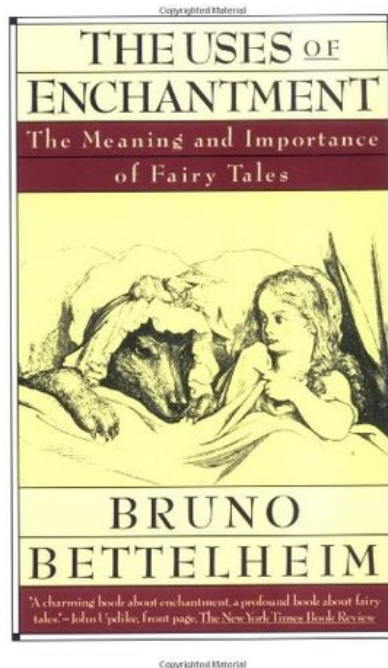




The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales

Bruno Bettelheim

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The famous child psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim, explains how fairy tales educate, support, and liberate the emotions of children.

The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales Details

Date : Published April 12th 1977 by Vintage (first published 1975)

ISBN : 9780679723936

Author : Bruno Bettelheim

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Psychology, Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Folklore, Criticism, Literary Criticism, Mythology



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Amy Rae says

~~I can't believe I'm going to start this review with a Neil Gaiman quote, which is both incredibly pretentious and apt to make you think I think far better of Gaiman than I actually do, but here goes:~~

“Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

eta: It turns out Gaiman lifted that particular line from an author I respect far more, so let's start this over again with a G.K. Chesterton quote:

Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.

Congratulations. You've now read the most interesting and relevant point of this book summarized in a ~~single sentence~~ a few sentences and can safely skip Bettelheim's 350-page tl;dr.

Look, this book has historical importance, and I won't deny that. A lot of the ideas he puts forward have become common talking-points regarding the fairy tales to which they apply. But:

- It's incredibly dated.
- The Freudian stuff ranges from "okay, I guess I kind of see what you're saying there" to weird to frankly gross.
- Bettelheim's condescending refusal to acknowledge there might be other, equally valid interpretations of these stories is wearying. Example: He pooh-poohs as shallow the idea that people might be frustrated by how many damsels in distress are featured in the most popular fairy tales. Perish the fucking *thought*, people might not see getting married and ruling a kingdom as emblematic of self-actualization, a successfully integrated personality, or whatever else you want to call it.
- For the first chunk of the book, he ignores the historical context of the stories near-completely. Once he does start using historical context in his analyses, he rarely touches on the history of the stories' use--who told them, where, why, etc.--which I think is shortsighted. (The closest he comes is pissing and moaning about how Perrault changed stories up to be permissible in the French courts--dude fucking hates Perrault, afaict, which was kind of entertaining.) From what I've learned outside this book, the differences between different groups of European fairy tales--French versus Italian versus English versus German, etc.--is in part due to the differences in where, when, and why they were told. While he's analyzing the effects on the modern child, I think acknowledging these differing histories more clearly and consistently would have

improved the book for me a *lot*.

- Occasionally, his analysis feels hypocritical--or maybe a bit like spaghetti thrown at the wall. Sometimes he states that children will understand ~preconsciously~ that X is symbolic of some aspect of sex, but other times, he's basically like, eh, they won't get this, and it doesn't feel like there's much difference except "Bettelheim needs children to work this way for the purposes of his theory."
- He generalizes about children *constantly*. I know this was written well before Perry Nodelman's "The Other: Orientalism, Colonization, and Children's Literature," but holy shit, I just wanted to WALLOP him with that until he agreed to rewrite the book with some consideration to the idea that children aren't a fucking monolith. Example: Children will naturally understand that violent ends to fairy-tale villains are just and therefore nothing to be upset about. More sensitive children who would be upset by imagery, like Cinderella's stepsisters cutting up their feet or Snow White's stepmother dancing herself to death in red-hot shoes, apparently aren't relevant to his pronouncements.
- There's little consideration given to how children's reactions to stories might differ by their location or ethnic or racial background. Places outside Europe rarely come up for more than a sentence.
- He mentioned on several occasions that in traditional Hindu medicine, mentally disturbed patients would apparently be given fairy tales upon which to meditate...but he doesn't actually cite a source for that in my edition.

Some of these issues are constraints of the times--this book was published almost forty years ago now. For what it wants to do, it succeeds. But what it wants to do is not something I'm terribly impressed with, personally.

If you like fairy tales and would like to know what the critical discussion around them is, I actually *would* recommend giving this a look, because you should know what the major talking-points are. But I can't recommend it personally, only professionally.

