

ALEX: Hello and welcome to another episode of The Princess and the Podcast, the best Hans Christian Andersen analysis podcast out there. I'm Alex

ANA: and I'm Ana. Today we will be talking about Anderson's rocky relationship with royalty through performance and analysis of his tales, "The Princess and the Pea" and "The Emperor's New Clothes". These are two tales that are critical of royalty, which is unusual for Anderson who usually wrote stories which celebrated princes and princesses.

ALEX: But before we get to the reading of those two tales, why don't we talk a little bit about Anderson's life and relationship with royalty?

ANA: Great idea. Let's start with a bit of background. Anderson grew up poor in the city of Odense, Denmark. His obsession with royalty might have even started at a young age because his father actually believed that they were long lost Royalty.

ALEX: Oh, interesting. And yeah, obviously, it remained a theme throughout his life. He surrounded himself with nobility and was always almost ashamed of his poor background, and apparently his rich friends didn't shy away from reminding him of that.

ANA: Oh, so that explains why he wrote all these stories like his most famous, "The Little Mermaid". That were sort of royalty positive or lifted up the idea of royalty. But he has as mentioned these two stories that seem to contradict that, which are "The Emperor's New Clothes" and "The Princess and the Pea".

ALEX: Yeah, so starting with the Emperor's New Clothes, how does that criticize or make fun of royalty?

ANA: Well, to start off, in the story, The emperor is a man who's literally obsessed with clothes and his outfits. And it's even mentioned that he cares much more about what he's going to wear during the day than about his soldiers or his real duties. For me, that's making fun of the futility and priorities royalty might have instead of putting effort into well, their jobs as leaders. Secondly, Anderson's story is about the Empire trying to find out through magical outfits, who is unfit for their post in his kingdom or stupid, of course, well, it's a fairy tale, but seriously? In the end his wish is to find out the truth about others. But the Emperor is the one that's put in the most awkward situation of walking a parade completely naked in front of his whole kingdom. If that's not completely ridiculous and embarrassing, I don't know it would be. Based on this, why then would he write these two stories that aren't so kind to royalty?

ALEX: Yeah, so it is unusual for Anderson, because he wrote all these stories that kind of celebrated royalty or just made them look like the good guys, which is why many people seem to have misread the Princess and the Pea as just being another one of those princess love stories and not a satirical tale. I think it a lot of it comes from just frustration because he surrounded himself with royalty for much of his life, but he you know, was always in the back of his mind, he knew that he was not truly one of them. He came from a very poor background.

And so you know, eventually that that'll get frustrating, especially because apparently they tended to make fun of him even for his modest background. And, you know, if you're constantly surrounded by royals, you're going to start to see the downsides of royalty. So I think it was just a good way of taking his frustration out with not being a true royal just by by telling these tales that are kind of making fun of them in a sly way.

ANA: Yeah, yeah, that's very interesting. Um, well, this brings us to the performance section. So we're going to do a dramatic reading of both tales, starting with the Princess and the Pea, and then we'll keep going with our discussion.

Transition music

“The Princess and the Pea”

PAUSE

Narrator: Once upon a time, there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess; but she would have to be a real princess.

He traveled all over the world to find one, but nowhere could he get what he wanted. There were princesses enough, but it was difficult to find out whether they were real ones. There was always something about them that was not as it should be. So he came home again and was sad, for he would have liked very much to have a real princess.

PAUSE

Narrator: One evening a terrible storm came on; there was thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down in torrents.

Storm sound effect

Narrator: Suddenly a knocking was heard at the city gate, and the old king went to open it.

Knocking on gate sound effect

Narrator: It was a princess standing out there in front of the gate. But, good gracious! what a sight the rain and the wind had made her look. The water ran down from her hair and clothes; it ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again at the heels. And yet she said that she was a real princess.

Old Queen: Well, we'll soon find that out...

Narrator: Thought the old queen. But she said nothing, went into the bedroom, took all the bedding off the bedstead, and laid a pea on the bottom; then she took twenty mattresses and laid them on the pea, and then twenty eider-down beds on top of the mattresses.

PAUSE

Narrator: On this, the princess had to lie all night. In the morning she was asked:

Old Queen: Good morning darling. How did you sleep?

