

# William Goldman's novel The Princess Bride: a study of the plot, character and th...

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## The Princess Bride Analysis

When we think about the average fairy tale, we often imagine scenes of defenseless princesses, sinister villains and prince charmings riding in on white horses. The last thing we'd expect from a fairytale is the dashing hero on his deathbed, or a villain who we kind of, sort of, almost like... A story like that would definitely make us re-evaluate our definition of the word "fantasy". But in "The Princess Bride" by William Goldman, this is the very sort of plot that is given to us: The juxtaposition of fiction and real life in the novel helps develop its themes, plots and characters.

Throughout the book, Goldman takes the clichéd impressions of his characters and plot, and subverts their preconceived patterns, giving the illusion of moving from the real world, into a fantasy one. Initially, the novel introduces us to a VERY particular heroine: the feisty, tomboy-ish, soon-to-be-princess, Buttercup. Although Buttercup is chosen by the prince to be his bride, she still loves Westley; the perfect setup for the perfect, helpless princess to be perfectly swept off her feet by the perfect prince. But instead of being the helpless princess, Buttercup becomes her own rescuer, saving herself on many occasions - all on her own. Westley, in the meanwhile is nowhere to be seen for the better half of the book. The powerful, courageous, leading hero, for most of the novel, is spent either crippled, or restrained. He has very little to do with the final rescue of Princess Buttercup. So who does save Buttercup? The two snivelling henchman of the villain, (who by the way, was eliminated in the first few chapters of the book), Inigo and Fezzik. That's right: the "bad guys" play a bigger part in the

saving of Buttercup then the prince himself. In the end, the reader even finds himself wishing for these two to have a “happily ever after” of their own. Repeatedly, this flipping of characters adds depth and singularity to the novel.

Goldman also surprises us with the plot of his novel. Over and over again, Goldman will set up a scene that appears to be a glorious one, only to promptly overturn it in the next paragraph. For example, the description in quotes of why Inigo loved his father. We are fully prepared for a picturesque, traditional image of love, war and adventure, but each time Goldman adds a twist to throw us off balance. He reminds us that this is not a typical story and that we ought to recognize that since we know so well the elements of conventional fantasy. Another surprise that comes with this novel? The author, as well as the characters, is fictional. Goldman claims to be, but retelling a tale, originally written by a man who we know only as “S. Morgenstern.” We know nothing about him other than he’s the one from whom Goldman extracts the original version. The author also frequently interrupts the telling of the story to input his own opinions and reminders to the reader. At the end of the novel, for example, Inigo, Fezzik, Buttercup and Westley ride off on white horses. But that’s not all Goldman has to say about it. He takes a few paragraphs to tell us of all the possible dangers the groups might come across before arriving to safety, and reminds us that things rarely ever work out the way we want them to.

This novel is an affectionate and humorous spoof on fairy tales and swashbuckling romances. Goldman through his telling of the story shows us

that heroes don't always have endless strength or make the right decisions. But in a way, he creates a more realistic story and characters, than the one-dimensional figures we find in folktales. Goldman's tone and narrative structure challenges us constantly to reassess our expectations of literature, to prepare our imaginations, for tangents, for silliness, for surprises.