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A Portrayal of Physical Disability in Brigid Kemmerer's Novel



A Curse So Dark and Lonely

ABSTRACT

The present study uses psychoanalytic and critical disability theories to analyze Kemmerer's novel 'A Curse So Dark and Lonely'. It tries to explore how a healthy author depicts the suffering of a disabled character and whether she can depict the protagonist's suffering physically and psychologically. How does the protagonist differ from many other disabled characters? The study concludes that no matter how the healthy author does, she cannot depict the deep psychological struggle the disabled protagonist endures like disabled authors

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تصوير الإعاقة الجسدية في رواية بريجيد كيميرر لعنة مظلمة ووحيدة

الباحثة سلوان عبد الرضا ضماد/ جامعة واسط كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

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الخلاصة

تتناول الدراسة الحالية رواية بريجيد كيميرر "لعنة قاتمة و موحشة جدا" باعتماد نظريتي التحليل النفسي و الإعاقة النقدية. تحاول الدراسة الكشف عن كيفية تصوير كاتبة غير معاقة لمعاناة شخصية معاقة. هل تستطيع تصوير المعاناة الجسدية و النفسية؟ كيف اختلفت البطلة عن غيرها من الشخصيات المعاقة؟. خلصت الدراسة الى ان الكاتبة التي ليس لديها إعاقة لا تتمكن من تصوير المعاناة النفسية العميقة التي عانت منها بطلتها مثل الكُتَّاب المعاقين مهما اجهدت نفسها. الكلمات المفتاحية: الشلل الدماغي, علم النفس الحيوي (السيكوبيو غرافي)

The American novelist Brigid Kemmerer (January 11, 1978) was born in Omaha, Nebraska. Before becoming a full-time writer, Kemmerer worked in the finance industry.

She is the New York Times best-selling writer of alluring and dark adult novels like Letters to the Lost (Bloomsbury), More than We Can Talk, and A Curse So Dark and Lonely (an adaptation of Beauty and the Beast).

She is also the writer of paranormal young adults' (YA's) stories like *Thicker than Water* (Kensington) and *The Elemental Series* (Kemmerer, 2019a).

Many of Kemmerer's literary works are distributed into series. The first series to enlist is called *The Elemental Series*. It encompasses *Elemental* (2012), *Storm* (2012), *Spark* (2012), *Fearless* (2012), *Breathless* (2013), *Spirit* (2013), *Sacrifice* (2014), and *Secret* (2014). The second series is called *Letters to the Lost*. It encompasses *Letters to the Lost* (2017), and *More Than We Can Tell* (2018). The *Cursebreakers Series* is the third series of Kemmerer and it contains *A Curse So Dark and Lonely* (2019), *A Heart So Fierce and Broken* (2020), and *A Vow So Bold and Deadly* (2021). The fourth series is called *Defy the Night*. It includes *Defy the Night* (2021) and *Defend the Dawn* (2022).

Forging Silver into Stars is the name of the last series. It consists of only *Forging Silver into Stars* (2022). Standalone novels include works like *Thicker Than Water* (2015) and *Call It What You Want*. (Brigid Kemmerer, 2022; Brigid Kemmerer - Book Series in Order, 2019).

1.2 Some Impacts of Kemmerer's Psychobiography on the Novel

Many events and circumstances in Kemmerer's life have an impact on her novel *A Curse So Dark and Lonely*. These circumstances form a cornerstone on which the novelist relies her narration. She has transferred her love of fairy tales especially those of Disney into this novel. She writes fantasy novels to escape her home which she describes as so noisy, smelly, loud, and crazy. (Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020).

There is a similarity in locations between the author and her heroes; Kemmerer places Emberfall—the location of King Rhen's palace—near the

seashore, and she resides in Baltimore, Maryland, on the East Coast of the United States. It is an hour away from Washington DC where her heroine (Harper) lives. Kemmerer re-narrates the story of Beauty and the Beast because it has been her favorite novel since her childhood. What she especially likes about Beauty and the Beast is that a girl falls in love with someone not for his physical appearance, but for who he is.

This provides a solid message that true love is above any background whether racial, political, regional, or so on. This is genuine if it is compared to the materialistic culture of the society where Kemmerer lives, which focuses on people's appearance and what they present to the outside world (Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020).

