

Gender Representation in Baker's *Princess Between Worlds*

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Abstract—Gender is a concept that differentiates women and men based on socio-cultural construction. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate gender representation through male and female characters in Baker's *Princess Between Worlds*. The data were collected from the novel using qualitative descriptive and feminist methods. Furthermore, the depiction of the characters was analyzed from five key aspects of gender proposed by Oakley, namely dress, gestures, occupation, social networks, and personality. The analysis showed that the characters attempted to break away from traditional stereotypes, separating both genders into different classes. Baker also reflected values of equality, justice, and the recognition of broader gender identities.

Index Terms—representation, gender, children

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is defined as written and unwritten works of art created by specific writers. According to Arafah et al. (2021), literary works often act as mirrors, reflecting the reality of a given age. Furthermore, these works capture how people lived in specific eras and regions, including the local wealth of rituals, traditions, and customs (Yudith et al., 2024; Takwa et al., 2024). Several studies have focused on traditions and rituals, with literary works being one of the key sources (Arafah et al., 2020). In line with Yudith et al. (2023), life may appear as a collection of seemingly meaningless stories unless written down. Literature creates a universe through infinite imagination (Arafah et al., 2021), not only in fiction but also in the current reality of time (Arifin et al., 2022). Although real events often inspire writers, these experiences are expressed through writing, incorporating ideas that may be factual or entirely fictional (Arafah et al., 2024; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to note that literature is a product of imagination, where the realities portrayed may be fictionalized (Sunnyoto et al., 2022).

Literature is a form of art that conveys messages through the beauty of language (Arafah, 2018). As an art, it relies on figurative language to express ideas aesthetically (Baa et al., 2023). Writers are expected to present ideas with as much information as necessary (Yulianti et al., 2023). However, figurative language can often lead to misunderstandings, as metaphors require readers to interpret meanings that are only sometimes apparent. In such cases, writers implicitly express

thoughts, which may lead to misconceptions or misinterpretations (Kuswanty et al., 2023; Iksora et al., 2022). Nevertheless, metaphors often symbolize local terms and are a hallmark of the writers' style (Mofu et al., 2024).

Basnet and Mounfold (1993) stated that literature was closely related to a country's cultural documents. Moreover, Eagleton (1983) viewed literature as an art form expressed through written words. Onuekwusi, J.A. (2013) defined literature as any inventive and beautiful work, oral or written, that analyzes humanity's struggle for survival while providing entertainment, knowledge, education, and excitement to the audience.

Literary writing serves as a personal expression of emotion, comprising ideas, motivation, and confidence. It also reflects writers' thoughts, manners, behaviour, and attitudes (Fadillah et al., 2022). Literary works take many forms, including short tales, poetry, novels, dramas, and songs, all of which offer valuable insights (Arafah, 2018). Peck and Coyle (1984) stated that literature is often rich in detail, frequently expressing core human values. Similarly, Tourmina (2005) showed that novels explore human characters in social environments, particularly focusing on humans as social beings. The relationship between humans and nature is a recurring theme in literature, as seen in works addressing environmental sustainability, natural balance, or ecosystems (Abbas et al., 2024; Manugeran et al., 2023). Taormina reported that novels not only depict character's storylines but also show the places and societies in which the stories developed.

Most people admire novels for their ability to change readers' mindsets and represent the lives of individuals in society. However, with the rise of the information technology era, thinking has revolutionized (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Literature continues to evolve with time, along with the emergence of various literary methods (Arafah et al., 2023). This evolution has significantly influenced changes in literary tastes over different periods (Afiah et al., 2022). Despite these changes, literature continues to thrive by improving in quality (Asriyanti et al., 2022). It has inspired writers to become more creative in producing works that reflect society's pressing issues (Siwi et al., 2022).

Literary works offer valuable lessons and reliable information about people's lives and societal values (Purwaningsih et al., 2020). These works also provide examples to be emulated and applied in social life (Jusdalyana et al., 2024). Values serve as guidelines for good behaviour and attitudes and play a crucial role in shaping the character of the younger generation (Takwa et al., 2022; Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). However, modernization poses a significant risk of eroding cultural values passed down through generations (Takwa et al., 2024; Takwa et al., 2022). It is no longer surprising that Generation Z is deeply engaged with social media and other technological platforms, as they provide unlimited access to information, significantly impacting behaviour (Arafah et al., 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). The impact can lead to social media addiction and, in some cases, deviant behaviour (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b). At this point, older generations have a role in making a change. The government, for instance, needs to instil cultural values into social life and the educational system (Arafah et al., 2023; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Education not only serves to improve skills but also fosters personal development, such as optimism, enthusiasm, and confidence (Misnah et al., 2024; Arafah et al., 2024). Even though the educational system faced significant challenges during the pandemic, these were addressed by providing online materials and effective teaching methodologies using technological devices (Arafah et al., 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Typically, literature can be incorporated into the learning process as a local subject, as it contains cultural values that help preserve local traditions and shape the character of the younger generation (Halil et al., 2024).

