

On Fairy Tales

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Once upon a time, there was a child waiting in bed with a torn and mouldy book, scrolling through the pages filled with adventures, romance and magic. Fairy tales have lived through the years, inspiring both children and adults. Since the old feudal days, fairy tales have been traditionally passed on as oral stories, mainly for children to stay away from the dark and mysterious forests; nowadays though, they are so fondly loved that they exist in the form of books, television programmes and even motion pictures. They are a money-making machine exploited by everyone who wishes to earn a living on them (especially costume sellers on everyone's favourite day –Halloween). Children are exposed to fairy tales since they are born for many of those stories have been adapted for readers of all ages. Originally, fairy tales were not really suitable for toddlers, they were, violent and gruesome, and, in some cases, did not even have happy endings. In spite of this, they have been capable of opening the unexplored world of imagination. People tend to believe that fairy tales are perfect; however, truth be told, they are not. They are very stereotypical, and that can be seen particularly in the protagonists of these stories. Society has evolved since the appearance of the first story so it can be said that fairy tales cannot represent children of the world we now live in. Children are too smart to fall for the traditional stories they are told –monsters do not scare them anymore and they are no longer entertained by tales which fail to show the new reality of their lives.

The guileless fool, though not well appreciated, is one of the primary protagonists of fairy tales. The fool, such as Jack and his magic beans, is usually a peasant who lacks common sense but is honest in spirit. He tends to have supernatural luck, and he is also so simple that he ends up being cunning, and so clueless that he ends up being courageous. Now, this is very far-fetched. People seldom come across a couple of beans that will magically grow and transport them into a magical land full of riches. Or, in a more realistic example, people do not win the lottery every day (or ever, for that matter). Humans are very superstitious so they have several rituals both for good luck and bad luck. And although they wish with all their hearts for something to happen, the odds are not usually in their favour. This kind of narrative makes children believe that they can just wait around until something happens, which does not encourage them to go out and fight for what they truly love since no form of magic will fall from the sky into their hands to make their lives easier.

A character becomes a memorable hero only when there is a memorable villain. In fairy tales, the wicked crones are everyone's favourite antagonists, whom people love to hate. They are like exotic creatures living in the wilderness since you can find them anywhere, sometimes hiding in plain sight (even the lovely woman next-door could be a part of this species). They exist in many forms but they are more easily recognized for their

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appearance as wicked witches, green with envy, as the popular evil queens or evil stepmothers. They will often go as far as to wear the skin of a lovely old lady to fulfil their sinister plans –and, sometimes, they can turn into dragons as well. Their lives revolve around the main characters who are (surprisingly) the princesses because the old ladies are generally so fixated on them that it seems as if they had an altar set on their fireplaces with candles and pictures they can contemplate all night. This unhealthy obsessive behaviour is built upon their envy and jealousy. They live with the green-eyed monster that is constantly driving their actions. They envy the princesses' beauty and innocence, and therefore, they would do whatever it takes to make them suffer in order to achieve their goals and be eternally beautiful and young. This is an issue for modern children since all they learn is not to trust their family members and to beware of family reunions as their grandmothers or stepmothers might be evil witches in disguise who offer them candy to lure them into a trap.

Every story needs a hero, and in fairy tales, the realm of heroes has been monopolized by princes –brave, dashing men with charming smiles, flawless hair, and adventurous souls. None the less, princes have a reputation for being on the hunt of princesses. They always act as if they had a device similar to a GPS, activated to show them the coordinates where they can find the nearest damsels in distress they can rescue since, not only do they desire to marry them, but also need to prove their worth to them and flaunt their white stallions and mighty castles (although they always make sure to look startled when they come across the girls wandering through the woods). This proves to be bad for modern boys because it does not reflect their reality anymore. Men do not have to be as perfect as these princes. They can allow themselves to have flaws, they can be sensitive, and they can be brave in different ways. They do not have to carry a sword to succeed; they are allowed to dream big and use their imagination as well.

When people think of fairy tales, they tend to think of princesses. Princesses are the best-known characters that can be found inhabiting the pages of classic fairytales as they are usually the protagonists of their stories. Although they can be cherished and spoiled royals or poor peasants treated cruelly, princesses usually have a dark background, a miserable childhood, until something happens to them –a curse. Princesses are known to be beautiful, with skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood, and to be pure and naïve (so they are easy to fool). They constantly fall prey to monsters or witches and they then have to wait patiently until they are rescued by Prince Charming. Of course, this is far from reality. Society has grown, so modern children and even adults do not want to read stories of princesses waiting to be saved. They want a story that reflects reality, a story where the princess can save herself, where she is not afraid of speaking her mind and fighting to save the day. Princesses are no longer flawless porcelain dolls and they should not be, as perfection does not really exist. As far as princesses are concerned, modern fairy tales have evolved so much that it is common to see, nowadays, more mature stories such as the story of a girl trying to escape the war that surrounds her by following the mysterious clues given to her by an ancient creature, or the latest tale of a

princess without a voice who gets to save her prince, who is, in fact, an ancient fish god; and that make children happy.

“And they lived happily ever after...” –or perhaps not. Most fairy tales end with those familiar words and we have heard them many times. But when we open a book of fairy tales, disappointment is all we find. In those stories, we are welcomed by all sorts of characters who live in a dreamlike world of magic, monsters, and supernatural creatures. Their stories are gripping, surprising, and even dark. The only issue is that they are somewhat stereotypical. It is an endless circle of damsels in distress saved by their Prince Charming, or peasants whose lives change overnight, and malicious old ladies trying to look more beautiful than their step-daughters. In real life, people are not like that. Since ancient times, fairy tales have been bedtime stories passed on from generation to generation. However, fairy tales had to evolve in time if they were to retain their popularity. They have followed Darwin’s theory of evolution and adapted themselves to survive in the new world. Nowadays, it would seem strange for a girl to feel like a princess awaiting her prince since little girls no longer love such stories. Instead, they admire characters that inspire and empower them. Now, princesses can wear the famous shiny steel armour into battle, and even princes do not have to be perfect. How interesting it would be if they were the ones waiting to be rescued. Fairy tales are fondly loved by children and even by adults, who do not say "no" to a little bit of magic. These stories should not be taken for granted, as magic represents hope to those who need to escape reality, and it brightens our worst days. But most importantly, magic can be powerful, for it can give us the confidence we need to face all the challenges real life throws in our way. It is up to us to keep fairy tales alive, to turn over a new page and see what new adventure awaits us.