Creating this novel, Kemmerer revises the situation. Harper is not pretty and has cerebral palsy (a disability) while Prince Rhen (originally Vincent Aldrhen) is the Byronic hero who is handsome, attractive to women, chivalric, and usually gets what he wants. Neither the materialistic features of Prince Rhen make Harper falls in his love, nor does hers prevent him from loving her. Kemmerer excelled in creating a kind of love beyond materiality.

Kemmerer's desire and interest in exploring unique and hidden things about stories makes her retell Beauty and the Beast. She wants to know more about things that are not explained in the story. For example, she wonders about what has happened to the royal family, what other people in the kingdom think about it, and what they do to survive.

To fulfill this desire, Emberfall comes together. So, when Kemmerer starts to create the story, she lets Harper outside the castle to see what is going on there and what people think about this issue (Maxwell, 2019; Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020). She also wants to explore how can the prince look beyond his curse

and how to fix it. For Kemmerer, it is a matter of looking at the medieval age through a modern eye (Mealy, 2019).

The character of Harper challenges the stereotype-able heroines found in fairy tale romance. She is a curious unafraid girl with cerebral palsy. Kemmerer wants Prince Rhen to see that all that he has is cursed by magic; he, his castle, and his lavish life including replenishing food as well as Harper's disability - though it is not an obvious curse. She has a limp on her left leg that weakens her left side (Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020).

Kemmerer is not suffering from cerebral palsy, but her childhood friend, Erin Canner does. Canner reads all her books, joking with her, Canner wonders if Kemmerer is going to make her a heroine in a literary work. So, *A Curse So Dark and Lonely* gives Kemmerer a chance to achieve Canner's desire. To add a more authentic experience in writing, she starts to get out of only her friend's experience searching for information about cerebral palsy to put them into her character Harper. She starts interviewing more people who have cerebral palsy (CP). She also talks to doctors and other medical professionals to ensure that she is using accurate medical information (Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020).

She may provide accurate facts about it, but looking at online reviews of some readers of this novel, readers with CP are majorly disappointed because their sufferings are not portrayed as they wish. Yet, through narration, Kemmerer exposes that the condition of CP varies between patients. Harper resembles one of several conditions of CP.

In addition to this, she has endured several surgeries to fix it. Kemmerer notices that she has not seen CP in young adult novels. So, this pushes her to

write about it (Maxwell, 2019). She wants it to be normal to have a character who is not like the stereotypical perfect heroine (Bhatti & Jakatdar, 2020).

The novel is about Prince Rhen, heir to the throne of Emberfall, who is cursed by an enchantress called Lilith. To break it, he should make a girl fall in his love so that he can save his kingdom from the vicious beast. If he fails, the season will restart for him and his castle, and he must try again with another girl. Whenever Rhen fails, he turns into a beast killing his people unconsciously.

In this way, he has killed his parents, sisters, guards, and many other people. Some of his men have escaped him. Grey, the guard commander, is the only one left with Rhen. The novel opens after the curse in nearly 300 seasons.

On his 18th birthday anniversary, Prince Rhen orders his guard commander Grey to go and fetch him another lady.

Grey has only one hour when a veil enables him to travel from his world to Earth. He tries to kidnap a lady from Washington DC. Harper, a girl with a limp who is watching for her brother, intrudes to save the girl. Instead, Grey kidnaps Harper despite she fights him wildly. Harper finds herself in front of Prince Rhen in a very lavish castle.

She wants to escape because she is thinking of her dying mother and her brother who is chased by a gang to whom her father is indebted. Her brother (Jake) is doing some illegal things for the gang to keep his family safe. Lilith appears and tells Prince Rhen that Harper is his last chance, if he fails he will become a monster forever.

When Harper tries to escape, she meets people from the kingdom and knows about the dangers surrounding it. People suffer from poverty and threats of

invasion from another kingdom besides their fear of the vicious monster. Rumors are set everywhere about the death of the royal family. Harper, Prince Rhen, and Grey defend the lives of some people, help them, and offer them money and food.

Harper agrees to help Rhen settle down conditions inside his kingdom. She pretends to be the princess of DC and her father, the king, will make an alliance with Emberfall. He will send his army to protect Emberfall from the attacks of the monster as well as the army of Karis Lauran queen of Syhl Shallow. In return, Rhen will arrange for her a meeting with Lilith because she wishes that Lilith will send her home.

She becomes astonished by Lilith's power and viciousness; she tortures Prince Rhen and cuts Harper's cheek with a dagger.