This study selected the novel as the literary work, defined as a largely fictitious prose story (Mazzoni, 2017; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). In particular, children's literature is a critical instrument for the early development of language, learning abilities, and imagination (Audsley, 2016). According to Hasanah (2022), these stories play a crucial role in shaping children's perspectives, with gender depictions in narratives influencing perceptions and attitudes toward appropriate gender roles in society. The study further emphasized that many children's books still conform to gender stereotypes in patriarchal cultures, showing that gender has not been accurately portrayed (Hashanah, 2022).

Gender stereotypes not only limit children's freedom of expression but also pressure them to conform to behaviours dictated by gender rather than personality (Singh, 1998). Gender is shaped by society, which relates to constructed roles (Asri et al., 2023). Since social construction fosters both positive and negative attitudes toward specific genders, these ideas can significantly impact children and even become deeply ingrained when introduced at a young age.

Interactions between children and stories significantly affect children's personal and social development (Marriott, 1998). Moreover, this can shape the sense of personal and social identity (Watkins, 1992). Judith Butler, who conceptualizes gender as 'performative', stated that gender is not an inherent aspect but a state of action. Butler further stated, 'because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all' (Butler, 1990). This perspective reinforces gender as a social construct subject to dispute and re-appropriation as societal ideas evolve. Gender quality and inequality are well-captured in literature, as literature often reflects the world where these phenomena are prevalent (Yudith et al., 2024; Arafah et al., 2024).

The preceding discussion was particularly relevant to the focus of this study, which examined how gender was represented in *Princess Between Worlds* by E.D. Baker. This study also aimed to investigate gender portrayal through male and female characters in popular children's novels. It is important to note that advancements in science have significantly impacted society by changing lives and perspectives (Arafah et al., 2020; Suhadi et al., 2022; Kaharuddin et al., 2023).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ann Oakley, one of the first feminist scholars to use the concept of gender, stated that 'gender' is a cultural matter, referring to the social classification of men and women into "masculine" and "feminine" categories (Oakley, 1985). Hence, gender is inherently social. Oakley further stated that while sex is constant, gender varies across societies (Oakley, 1985), and it has no biological basis.

Simone de Beauvoir, the first philosopher to distinguish between sex and gender, articulated this idea in the classic work *The Second Sex*, stating, 'One is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman' (Beauvoir, 1956). Scott (1986) added that gender serves to reinforce social constructs regarding the division of roles considered appropriate due to perceived gender differences.

Discussing gender necessitates considering how it is represented in literary works. Jodelet (1989) defined representation as a form of socially developed and shared knowledge that serves a practical purpose, contributing to constructing a reality familiar to a social group. Gender representation refers to the reflected images of women or men, which is often objectionable. However, it shows how lives are valued and portrayed in the public sphere (Whelehan, 2004). In other words, the gender represented in the novel reflects what is deemed acceptable for men and women. It also describes men and women in a given context. According to Oakley (1985), being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, is as much about dress, gestures, occupation, social networks, and personality as possessing a particular set of genitalia.

III. METHODOLOGY

According to Hasjim et al. (2020), all projects require a method for data collection and analysis. Therefore, the current study used a qualitative method. Subjective strategies focus on interpreting phenomena, emphasizing the essence of their meanings (Kaharuddin & Rahmadana, 2020). In qualitative inquiry, the quality of the words and sentence structure significantly impacts the depth of analysis.

Qualitative study is exploratory by nature (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Arafah & Hasyim, 2020), providing insights into a problem or helping to develop ideas or hypotheses (Hasyim et al., 2020). To analyze the representation of sex and gender in the selected literary work, this study used a qualitative method. The data comprised words, phrases, sentences, and descriptions. As a qualitative study, no statistical methods were applied (Purwaningsih et al., 2019). Data were collected through close reading and careful interpretation of the text, with attention to specific words and sentences. The analysis was conducted using a feminist technique to identify dialogues and thoughts of male and female characters.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elizabeth Dawson Baker, author of *Princess Between Worlds*, represents gender through male and female characters. In this novel, Baker portrays the Prince and Princess travelling the world, depicting male and female characters equally, without bias or harmful stereotypes.

A. Gender Representation of Male Characters

Gender representation of male characters in literature reflects the complexities of masculinity and men's roles in society. Traditionally, male characters have been depicted through archetypes that conform to societal ideals of masculinity, emphasizing power, control, emotional restraint, and bravery. However, contemporary representations have evolved to include more diverse and nuanced portrayals, incorporating vulnerability and emotional depth. Male characters are represented through various elements, including dress, gestures, occupation, social networks, and personality.

