible to the common classes but the ability to become royal isn't. It is subtle but overwhelming disempowerment of commoners.

Other significant signs dominate the text which further position readers to accept a hegemonic view of the world. The sign of the "princess" is a signifier of female royalty and wealth. What is signified is privilege, femininity and high class yet powerless in her life choices. The sign of the "prince" signifies male royalty, wealth and the power of the throne. His decision-making abilities, privilege, masculinity, high class and rights above everyone else are signified. These structural features reinforce the invited reading of the base text: women are dominated by men and royalty and the class structure are the natural order of things.

Binary oppositions are another structural feature that reinforce the invited reading giving us a black and white view of the world that men and royalty are superior. Derrida argues that one element in a binary opposition is often privileged over the other, which devalues the second element (Moon, 2001, pg. 3). Cixous goes further, arguing that patriarchal binary thought "believes that women are born to be passive while men are born to be active because it is natural ... thus, if a woman is not passive, she is not really a woman" (Tyson, 2015, pg. 96). This is clearly evident in The Princess and the Pea where the pervading binary opposition is that of male and female. Males are dominant – the prince is logical, tough, decision-making, and has superior needs – while females are marginalised voices – sensitive, passive, decision-compliant (the princess) and conniving in the case of the old queen (see table in appendix). This feeds back into Andersen's epitome of femininity: the "real

princess" is desired for her sensitivity/weakness. Women who aren't weak, passive and compliant, but show the qualities ascribed to men (strength and decision making) cannot be as desirable as a real princess.

This text also needs to be viewed within the broader context of the fairy tale culture. Intertextuality "describes the way texts of all kinds are bound together by the broader reading and writing practices of a culture" (Moon, 2001, p. 27). The Princess and the Pea belongs to a much larger class of fairy tale literature that promotes the hero prince, the princess who needs saving and the disapproving mother figure. Nanda theorises that fairy tales embody the ways that societies attempted to silence and oppress women: "In the fairy tale, passivity is the most valued and honoured attribute a woman can possess in life" (Nanda, 2014, p.248). These intertextual links are "important in maintaining certain power structures" (Moon, 2001, p.32)

Textual features and language details

There are a number of textual features and language details that reinforce the key assumptions and values in the base text - male dominance, and the inborn nature of royalty. First, the text is written from the perspective of the determined wife-seeking Prince. At no point does the third-person narration dictate what any of the other characters are thinking. The only way the reader knows what the old Queen and the princess are thinking is through dialogue, which portrays both women in a very negative light. The old Queen is untrusting and conniving: "we shall see if that is true", she says to herself, as she plots to test if the princess is real. The Princess is depicted as ungrateful and complaining when asked how she slept: "Oh terribly bad … Heaven knows what was in the bed". As this is the only dialogue the text offers, we are asked to accept this portrayal of women.

Second, the text uses the phrase 'a real princess' four times. This reinforces the notion that those who are royal are innately physically superior. It keeps commoners subjugated, believing that the class system is simply the natural order of things. This 'born to rule' ideology is one of the key notions that is the basis of our classist society.

Third, there are large silences in the text: the voice of the princess is practically silenced, except for her one whinge. The princesses who have been rejected by the prince as also

silent and valueless; we never learn anything about them except for their unsuitability. This reinforces the subjugation of females – women have no reason to have a voice, as they have the same desires as men and are happy to remain oppressed.

Finally, the fairy tale ends with "Now that is a true story". It tells the reader to take this view of the world as fact; that these ideologies are the truth and this is the way the world works.

Theoretical approach to text transformation

To challenge these ideologies in my transformation of the text, I changed the fairy tale's medieval setting into a contemporary high school setting thereby allowing it to "transcend its own time" so that it wasn't constrained by "a horizon of culture constructed by ideology" (Bertens, 2008, p.147). Using the same theory, I changed the fairy tale genre to a conversation between a teenage boy and girl via social media. This allowed me to avoid the constraints of intertextuality. A modern context also allowed to me to overcome the limitations that were placed on women in the 19th century. Using a feminist prism, it allowed me create a strong female character who could express her desires and make her own choices, thereby shattering the attitude that the ideal woman is weak and sensitive.