Over time, She starts to sympathize with him and a kind of trust starts between them. Then, he becomes so busy rebuilding his new army with the help of Grey. He is no longer in need of her except for a few times when they go to some cities to gain the trust of people and encourage people to work for the good of Emberfall. They seem to achieve success in their duty, however, they face many misfortunes.

When the time for the prince to transform into a monster approaches, Lilith enables Grey to go through the veil whenever he likes. The prince orders Grey to take Harper back home because she wants to stand by her family. Scales start to form on the prince's body as a mark for becoming a monster. She hands Jake a satchel of treasure - Rhen gave her earlier. Jack gives it to the gang. Harper's mother dies and Grey comes to take Harper though he is bleeding. Doctor Noah, Jake, and Harper save Grey's life. From his side, Grey tells Harper about the news. Seeking more money, the gang members come

again, but Grey takes Harper and the couple to Emberfall. Working together, Emberfall is saved.

1.3 The Disabled Protagonist Harper

Besides Rhen, Harper is the protagonist of this novel. Despite having (CP), which affects the left part of her body causing her limp and hard conditions, she does impressive things throughout the novel. She is a teenager whose father has gone and no more details are given about him. She lives in a flat with her brother and mother who is dying of cancer. To prevent possible harm the gang can cause, her brother Jake has to deal with some illegal issues. Their father is indebted to the gang which keeps teasing his family. Harper has to play the role of a watcher for her brother to keep him as well as herself safe from the cops.

After leaving her school, Harper feels that nobody at school is caring about "her absence during her senior year, "I sure don't have any friends who'll miss me" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 4). Therefore, when she is in Emberfall, she does not miss anybody except her family and she does not regret missing school. This issue is presented deliberately by Kemmerer to show Harper's alienation caused by her disability and family conditions. This also exposes Harper's missing such feelings. She regrets (though implicitly) not having someone who can love and care about her. Someone who misses her and asks about her absence. However, she is determined enough to bury this feeling of alienation in her unconsciousness to overcome it eventually.

Studies show that teenagers who have close friendships are happier due to feeling unique. They are more assertive and tend to have higher self-esteem (Sandoiu, 2017). Therefore, Harper - who has no friends and is devaluated by her brother because of her limp - has no self-esteem. She keeps silent about

this, especially when he talks about the dangers he has to endure for the sake of their family while in Emberfall, she no longer submits to anyone, She thinks, “I’d forgotten this. How I could never solve anything before. How I was something to be shoved into back rooms or left playing lookout in the alley because I never had anything to offer” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 297). She rebels against this devaluation when the environment becomes suitable for that or at least when she decides not to submit to her kidnappers. This decision awakens her consciousness and she wonders how she has submitted once to others. This is a moment of epiphany where she realizes her oppressed soul that has been buried once by her complaining brother as well as circumstances. She realizes that she is more than to be burdened with her disability, which is not a real disability. She can offer and do many things that many non-disabled people cannot do including Prince Rhen, Commander Grey, and her brother. In this sense, she is not disabled because her disability does not affect, or restrict her abilities to achieve her goals and satisfy her desires. With this, she starts to evaluate herself as well as her abilities. Consequently, she also forced others to evaluate her to the extent they believed her to be a real princess descending from a royal family. Prince Rhen treats her with respect using formal language and wonders on several occasions about her royalty. People of Emberfall also call her the princess.

Harper has a strong and confident character that always impresses the prince. He thinks that despite her limp, “she's so strong-willed, so certain of herself, that I expect her to move with a grace and assurance that matches her temperament. [...] Harper speaks in a manner that leaves no room for disrespect. Like a ruler, not a subject” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 85). In Emberfall, Harper shows features that do not match hers in Washington DC.

She is no longer submitted to anyone's will and consequently can show her real personality that has been hidden once before. She revolts against Rhen's domination and refuses to submit to his will even if this submission can break his curse.

Harper refuses to show any hint of weakness before Rhen though sometimes he feels that she needs his help, "she must be stiff and sore, because her limp is more pronounced now than it was earlier, and she moves slowly, grasping the railing to climb the stairs" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 85). Despite she is exhausted and can move hardly, she refuses the help of Prince Rhen because she dislikes showing any hint of submission. She prefers to limp and cling to the rails of the stairs to get his help.