Princess: Oh, very badly! I have scarcely closed my eyes all night. Heaven only knows what was in the bed, but I was lying on something hard so that I am black and blue all over my body. It's horrible!

Narrator: Now they knew that she was a real princess because she had felt the pea right through the twenty mattresses and the twenty eider-down beds.

Prince: Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that!

Narrator: So the prince took her for his wife, for now, he knew that he had a real princess; and the pea was put in the museum, where it may still be seen if no one has stolen it.

PAUSE

Narrator: There, that is a true story.

Transition music

ANA: That was the Princess and the Pea. Now we move on to the Emperor's New Clothes.

Transition music

PAUSE

“The Emperor’s New Clothes”

Narrator: Many years ago, there lived an Emperor who cared ***so much*** about beautiful new clothes that he spent all his money on dressing stylishly. He took no interest at all in his soldiers, nor did he care to attend the theater unless of course, it gave him a chance to show off his new clothes.

Narrator: One day in the big city where the Emperor lived, two swindlers appeared. They claimed to be weavers and said that they knew how to weave the loveliest cloth you could imagine, which also had the amazing ability to become invisible to those who were unfit for their posts or just hopelessly stupid.

Emperor: “Those must be lovely clothes! If I wore something like that, I could tell which men in

my kingdom were unfit for their posts, and I would be able to tell the smart ones from the stupid ones”.

Narrator: And he paid the swindlers a large sum of money so that they could get started at once. The swindlers assembled a couple of looms and pretended to be working, but there was nothing at all on their looms.

Narrator: Everyone in town had heard about the cloth’s mysterious power, and they were all eager to discover the incompetence or stupidity of their neighbors.

Emperor: “I will send my honest old minister to the weavers”

Narrator: So off went the good-natured old minister to the workshop.

1st Minister: “God save us! Why can’t I see a thing! “Is it possible that I’m an idiot?” I never once suspected it, and I mustn’t let on that is a possibility. Can it be that I’m unfit for my post? No, it will never do for me to admit that I can’t see the cloth.

1st Swindler: “Well, why aren’t you saying anything about it?”

1st Minister: “Oh it’s enchanting! I shall tell the Emperor right away how much I like it!”

2nd Swindler: “Ah, we are so glad that you like it”

Narrator: After a while, the Emperor sent a second respected official to see how the weaving was progressing. What happened to the first minister also happened to him. Since there was nothing there but an empty loom, he couldn’t see a thing.

Like the first minister, he wondered whether he was stupid or unfit for his post. He also lied to the swindlers and told the Emperor how much he loved the cloth

PAUSE

Narrator: The splendid fabric soon became the talk of the town. And now the Emperor wanted to see the cloth for himself while it was still on the loom.

Emperor: “What on Earth! I can’t see a thing! This is appalling! Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be Emperor? This is the most horrible thing I can imagine happening to me!”

Narrator: But all he said was:

Emperor: “Oh, it’s very beautiful”

Narrator: He wasn't about to say that he couldn't see a thing. The courtiers couldn't see any more than the others. Still, they all said exactly what the Emperor had said.

Multiple voices: "Oh, it's beautiful!"

Narrator: They advised him to wear the splendid new clothes in the parade that was about to take place.

PAUSE

Emperor: "I am quite ready. The clothes suit me well, don't they!"

Trumpet noise announcing parade

Narrator: The Emperor marched in the parade under the lovely canopy and everyone in the streets and at the windows said:

Multiple voices: "Goodness!"
"The Emperor's clothes are the finest he has ever worn".

Narrator: People were not willing to let on that there was nothing at all to see, because that would have meant they were either unfit for their posts or very stupid. Suddenly, a little child declared:

Little child screaming: "But he isn't wearing anything!"

Crowd whispering sounds

Narrator: The child's remark was whispered from one person to the next until the whole crowd Shouted:

Crowd: "Yes, he isn't wearing anything at all!!!"

Narrator: The Emperor cringed, for he was beginning to suspect that everyone was right. But he realized he must go through with it now, parade and all. And he drew himself up even more proudly than before...

Transition music

ALEX: Alright, so let's talk about these two tales and the methods Anderson used to mock and criticize the ruling class.