Nicole says

Bettelheim has totally schooled me on the phallic symbol. I have learned, in reading about how to read fairy tales, that I am woefully under-educated about penises and their manifold symbols, which there are exponentially more of than I ever could have dreamed about or hoped for.

This is an amazing and amazingly flawed book. His points about the function of fairy tales, how children and adults read them and what children get out of reading them on pre-, sub-, and conscious levels, is convincing. His understanding of the child-brain, its id, and ego, and super-ego, and how it develops, or doesn't, and the way fairy tales dis- and enchant it will make you want to go out and grab a kid and read it Cinderella--not the Disney version--the real one where the step-sisters cut their toes off to fit the glass "slipper-vagina," and not feel weird about doing it.

But. Before you grab that kid, bear in mind that all fairy tales, according to the Freud-trained Bettelheim, are pretty much Oedipal conflicts that arouse too many unmentionable sub-conflicts to mention here, that you are really reading him or her stories about fathers and daughters and mothers and sons, and their vaginas and penises. He acknowledges this, and, as such, one of his most compelling overall arguments is that fairy tales allow children to work through multiple, and very normal, psychological conflicts about relationships and their bodies (and their psychic growth and biological development) that, if addressed directly, would horrify

and stunt.

Though I'm unsure how scholastically responsible this is, one of Bettelheim's more entertaining tacks is to slip out-of-nowhere psycho-phallic associations in as evidence and, other than letting them hang there, not do much anything else with them. In reference to Cinderella's footmen (magically created of mice and rats, remember) he drops in ever so casually "Mice and rats...also arouse associations to the phallus." For me they didn't, but, now that he mentions it, they do; I can't help but think "penis" whenever rats and mice are referenced. I'm not sure if that association was always there dozing in sub-conscious dormancy, or if I just find his knack for phallic-symbol dropping especially good red herring.

To his credit, he challenges phallocentric psychoanalytic interpretations, and upends misogynist penis-envy readings as critical thematic, which is oddly un-new critic of him given that he is a new critic (wearing psychoanalytic glasses).

Upshot: all the above might be true. Problem is we have no way to verify other than to take his word for it. And a lot of those words—this says a lot more about me than it might you--I do.

Miss Ravi says

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Manybooks says

I had to read Bruno Bettelheim's [The Uses of Enchantment](#) many years ago for a university-level course I was taking in the summer (on specifically Charles Perrault's and the Grimms' fairy tale collections as pscho-drama therapy for children), and while the author does indeed have some interesting takes on what fairy tales as a literary/oral genre can mean, and that they are important for children and their psychologic development, the massive Freudianism of Bettelheim's analysis and that he basically sees sex, penis envy, oedipal

complexes and the like in the majority of the fairy tales he attempts to interpret, that does not only tend to get a bit stale after a while, it also has made me feel almost a bit dirty and a potential sexual deviant simply because I enjoy reading fairy tales and much liked having them read to me as a child. Well, to be entirely fair, I did feel pretty strange and uncomfortable mostly the first time I read The Uses of Enchantment for that course I was taking, and now, more than thirty years after that university level perusal, I no longer really feel all that massively uncomfortable, I just feel as though Bruno Bettelheim is a bit over-the-top with his Freudian fairy tale analyses and I can at least partially enjoy and also find some rather perverse humour in just how sexually charged the author seems to consider many if not most fairy tales to be and in their entirety (in other words, I find the author's one-sidedness of interpretation rather hilarious and yes also a bit sad, as The Uses of Enchantment really does not seem to show much if any possibility that there are different manners of interpretation possible and probable, that everything is somehow psychologically based on sex and on Freud's attitudes towards sex).

Now if I were just ranking The Uses of Enchantment for its text and only for its text, I would most probably be rating it with a low three stars (readable but with some definite potential issues and problems). However, after Bruno Bettelheim's death in 1990, it has been suggested (and also now been pretty much proven without a doubt) that he callously plagiarised from colleagues and that even many of his supposed academic credentials were in fact at best misrepresented and fudged a bit. Now plagiarism is often a problematic accusation in and of itself, as sometimes (and even often) an author can be accused of academic dishonesty when he or she has in fact not actively copied another person's work at all (and sometimes, plagiarism is used as a weapon when really, all that happened was that a few quotation marks or footnotes have ended up being forgotten). However, this does not unfortunately appear to have been the case with Bruno Bettelheim, as in his The Uses of Enchantment he almost verbatim uses entire passages from especially Julius E. Heuscher's A Psychiatric Study of Fairy Tales (but even worse, the latter book is NOT even mentioned in the presented bibliography of The Uses of Enchantment, something that I for one absolutely consider as NOT in any manner even remotely forgivable, for Bruno Bettelheim has not just made use of Julius Heuscher's work without showing him as a source via quotations and/or footnotes, he has also subsequently and majorly insulted him by not even listing Heuscher's work in the bibliographical section of The Uses of Enchantment).