She is stubborn and determined not to belong to Emberfall, insisting on going back home and refusing the lavish royal life with Prince Rhen. He cannot buy her love with all the materialistic things he can offer nor she shows interest in them. Having a disability does not form a weakness for her, nor make her a cheap girl who clings to any chance to have love and wealth. She sees a carnage-like scene where blood covers a room. She gets panicked and Prince Rhen holds her because she is about to pass out. She asks him to put her down and he does. She says: "I can walk." I take hold of the banister and step down. My fingers shake from leftover adrenaline, and I feel twitchy and unstable" (Kemmerer, 2019b, P. 92). Despite she is panicked from the horrible scene and is about to die, she refuses his help and eventually, his attempts to get her affection and love.

Harper keeps in her consideration that she will not fall for Prince Rhen nor will forgive him for kidnapping her. Consequently, she oppresses her affection towards Rhen that is unconsciously raised by sweet memories of her

father, “I could close my eyes and pretend I’m a little girl again before our lives turned to crap, swept up in my father’s arms, inhaling his scent just like this. But I’m not. And this is Rhen” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 93). This also exposes her oppressed wish to see her father and rejoin her family. She refuses a sweet memory of her father only because it is ignited by Prince Rhen despite she sometimes recalls such memories and cries for missing her family.

Harper has two kinds of memories to recall when she sits alone in her room in Ironrose castle; the first is a conscious one that is related to her family, her longings for them, and her worry about them, but soon she imagines what can happen if the cops catch her brother. Who is going to take care of her sick mother? So they hurt her eventually.

These images expose her care, love, and longing for her family. She starts to cry once these images come to her. So, despite the solid character she shows to Prince Rhen, she hides the passionate girl who longs for family warmth. She does not get used to and refuses to get used to being away from her family.

Secondly; the unconscious memories visit her as she is alone even though she always tries to suppress them. They are related to Emberfall like, “images from the blood-soaked room” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 113). She also thinks about the humble people of Emberfall and the evil people of Syhle Shallow who are threatening Emberfall. Unconscious memories expose Harper’s care about certain things she dislikes to expose to others, especially the prince.

While her brother used to devalue her, Prince Rhen did not. She expresses her appreciation to Rhen for this. He is, “not making me feel like an idiot because I can’t dance [...] didn’t make me feel like an idiot for asking you [Rhen] to show me how to shoot an arrow.” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 236).

Hence, Kemmerer gives justification for why Prince Rhen treats her in this way when he says: “You have convinced me you can do anything” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p.236). This is an important issue for Kemmerer to focus on. Despite her disability, Harper is treated in the way she allows others to. Her brother dominates her because she allows him to, while Prince Rhen respects, appreciates, and admires her so much because her actions motivate him to do so.

Despite her disability, Harper gives people a brighter idea about rulers; She is with people, helping them, and confesses her mistakes on many occasions though it brings her tiredness, “I stumble in the mud and almost drop it myself. But the man catches the other side, and together, we heave it over the side of the wagon, then go back for the others” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 106). She helps the man because she has crushed his wagon with her horse. So, she stumbles in mud to help him reload his things neglecting her disability and that people consider her a princess.

In addition to that, Harper has many good features to make many people love her and look at her soul rather than her physical appearance. She is not the kind of pretty and attractive lady.

She also has a defective foot due to her cerebral palsy. Prince Rhen always thinks about the positive features she has that many non-disabled people lack. The prince thinks that:

She has fallen into the role of a princess better than I could have anticipated. She is compassionate and kind to everyone she meets, a direct contrast to the royal family of Ironrose in the past.

My sisters would have closed themselves away in the castle, but Harper is always with my people, always listening, always learning. Determined to be independent, she insists on training with the soldiers, throwing herself into their routines without hesitation. They believe her limp is the result of a war injury, but Harper is quick to correct them, “I was born this way,” she’ll snap, “and I’m going to die this way, so teach me to work around it.”

They love her for it (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 275).

Harper is not the kind of girl who weeps about her physical disability nor tries to hide it due to a feeling of shame. Above all the mentioned good features she has, her admittance and not feeling shame to say that she was born with a defective foot exposes an unexpectedly vivid kind of personality that she gives lessons to others including Prince Rhen. People, who believe that her leg’s defection is due to war, love her for this frank declaration. When Karis Laurant, the queen of Sylhe Shallow tries to devaluate Harper and says to Rhen:

“I have heard of Princess Harper and the soldiers she promises to bring. The invasion this crippled princess hopes to subvert”, (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 311). Harper proves that disabled people can do more than many non-disabled people can do. It is just a matter of will. This way she helps defeat Karis Laurant’s army.