A critical practice most commonly associated with Derrida and poststructuralism is deconstruction. When analysing a text, looking for gaps or silences in the text allows us to examine different readings that may emerge. To question the invited readings using these 'cracks' present in the text, we may 'give voice to one of the marginalised characters in a novel in order to question the assumptions on which the text is based' (Simon et al., 2003, pg. 19). In the base text, the voices of both common people (as discussed before) and the women who were turned down by the prince were silenced. In the transformation, one of the girls who was disregarded by the 'prince' now has a voice, and the emotions she would have after her rejection are clearly expressed.

I used the social hierarchy of a high school to replicate the context of royalty and classism. School hierarchies are infamously known for exclusivity and judgement against those at the bottom. Instead of a marriage proposal, I had my male protagonist/modern prince asking a girl to the school formal. In school environments, there is also a huge focus on the 'perfect' girl which is a modern-day equivalent of 'a real princess'. With the introduction of social media into mix, the image of a girl who is skinny, fit, and attractive is deemed the modern epitome of femininity.

To transform the text, I challenged the binaries that reinforced patriarchal values and assumption. Rather than inverting the text and making the woman strong, dominant and logical, and the man weak, passive and compliant, I subverted the text and reinforced equality between the sexes: that both men AND women can make big life choices and both men and women can be strong, intelligent and logical. According to Hourihan, "subversion, not inversion, is the more socially responsible path for textual intervention," (quoted in Johnson, 2012, pg. 53).

I applied my understanding of semiotics to transform "the pea" into its contemporary equivalent. I chose the linguistic **sign** of the "car". Its **signifier** is a metal machine for transportation. What it **signified** is how much money you have and what class you belong to.

In terms of textual features, I change the third person narrative voice which had taken the perspective of the prince to a conversation which allowed me to give the male and female characters an equal voice.

Evaluation of transformation

The first message from Ian to Elle is designed to provide an alternative reading that only challenges part of the base text's invited readings, primarily, the epitome of femininity as weak. It is, as Johnson describes, "an alternative or negotiated re-write that disagrees mildly or reads *across* the primary discourse of the base text" (p.50). I have transformed the prince into Ian Prince, who wants to take a partner to the formal: someone who will look good in photos and laugh at his jokes. His first choice is Marigold, who meets his exacting standards but he later discovers is disloyal and irritating. Ian is forced to challenge his own views of the 'perfect girl'/'real princess'. He then makes an offer to Elle, who he has previously criticised as a 'nerd' and a 'loner'. He apologises to Elle, admitting that he made a mistake, and he now appreciates her unconventional personality traits and strength of character, thereby expanding his view on what is the 'perfect girl'. However, like the prince in base text, he isn't asking her to accompany him; he is assuming her desires are his desires and she will passively accept his decision. In this way, I haven't challenged the notion of male dominance. Ian Prince is also focused on the importance of the school's social hierarchy, aware that girls like Elle don't go to formal with high school 'royalty' like him and he is doing her a big favour. It is these assumptions the second transformation challenges.

Elle's response is aimed at giving an oppositional/resistant reading to the base text "that repositions readers" (Johnson p. 52) to reject patriarchal values. Elle not only presents a version of femininity that is strong, decisive and intelligent, she resists the male dominance ideology, rejecting his offer, stating that she is independent and free to make her own choices. She also opposes the belief held by Ian of the inborn superiority of class - that those lower in the school social hierarchy should feel privileged to go formal with someone of a higher status. She makes it clear that a person's value is not equal to the social classes they belong to. To do this, Elle chooses to go to the formal with someone who is from a much lower social class - Matt, who plays in the chess club. This contradicts classist ideology. Elle also rejects Ian Prince's criticism of her car, which is akin to 'the real princess' refusing to do 'the pea test'. It is a refusal to have her value determined by an object.

Using world-centred and text-centred analysis, it is clear that fairy tales like The Princess and Pea have presented a hegemonic view of the world of male dominance, female weakness and royal superiority for centuries. They do this subtly through structures, codes and conventions, textual features, intertextuality and binary oppositions. I aimed to challenge these assumptions by choosing a contemporary context, subverting the text and presenting first an alternative reading, and second, a resistant reading. The result is an empowered 21st century female character, who celebrates her strength and unconventional traits, assertively resists male dominance and defies the notions of class.

Now THAT is a true story.

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