And therefore, and for me personally, Bruno Bettelheim is absolutely and no longer in any manner an individual I can even remotely academically respect (especially since it has also been revealed that Bettelheim was often both physically and verbally abusive to the students he was teaching at his Orthogenic School), and The Uses of Enchantment will and can from now on only ever be considered a one star book for me, and one to only consider as at best rather majorly problematic (and as an example of how NOT to write an academic tome of literary or of any type of analysis).

Joanne Freitas says

Este livro é adequado quem gosta de contos de fadas e de saber os aspectos submersos sobre eles, ou seja, em que medida ajuda no desenvolvimento cognitivo da criança. Para além disso, fala de como os contos de fadas são todos pensados de uma forma inteligente e refletem na vida real das crianças.

Sahel Ebrahimi says

I really liked the book since it was so informative on the subject of fairy tales and how they can be beneficial to children. I also did not know how to start reading about fairy tales' criticism, so as a beginning it helped my initiation to the subject. I'd recommend it to people who want to write something on fairy tales and how

they can help children get over their psychological and also oedipal problem, if there are any.

Trevor says

I've been meaning to read this for years. This isn't quite what I was expecting, though. And given this was published in 1976 it seems much too Freudian than it ought to have been too. There were times when I would have been sure it was written in the 1950s.

Now, saying this is a Freudian analysis of fairy tales might be enough to put some people off. And that would be a real pity. There are few things more suited to a Freudian interpretation than literature – as a teacher of mine once said, 'better literature than people'. All the same, it would be hard to not feel confronted by some of these interpretations and readings. I read many of these to my daughters while they were growing up, but now I find it remarkable that I didn't notice any of the sexual metaphors. I'm obviously much more naïve than I pretend. Even to myself.

The short version of what this book is about is that fairy tales are a very particular genre. There is very little ambiguity to them – at least, not on the surface. Bad people are BAD. Good people are GOOD. Ugly people are UGLY and the beautiful are BEAUTIFUL. There are no shades of grey. Good people need to be rewarded, bad people need to be punished. People are kings and queens or dirt poor. Like the US at the moment, there is the 1% and then there is everyone else and bugger all in-between.

There is a supernatural quality to these stories – they are set at a 'time' when animals could still talk or long ago when magic wasn't quite so unusual. The author says this is incredibly important as it allows children to know the world depicted is not real and so is a safe place for them to engage their wish-fulfilment – in all its excess and sometimes in all its horror.

The author has very few nice things to say about Perrault, someone who 'did a Disney' to French fairy tales. This generally involved getting rid of many of the more gruesome aspects of the stories and making the morals much more 'clear'. The problem here is that the moral of the story ought to be left a bit unclear because the same story can mean very different things to the same child at different times while growing up. Although, after reading this book, I suspect that one of the major audiences for fairy tales really ought to be adults.

So, what does a Freudian analysis of a fairy tale look like? Well, you know there is going to be repressed sex and Oedipus is going to rate more than the occasional mention, things are going to look like penises and that isn't just something you might notice along the way, but be really very significant. In fact, unlike in the real world, no penis is ever going to be insignificant. And then there's going to be guilt – lots of that. And repression – let's not forget about repression. Sorry, this makes it sound like I'm being flippant about this book – in fact, when I first worked out this book was going to be a Freudian reading I was much more flippant than now that I've finished. This really was a very impressive book, but there were more than enough penises, repressed Oedipal complexes and castration fears to make a couple of dozen Woody Allen films.

I'm going to do Cinderella, only because I get to mention King Lear – which, oddly enough, Nell mentioned under my review of King Lear and I remember going, 'oh yeah' at the time, but never really thought it through as much as I ought to have – now Lear and Cinderella are intimately linked for me and not because this is even a laboured part of the book – in fact, without checking I'm not even sure if he draws out the connection or not.

One of the things I really believe is that love is about acceptance of someone else, acceptance of them FOR their scars, not despite them. And that is why love is quite rare, if not, in fact, depressingly rare.