People’s love for Harper and their belief that she is a princess coming from another kingdom to make an alliance and save Emberfall, motivates her to work for their sake. This issue also distracts her from keeping on remembering her family and crying for them. She thinks that, at least, she can help them if she cannot help her family. So, this repressed desire to save her family turns to saving the people of Emberfall despite her revolt against Rhen and refusing to submit to his wishes. She is also independent, which provides an

unexpected image of a young girl with a disability because such a girl is expected to be dependent most of the time. Neglecting all about her physical disability, Harper starts a kind of military training day and night. She is transferred from a girl who cannot dance because of her disability into a warrior. This exposes her gradual maturity as well as attracts Rhen's admiration. He thinks that:

At night, when the soldiers retire, she seeks out Grey—or more often now, Zo. They throw knives until she has mastered her aim. They spar with daggers or fists or both at once. When her guards are not available, she brings me a quiver and bow and says, “Come on. Show me how to shoot.” Muscle has begun to form on her frame, a warrior replacing the skinny girl who appeared in my drawing room so many weeks ago (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 275).

Her love for the people of Ironrose motivates her and she feels that she is responsible for them, so she never lets them down. Moreover, Rhen admires how much she loves and cares about her family. He thinks, “She cares for her brother, how deep his worry runs for her—likely an equal depth to that of my feelings of guilt about trapping her [...] She tells me about her mother, and the illness ravaging her body” (Kemmerer 2019b, pp. 275-276). Her love and care for her family is not a weakness, but something powerful that makes Prince Rhen feel guilty for trapping her in his kingdom for the sake of his benefit, though it leads to the benefit of Emberfall. Her love also makes him forget his selfishness and think about others' benefits away from his. According to the biomedical model, Harper is the kind of influential character with a disability who helps to develop the protagonist's (Prince Rhen's) personality, which leads to his maturity more than before in the same way he helps her through the reversal twist.

1.4.1 The Health Condition of Harper

Harper expresses Kemmerer's intended meaning of CP and how it affects her body. She has it because something went wrong when she was born. She explains, "The cord was wrapped around my neck, and I got stuck in the birth canal. I didn't get enough air. It causes problems in the brain. Some muscles don't develop the right way" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 61). She also says that the impact of CP varies among patients.

Therefore, "some people can't walk, or they can't speak, or they have to use a wheelchair" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 61). She considers herself to be lucky because she disposes of much of its effects due to the many surgeries she has had to correct her left foot since her childhood. Anyhow, still, she has trouble with balance and she walks with a limp.

Despite her visible disability, Harper is still optimistic about her disability and "the repressed emotions she once had, no longer affect her. Again this proves her maturity where she creates new positive perspectives out of her disability.

Going back to the beginning of the novel, Harper's complaints about the oppression and devaluation she gets due to her disability, "I'm not quick, and I'm not strong. Playing lookout is the only way he'll let me help. So now, when he [her brother] needs to talk about these near-atrocities, I keep my mouth shut. I can't fight, but I can listen" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 5). Her disability prevents her from doing many things; therefore, she has to repress the words inside her and keep listening only. Because of her CP, She can only help her brother by looking out. Harper respects her brother's sacrifices and keeps silent while listening to him, but she also risks herself by watching out. She is also so smart that she always keeps herself safe from the cops' sight. In addition to this, she helps to release the lady that Grey tries to kidnap for

Prince Rhen. These actions prove that she has a great deal of courage and that her defective foot does not form a disability for her; She can always overcome what she faces.

In addition to that, the previous quotation of Harper shows her repressed wish to change; she always listens to others rather than fights because she thinks that she cannot do more than this. Such belief- created by her brother- is refuted when she fights Grey as he kidnaps a girl, and then when he kidnaps her. In Emberfall, she reversed this binomial. She makes all people (including royalty) listen to her while she speaks. She learns how to fight and become strong rather than a weak skinny girl. What others see as a weakness in her becomes a motivator for her to be stronger over time. The supposed weakness is instilled by her brother and society whereas, in Emberfall, her belief in herself creates new perspectives for her. This belief also finds its way through other people where their belief in her exceeds her belief in herself.