(a). Dress

Dress expresses personal style and reflects how people conform to, challenge, or express gender roles. Historically and in contemporary settings, dress has been closely related to gender norms, and its portrayal in literature, media, and culture mirrors the intricate nature of gender identity. The association of colour with gender, particularly for men, has a significant cultural and historical context. Although colours are inherently neutral, society often assigns specific meanings. Certain colours like blue, black, grey, and brown have traditionally been associated with masculinity. This is shown in the sentence, "The man was wearing a shapeless garment that covered him from neck to feet. The blue fabric was finer than the older woman's, and he had the bearing of a man in charge when he started toward Annie and Liam" (Baker, 2016, p. 38). In this context, the man is depicted as wearing a shade of blue.

(b). Gestures

Gestures involve using the body to convey messages or emotions without words. As a component of non-verbal communication, gestures include movements of the hands, arms, head, face, and body. This is evident in the sentence, "The man with the long face shook his head" (Baker, 2016, p. 17). Shaking one's head is a universal gesture all genders use to show disapproval, opposition, or confusion. Similarly, nodding is depicted in the sentence, "When Liam nodded, Annie's uncle looked thoughtful" (Baker, 2016, p. 28). Although cultural and situational factors may influence the use of gestures, these variations are generally related to factors other than gender, like cultural norms, social settings, and

personal preferences. Therefore, gestures like shaking or nodding the head cannot be strictly associated with a particular gender.

(c). *Occupation*

Gender-related professions refer to the phenomenon where certain jobs are socially or culturally considered more suitable for, or dominantly filled by, one gender. These views are often influenced by longstanding gender stereotypes and social norms. The traditional view assumes that men and women have different characteristics and abilities.

In the novel, Baker describes a man leading the kingdom, "I have decided to hand my crown over to you when you return from your grand tour" (Baker, 2016, p. 2). Four of the seven kingdoms are governed by kings, while the leaders of the other three are not mentioned. The depiction of kings reinforces traditional gender roles by associating power with masculinity. The role of kings often reflects the belief that men are more suited for positions of authority and leadership.

The novel features guards and witches, further showing traditional gender roles. This is exemplified in the sentence, "The guard shrugged", "How should I know? He does not confide in me!" (Baker, 2016, p. 69). Guards are often depicted as embodying traits like power, control, and courage, reflecting societal stereotypes that relate physical strength and protective roles to men.

(d). *Social Networks*

Social networks involve relationships with others, and gender plays a role in portraying these relationships. Social relationships occur in various contexts, including family, friendship, work, and community, and the way males and females are depicted in these networks often reflects gender expectations.

In the novel, Baker describes the male character with positive social relationships, as seen in the line, "Then you are doubly welcome here", said the man. "You honor us with your presence at such an important point in your lives. I am King Lalidama and this is my wife, Queen Shareeza. The runaway child is our son, Prince Marco" (Baker, 2016, p. 39). The male characters are shown to be kind and gentle toward others, confirming that there are no gender stereotypes attached to the social relationships.

(e). *Personality*

Personality refers to the characteristics and behaviours that differentiate individuals. Although personality is influenced by genetics, environment, and life experiences, societal generalizations often associate certain traits with gender.

Traditionally, male personalities tend to possess traits that conform to gender norms, such as strength, leadership skills, emotional toughness, and dominance in social interactions. In the novel, male characters are depicted as responsible and capable of leadership. This is evident in the sentence, "I thought you might ask me to delay the day, but you have always been one to shoulder responsibility when asked" (Baker, 2016, p. 3).

Male characters are also portrayed as physically strong, often taking on heroic roles. This is demonstrated in the sentence, "Yes, but Liam helped me!" Annie hurried to say; He protected me when I went looking for princes and fought his brother after Gwenie woke up" (Baker, 2016, p. 19).

Male characters were shown to have kind and gentle qualities in the sentence, "Thank you!" Annie called after the retreating monster. That was very nice of him, she told Liam (Baker, 2016, p. 116). This shows that male characters possess both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities.

B. Gender Representation of Female Characters

Gender representation in female characters focuses on how women are depicted in various forms of media, including literature, particularly novels. It reflects societal views on gender roles and femininity. Although the previous section discussed gender representation in male characters, this section explores how female characters are portrayed through dress, gestures, occupation, social networks, and personality.

(a). *Dress*

The way writers describe characters' dress can show personal taste and social status and reflect gender roles or even challenge conventional gender expectations. Colour plays a significant role in expressing gender through traditional associations and symbolic uses. For example, in many cultures, pink is often associated with femininity and softness, while blue represents masculinity and strength. These colour codes are widely recognized and can be used to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes.

