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## Princess

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# Princess

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *Princess* (2014) directed by Tali Shalom Ezer.

## **Author Notes**

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



*Princess*

(2014)

Directed by Tali Shalom Ezer

*Princess* is a coming-of-age story but not within the conventional bounds of budding sexuality and identity formation we often expect to find in such films. Adar (Shira Haas) is a twelve-year old girl living with her mother (Alma) and her much younger step-father (Michael) in Tel Aviv, Israel. Although Adar is budding into young adulthood, she often acts like a young child, climbing into bed with her mother and Michael, spending lazy days in bed, not going to school and rough-housing with Michael. But there is an underlying sense of dread, as we see Michael try to shape Adar in particular ways – he touches her too intimately, treats her much like a young boy, and calls her “Prince”, insinuating she’s a boy rather than a girl.

As the movie progresses, we see Alma view her daughter differently, as if she’s becoming jealous of her and her relationship with Michael. Adar voices her internal angst when

she states “I wish I were dead.” No one particularly pays attention to Adar’s internal turmoil, and she strolls the streets looking for connection. She encounters a young boy, slightly older than her, but amazingly, dressed the same as her, who acts and looks much like her older doppelganger. Alan (Adar Zohar-Hanetz) is homeless and so Adar brings him home. At this point, we see the dynamics of the family shift, as Michael has now found a true Prince in this young male.

The intertwining characters of Adar and this young man culminate and mingle into one person; after Michael sexually assaults Adar, she wakes up and assumes the gender identity of a boy, a boy who can fight back against Michael and his predation. The princess has blossomed into a prince, and we see that the prince can fight back. Adar’s evolution ends with her changing schools, from a private institution (much like her home – solitary, lonely and silent) to that of a public school, where she is free to be who she wishes to be, without fear of Michael and his sexual urges.

Although *Princess* may not an easy movie to watch given its subject matter, it allows us to examine how young girls can be shaped and groomed for malevolent purposes by the adults that surround them, who are responsible for their wellbeing but cannot see beyond their own desires to realize how damaged a young person can become when there is no guidance and security in their lives. Sometimes, just once in a while, a child can find the strength and courage within themselves to confront the horror in their lives and end the pain. This ending does not in any way make *Princess* any easier to watch. Yet the film handles the subject matter deftly, and beautifully.