Like most people who have a mundane vision toward others, Prince Rhen describes Harper's movement from first sight as if she is not worthy of love: "Her movement is labored and clumsy [...]. She gets a hand on the wall and staggers to her feet." (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 10). Harper's disability is another obstacle, he always gets charming ladies, and he is also a very handsome prince. Yet, falling in love with her proves that love is beyond her appearance, her disability, and any other obstacles.

When Harper tries to escape the castle for the first time, she challenges her left foot which she describes as, "clumsy and about to give way, but I mentally threaten to cut it off if it doesn't get me out of here. It listens." (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 14) Furthermore, she struggles to keep herself moving despite the defect of her left foot, "my left foot dragging and begging for a break. I

stumble through the doorway, slipping a little in my damp socks” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 16). This is one of many situations where Harper challenges her disability determining to fulfill what she decides to do. She is getting more strength alongside the novel whenever she faces the misfortune of her strong personality. She addresses her left foot as if it is a conscious human being. This personification is another proof of Harper’s strong will and determination. She can do what she wants despite the obstacles. She submits conditions to her strong will.

Addressing her leg, Harper’s threat is intended for all of her body (synecdoche). She does not allow any hint of weakness, though she struggles to bear the pain and move. When her leg listens to her threats, all of her body listens, and no more pain to complain about it.

مجلة لارك للفلسفة واللسانيات والعلوم الاجتماعية

“Harper shows a kind of professionalism in riding horses, which is something that is not usually expected from a poor girl with cerebral palsy, “I rode horses. It had started as a therapeutic activity after all the cerebral palsy–related surgeries—but it turned into a passion” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 16). Being able to ride horses, exposes that her condition is not so bad and at the same time gives a piece of information about how she has mastered horse riding, while her leg is defective. Kemmerer refers to an important issue; chances can enable many people to discover their passions and abilities. Harper, for example, discovers her passion for horseriding through therapy for her disability. She also discovers her buried abilities, and consequently, her brighter side. Dealing with defections in proper ways is also helpful in this perspective.

Harper knows that she is not fast enough, but she never gives up as if her disability motivates her. Grey makes her fall when she holds a dagger at him, he reaches before her to catch her brother's phone. Not only because of his physical superiority and advanced strength but because of her defected left foot, which weakens her movement, he precedes her. On many occasions, She proves that she is excellent at diagnosing her weaknesses and finding solutions to them. In this case, she knows that Grey is stronger than her and that she is not fast. She can only keep struggling and that is what she does. Most importantly, she never gives up and nobody can coerce her to do what she does not like. She struggles till she achieves her desires.

On another occasion, Harper feels that her disability is the cause behind her lateness and slowness. It is when she wants to help Freya and her kids get a warmer place near the fire at night. She notices, "Evalyn is faster, coming around the corner" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 67). There is always someone to precede her, yet as usual, she keeps on doing what she has to and struggles with her disability.

Harper's disability motivates her to keep learning from situations of life, "it's freezing outside, and my left leg refuses to cooperate. I can barely get to my knees. [...] If this woman can be fierce with a kid on her hip [which is an obstacle she carries], my body can stand up" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 50). Accordingly, Harper forces her foot to work and she can stand up. She is fighting with men who are abusing a woman (Freya) burning her house and threatening to kill her sons. So, Harper neglects her falling from the horse and the disabled left foot [also an obstacle] to help Freya and her kids. Harper's disability is always portrayed to be under her will and control. She always

refuses to submit to it. Her disability listens to her orders, desires, and wishes rather than she listens to her disability.

Harper learns how to control her pains for example, when Rhen asks her about the scar on her face, Harper declares, "It's not my first scar, Rhen. I wasn't perfect before. I'll get over it" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 201). He is expecting her to be weaker and to complain after her injury, but she is not because it is not her first scar. She has undergone several surgeries to fix her cerebral palsy. So, she learns to be stronger from such incidents. Harper trusts her abilities so much. She can overcome the scars (defects) on her face in the same way she overcomes the scars of surgeries. She also overcomes her mental pains after being kidnapped. In this way, she prevents him from sympathizing with her because this is a weakness and she always wants to reflect on her strength instead. She is Harper, whether with a scar or not just like she is Harper with a limp or not. People usually care about their appearance, especially girls, they try to hide any defect, but Harper does not. This highlights Kemmerer's intention to celebrate the soul over the materialist body. Beauty is not something materialistic, it is rather spiritual.

