

**AFTER HAPPILY EVER AFTER
STANLEY DAVID GEDZELMAN**

15 Nov 2017

One primary use of Fairy Tales, according to Bruno Betelheim (*The Uses of Enchantment*), is to help children grow up. The lessons are aided, as in dreams, by disguised messages and symbols that are transparent to any Freudian. The little princess plays with a golden ball. Only an ugly frog can retrieve it for her. What do you think the ball and frog represent? After Sleeping Beauty pricked her finger and bled, princes galore fail to penetrate the brambles that grew up around her impregnable castle until Prince Charming approaches and the brambles instantly spread wide to allow him easy entry. What do you think the blood and brambles represent? It is always the stepmothers or evil witches who compete with or suppress the beautiful and innocent daughters. Motherhood must be treated as sacrosanct.

Most fairy tale heroines and their anonymous princes are still teenagers when the fairy tale ends. The remainder of their lives is summed up by the three words, “happily ever after.” Dare I assert that the words imply there are no adventures left for us in our long adult lives (which admittedly were much shorter in the good old days).

These three weighty words are portentous, indeed, for if, in fact, fairy tales do help children grow up, first, they lie, and second, they do not encourage children to welcome adulthood, given the exceeding dim picture they paint of it. Most fairy tale adults are portrayed as miserable. Most of the adult women, aside from the occasional fairy godmother, are evil stepmothers or witches; most of the adult men are harried husbands and stupid, feckless fathers. Poverty and creditors hound almost all of them.

To test the validity of “happily ever after” I did a little research about the later lives of our heroines, and whenever you do a little research it is amazing what turns up.

Here are some sad statistics. Only 7% of the heroines got to the 6th grade; 74% were illiterate. Some 87% got divorced or were abandoned in their 20’s. Of these rejected women, 40% worked in domestic services, 25%, in fast food, and the rest wound up on welfare.

Individual cases reveal even greater pathos.

1. Beauty returned the Beast’s cell phone ring after secretly installing an App to track him and discovered he was having affairs with her sisters.
2. Rapunzel got cancer while still in her 20’s, underwent radiation treatments followed by chemotherapy, and lost her hair.
3. Cinderella got emphysema from her years cleaning the fireplace.
4. Snow White had septuplet dwarfs. All were imprisoned for a botched jewelry heist.
5. Hansel and Gretel had carnal relations and were burned at the stake.

These discoveries broke my heart. Now, I don’t know what fairy tales I can in good conscience tell my delicate granddaughters.

So, I certainly cannot live happily ever after. Can you?