In *Princess Between Worlds*, Baker challenges traditional gender stereotypes associated with colour and clothing style. This is evident in the sentence, "Her gown was made of layers of brown and green, with pockets in every layer" (Baker, 2016, p. 4). Green is frequently seen as a gender-neutral colour, symbolizing nature, growth, and balance, while darker shades like brown are typically associated with masculinity.

Blue is often associated with masculinity, particularly in Western cultures, calmness, stability, and power, qualities typically admired in men. However, in this novel, Baker pairs the blue with female characters, as seen in the sentence, "He was darting across the courtyard when a young woman dressed in a rich blue, shapeless gown ran through the same doorway" (Baker, 2016, p. 38).

Other characters are depicted wearing bold colours, “Two elderly women wearing strange loose gowns made of red, yellow, and orange fabric” (Baker, 2016, p. 131). These bright colours, with no strong gendered connotations, can represent gender fluidity or non-binary identities, reflecting a blend or absence of traditional gender markers. In terms of clothing styles, all female characters wear long dresses, and none wear trousers.

(b). *Gesture*

In literature, gestures often emphasize gender differences and the social roles attached to male and female characters. Body language can show how characters react to situations, express emotions, and reflect power dynamics or tenderness associated with gender stereotypes.

Female characters are depicted in the novel using open hand gestures, implying warmth, friendliness, or a desire to bond with others. This is evident in the sentence, “Annie noticed how worried Liam looked. Placing her hand on his arm” (Baker, 2016, p. 3). This gesture conveys the motherly or caring characteristics often related to femininity.

Female characters are described with smooth and gentle movements, “She wondered whether Mara was a female, as her movements were more graceful than some of the bigger adults and her gestures more refined” (Baker, 2016, p. 53). This reflects traditional softness and femininity, where women are considered delicate, obedient, and graceful.

(c). *Occupation*

Gender representation in occupations involves how societal roles are portrayed in various professions, reflecting social norms, stereotypes, and expectations about male and female roles in the workplace. Gender associations with particular professions are often shaped by history and culture, leading to a division of labour based on gender.

In the novel, Baker presents female occupations, such as the role of a witch, “I think she’s a witch” (Baker, 2016, p. 4). The female character is portrayed as possessing the power and bravery to combat wicked witches. By depicting women in roles beyond domestic tasks, Baker describes their superpowers.

Traditional feminine roles are also portrayed, including cooking, “She is in charge of the pastries and makes the lightest cream puffs you can imagine” (Baker, 2016, p. 24). Cooking is one of the domestic duties often associated with women. Similarly, the role of a servant is described in the sentence, “Annie had a feeling that the second woman was a servant” (Baker, 2016, p. 38). The occupations of cook and servant are often related to women due to the longstanding perception of women as well-suited for domestic tasks like cooking and serving. Nevertheless, Baker challenges gender norms surrounding careers by also depicting the occupation of a witch with special abilities.

(d). *Social Networks*

The depiction of social relationships in the context of gender often reflects and shapes how gender is understood and expressed in society. In fiction, social ties can show power dynamics, social expectations, and gender roles, as well as how individuals navigate or challenge these norms.

In the novel, social networks are not intensively explored, but there are glimpses of how female characters form social relationships, as evident in the sentence, “Will you be my friend?” asked Penelope. Annie drew in a deep breath despite her now sore ribs. “I would be happy to be your friend”, she replied and coughed from the effort, making her ribs hurt more (Baker, 2016, p. 125). These conversations reflect the positive social relationships between women in the novel.

(e). *Personality*

Gender representation in personality explores how personality traits are often associated with a specific gender in society, psychology, or culture. Women are often stereotyped as more empathetic, emotional, gentle, and caring. However, traditional views of female personalities are evolving with the development of science. Baker also portrays more varied female personalities, as seen in the sentences, “Mara was not going to let her go as long as she thought Annie was a little one who needed her protection” (Baker, 2016, p. 58) and “Annie came next in order to hold on to Liam and protect him from the wizard’s magic” (Baker, 2016, p. 158). In these examples, female characters are depicted as protectors or heroes, roles typically associated with male personalities.

Women are still portrayed with traditional empathetic and emotional traits, as shown in the sentence, “Annie wanted to give her something in return. Hence, she took off a bracelet she had for years and handed it to her new friend. Annie’s eyes were as read as Mara’s when she started down the slope toward the castle” (Baker, 2016, p. 58).

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Elizabeth Dawson Baker described gender through male and female characters in the children’s novel *Princess Between Worlds*. Gender was represented by examining how the characters expressed gender through dress, gestures, occupation, social network, and personality. Based on these five aspects, Baker could describe diversity in gender roles. Therefore, this study showed that females do not always exhibit femininity, and males do not always have to be masculine. By portraying equal roles, young readers could view gender more objectively.

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