Despite her refusal to get any kind of help from Rhen, sometimes Harper asks it kindly from simple people like the one-handed man, "If you wouldn't mind me using the back of your wagon to get on my horse" (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 106).

She asks because she needs his help due to her disability, "it's still a feat of strength and balance, and I always doubt my body. It takes my contracted muscles a moment to ease back into the saddle." (Kemmerer, 2019b, pp. 106

- 107) She cannot climb the back of the horse easily because of her disability; therefore, the wagon helps her to climb it.

When Rhen asks Harper to play the role of the princess to save his kingdom, she agrees to save his people, but she wonders whether her disability may become an obstacle. Rhen exposes his trust in her intelligence and abilities, “while your weakness may be a disadvantage in some ways, it is an advantage in others. One I think you could use to your benefit” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 165). Thus, he is expecting her smartness to benefit from her disability. This expectation also proves that he gets used to her wisdom and that her disability never shakes her at any rate. Though she always turns her defects to her benefit, it is wise to inquire before the prince about such issues because she is not a real princess.

مجلة لارك للفلسفة واللغات والعلوم الاجتماعية

“When Rhen asks Harper if she wishes to dance, she refuses, “Even if it were appropriate, I can barely walk without limping. You think I can glide around a dance floor? I’ve got the mark of one failure on my cheek. I don’t need to give anyone more evidence.” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 229) Rhen complains that he is not doing so to humiliate her, but she thinks about her public image, “you think the people are going to see me as a fierce warrior queen when I fall on my face?” (Kemmerer, 2019b, p. 229)

She has more reasons, “I’m not going to be good at it [dancing]. When I was younger, my physical therapist recommended ballet to help stretch my muscles and improve balance—but I hated it.

I was terrible” (Kemmerer, 2019, p. 232). Harper hates what she cannot master or what gives others an impression of her weakness. She wants to look like a

strong fierce warrior lady, not a trembling one. She refuses to show any hint of weakness before anyone. She wants to perform her task, as a princess, perfectly.

Conclusion

A Curse so Dark and Lonely is not a novel intended majorly to be written about disability or to portray a disabled heroine. It is a retelling of Beauty and the Beast. To make a difference a disability is added. Therefore, there is no deep or clear focus on disability or the inner suffering that disabled individuals normally endure. Instead, Kemmerer suggests a kind of disability where it becomes a source of strength rather than suffering and misery.

The description and portrayal are not that deep compared with many novels written by disabled authors. The author is not motivated like many disabled authors who reflect their disability through their texts. She cannot reflect on what she does not suffer from in the same way as disabled people have portrayed and reflected on their pains, struggles, and experiences (psychobiography). Furthermore, there is no clear psychological impact of disability to be found on Harper except her brother's devaluation, which makes her submit to him before her kidnapping.

The author makes Harper ride horses. In this way, she eliminates Harper's suffering by moving. Instead of focusing on disability, Kemmerer shows the normal feminine reactions that Harper has. For example, when some people fight her, Grey, and Prince Rhen, Harper does not show any struggle caused by her disability, instead, she shows only panic of blood like any non-disabled

girl may. Any reader of the novel will forget that Harper is disabled while reading the novel except for some references here and there that do not resemble a real struggle caused by disability.

Accordingly, many disabled readers (especially those who suffer from cerebral palsy) show their dissatisfaction with the novel through many websites. They keep searching for the reflection of their suffering, but cannot find it. Non-disabled readers on the other hand show their approval and admiration with the narration of the novel. A wound does not harm anyone except the one who has it.

At the end of the novel, Kemmerer gives a note stating that CP affects each individual differently. It is part of Harper`s daily life and Kemmerer wants to create a girl who is resilient, strong, and capable who is, “not in spite of any physical challenges she might face, but in addition to them [...] Harper’s experience may not be reflective of all people with CP, but hopefully, her determination and tenacity will be relatable to everyone.” (Kemmerer, 2019, p. 397) The word everyone refers to both sects; people with disabilities and non-disabled people. This again asserts readers’ perception of the novel.

Kemmerer highlights the concept of socially constructed views, which most of the time, result from how people view and believe themselves to be and vice versa. When Harper believes that she is weak, others believe that she is weak. When she rebels against this and shows her buried strength, others start to feel and believe it. At the same time, Harper's belief is a result of the social view. When others, like her brother, tell her that she is weak, this affects her and she believes in it. When others, like Prince Rhen, see her strength, her buried courage appears.

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