ANA: Alex, you did some research about the princess and the pea, right?

ALEX: Yeah.

ANA: Tell us some more about that. For example, there are many different theories about the purpose of his this story. Which one do you agree with the most?

ALEX: One theory that's held by even a lot of respected folklorists is that Anderson didn't write this as a satire at all. Maria Tatar, a folklorist wrote that the theme of this town is quote, true nobility resides in sensitivity rather than birth end quote So basically, they thought that he was writing this tale because he wasn't born into royalty but wanted to be so he was saying like, oh, the princess is royal because she's sensitive not because she has royal parents. But I don't like this theory because I feel like if you read the his original tale at all, it doesn't really say that because it is established that she is like of royal blood. So it kind of it kind of goes against the theory that she's a princess because she's sensitive. The theory that I tend to go with, which is why we chose it for this episode is that Andreessen wrote it as a satire, which I think has a lot more evidence to back it up. Basically, it's a commentary on some of the ridiculous practices of royalty, about, you know, their obsession with proving that someone is of royal blood, and the fact that they so often used marriage as a political move and not as something out of true love.

ANA: That's interesting. Um, I know that there are many retellings of the original story, and they're very different from Anderson's version. So how'd this change in the stories affect the purpose and the essence and lead to different interpretations about the purpose of Anderson's story.

ALEX: Yeah, so that's a really interesting thing that's happened to this tale. People don't seem to read it as a satire, like even Maria Tatar, the the folklorist didn't read it like that. Which is why I think in a lot of modern retellings of the story, they they don't write it as a satire they they write it in the vein of, you know, all the other princess fairy tales that we hear about where it's about the Prince and the princess falling in love. And, you know, it does make sense that people see it this way because it's very uncharacteristic of Anderson to write a satire. So and it's uncharacteristic of the genre in general. So that's that's why it's it's been changed in so many retellings to add love story aspects into it to kind of downplay the way this absurdity is portrayed. They don't make fun of the royals for putting the pea under the mattress they're like oh yeah, that's just a silly fun way of telling the story but they're not criticizing the the queen or anything like that.

ANA: Another point is that Anderson actually was inspired by a Swedish tale called princes who lay on seven peas to ride the his original version of the princess and the pea, but he made some changes to it. What did he change? And how are these changes relevant to portray his obsession with royalty and his desire to satirize it?

ALEX: Yeah, so this original Swedish tale a lot of people theorize that it this is the one that Anderson heard when he was a child. And it's it has some a few key differences from the tail

that Anderson ended up writing. Notably that the the princess in the Swedish tale was not true royalty, and she she passed the the pea test, which was 7 peas in this original story by tricking the Queen by people telling her what the test was so that she knew to say that she couldn't sleep well. And so my thinking is that Anderson remembered this tale, and since it's already a funny premise, he thought that it was a good story to change a bit to turn it into a satire,

ANA: okay. And based on this, how does the princess and the pea and make a commentary on the absurdity of royalty?

ALEX: Yeah, so I think he makes that clear by playing this absurd premise as completely reasonable within the language of the tale. Like, it's obvious that obvious that no real person is going to feel a pea under 20 mattresses, like, it's not going to happen. And by saying he that a true Princess will be able to feel the pea under the mattress as he's basically saying that nobody's a real princess, because there were genuine princesses when Anderson was writing this story, and they wouldn't have been able to feel a pea. So that kind of tells you that he was not being serious with this thing. But you know, the characters within the story were serious, which is, you know, kind of the definition of a satire. And the other like big giveaway for this is that the word love isn't mentioned at all during the story. It's all about the marriage and how the the prince needs to find another princess to marry, because he can't just marry some commoner but it's not framed in the way that oh, I want to find a princess to fall in love with. Its no I want to find a princess to get married. Yeah. So I think that that's a dead giveaway that it's kind of making fun of royalty that they don't care about love. They care about marriage for political gain, you know, Royal marriages back then were a lot about merging two powerful families to consolidate power. And I think Anderson was satirising that.

ANA: Yeah, that's, that's really interesting. Well, in my case, I did some research about the Emperor's New Clothes. And what he found was a very different way in which he does this satire to royalty.

ALEX: Yeah, so I actually wanted to ask you about that because you have knowledge about kind of diving into the psychological aspects of of these tales. So I wanted to ask you, first of all the psychological reason behind the way that the ministers are acting when they see the cloth?

ANA: Yeah, of course. Um, well, the ministers act according to different social psychology theories. So the main one that I would say on the whole story is social influence. Which that basically explains why they agreed to see the cloth simply for fear of social exclusion and being judged by society, as well their inability to see the cloth would indicate that they're either stupid or unfit for their post, no one wants to be labeled that. So another theory that can be applied for the ministers is obedience, in which they obey and act according to whatever the Emperor says. so it gets to the point of the Emperor says he sees a cloth but it doesn't actually exist and everyone else in the room knows they still say they believe it exists because they don't want to go against the figure authority, which is the Emperor,

ALEX: And speaking about the Emperor, he himself, you know, is also a victim. So I think probably similar psychological thing. So what would you say that explains the way that he acts in this tale?

ANA: Well, the Emperor also falls under the social influence theory as well. He's the authority doesn't want to be judged by his kingdom. And as the authority he doesn't fall under obedience, but he is also affected by conformity, which is a theory that explains the tendency people have to do what others do simply because others are doing it, which is a direct quote from a psychology textbook. And this explains why all the characters say the clothing exists, even though it doesn't, they don't want to go against everyone else's opinion. They don't want to be the minority and say that they don't see something that will cause them to be labeled stupid or unfit for their jobs.

ALEX: Right. And then obviously, the tale concludes by having someone actually break that societal norm, and it's a kid so what do you think Anderson was trying to say about having this little child be the one to say the Emperor is in fact naked?

ANA: Well, I think this was he was trying to make a commentary on society. The kid is innocent and uncorrupted by societal norms and ideas well yet at least, and he's the only one able to speak up and say what everyone else was thinking, but was too scared to say the kid has nothing specific to lose as he's had no job to be labeled unfit for and because of that no reason to be labeled as stupid. Well, all of those, I've think it's a commentary on like our big society, even though was long time ago, it still clearly applies for today that we are all so worried about others opinions and being excluded from society and what everyone's going to think of us that sometimes we lose sense of what's important, and we decide to ignore or stay quiet about things that are actually relevant, which is applied to dozens of topics in society nowadays. So I think he was trying to make that commentary that the only one that was able to speak the truth was a kid, because he's not affected by the circumstances yet, which I think is really interesting.

ALEX: Yeah, yeah, definitely. And I think it's also important, you know, some people might say, why are you reading this far into a tale that was written hundreds of years ago? So why do you think it's useful to you know, read this far into into a psychological analysis of a fairy tale.

ANA: So I believe reading through the lens of social psychology presents the reader an analysis of a population that is not much different from our real population. And besides that, I think it helps the reader relate to his own life and how we are usually unaware victims of these theories such as conformity, social influence, obedience, and especially the grave fear of being judged and excluded by society. It allows us to identify our own selves within the story as it's so relatable, and also to oversee how these theories apply to this made up world can also be applied to our real world, even though probably not with the Emperor walking naked in the middle of the street. Yeah.

ALEX: And I think yeah, that's so that's kind of why we decided to look at these two tales, because it's really interesting to talk about these satires even in our modern modern context.

And it's also you know, interesting from a historical view, because the Princess and the Pea and the Emperor's New Clothes were both kind of unusual Tales for Anderson's style. And why I thought it was really interesting for us to go into them today.

ANA: Especially because they're also so different from each other. So yeah, yeah. I think it's really cool that he does use a satire in both of them but he uses it differently.

ALEX: Yeah, he he definitely like plays it a lot more straight in the in the Princess and the Pea. On the surface, it's not satire, whereas on the surface of the Emperor's New Clothes, you can kind of tell that he's making fun of the Emperor. Really, really interesting stuff.

ANA: Okay, thank you so much for listening to this episode of the princess in the podcast next week be sure to tune in for an episode of The Little Mermaid and how Anderson's tale compares with its Disney adaptation.

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ANA: And make sure to check out more information on our website, [www dot the princes and podcast dot com](http://www.thepincesandpodcast.com). Until next time I've been Anna

ALEX: and I've been Alex.

TOGETHER: and this is the princess and the podcast!