Cinderella's mother dies and her father asks her what she would like him to bring her, she says a cutting from a tree that knocks his hat. When she gets this she puts it on her mother's grave and her tears wet it in. It grows into a great tree. But the father marries again and Cinderella is confronted with a step-mother and two siblings. The big lesson in this book is that there is no such thing as a 'step' anything, or of a monster – monsters and step-mothers are generally fathers and mothers in their Oedipal 'nasty' incarnations. So, Cinderella, on one level, is about a young girl who wants to take her mother's place in her father's affections. This needs to be repressed and so the mother can't be the 'real' mother – but an unkind and horrible replacement mother. One that sets impossible tasks and then banishes the young girl to lie in the dirt and in the filth. But this is also a story of sibling rivalry; the ugly stepsisters that have ultimate power over Cinderella and who she must degrade herself before.

What is interesting here is that Cinderella is removed from her mother's love – in fact, denied this love even when she performs, via magic, all of the tasks assigned her by her mother. Such is the jealousy of mother to a daughter seeking to take her place. And such are the obligations of growing up – that what can seem like insurmountable difficulties need to be overcome and what is a horrible refusal of parental care and love is actually motivation for growth out of childhood.

He reminds us that Cinderella is a story of Chinese origin – hence the small feet as a sign of elegance. But even if this was not the case, as he makes clear, men are big in fairy tales (it is one of the oppositions set up) and so the smaller a woman the more feminine she will appear to be. So, Cinderella's little feet mean she is more feminine than her two 'ugly' sisters, who, because everything is done for them never get the opportunity at the transformation of their lives Cinderella is presented with.

In the Brothers Grimm version of the story the ugly sisters are told by their mother to cut off either their toe or their heel to get their foot to fit into the glass slipper. The Prince is revolted when he is told by some birds sitting on the tree Cinderella planted on her mother's grave to look at their feet at the blood coming from the shoe one or other of the ugly sisters is wearing. He brings the sisters home again and finally Cinderella gets to slide her foot straight into the shoe without effort; a perfect fit.

Now, this is the bit I never realised before. The shoe is a metaphor for a vagina. I'd have never thought of this, but it is so damn obvious once you've been told. The author here says that the Prince is revolted by the blood from the ugly sisters because it makes the sexual allusions all too clear, and like Cinderella, this is a rite of passage for him too towards being prepared for sexual love. Cinderella's foot sliding in so perfectly is a kind of sign everything will be okay. Wedding rings serve much the same metaphorical purpose – a woman's finger being inserted into a circle given by her male partner in a kind of inversion of the sex act. Something else I had never really noticed before – honestly, and if you'd asked me I'd have said I had a dirty mind...

But despite there being three occasions when Cinderella meets with the Prince, she runs away each time and it is only on the third occasion that she loses the shoe and so the whole thing is set up for the climax. The point being that it is important that the Prince finds her at home – and covered in filth. It isn't enough for him to fall in love with her in her finery, but he must still love her at her most disgusting. Here is the reassurance for the child who believes they are beneath contempt and undeserving of love – that someone will love them despite it all.

The Oedipal aspects of this story are really interesting when you compare it to King Lear – a Cinderella story where Cinderella disappears after the first Act and we are forced to watch the Oedipal nightmare of a father that did not know enough that there comes a time when a father's love is really shown by allowing his daughter's love to mature – and this can only be with someone other than her father.

Now, you may well be saying, for God sake McCandless, isn't this just reading too much into a kids' story? To which the obvious answer is: no, I don't think so. In fact, more needs to be read into this story. There needs to be a feminist reading and a semiotic reading and perhaps even a Marxist or Foucaultian reading – but certainly this isn't reading too much into the story. The point is in realising that no reading is the 'true' reading of such a story – but even having said that, a reading that makes it clear that these stories are popular because for hundreds of years they have allowed people to work on their deep psychological desires must say something interesting. I mean, if these stories didn't help people confront deep truths about what it means to be human, it is really hard to see why they have remained popular for so long.

We humans are in constant danger of believing that we are monsters. We have nightmares and we catch ourselves desiring what we can barely bring ourselves to admit to. Fairy tales allow us to know that these are not signs of mental illness, but are a universal part of the human condition. We are not alone in our nightmares or in our desires. They do not make us evil or wicked or loathsome. They make us human.

What is particularly interesting in this book is when he discusses 'updated' versions of these stories or, worse still, modern tales like Tootle the Train. Tootle liked to play with flowers, but it was very important that he been kept on the right track (could a metaphor be more laboured?), and so the town's people would watch when he was about to go off the rails and in among the flowers and keep him on track by waving big red flags. A kind of aversion therapy. And finally it work a treat and Tootle grew to be a big train and never again wanted to play among the flowers. (Something that seems increasingly sad the more you think about it) Hard to do a Freudian reading of a story like that – which is part of the problem, because it is also hard to see how a story like that might help someone with the deep psychological challenges that growing up inevitably involves. Hard not to admit that if you have siblings there were times you might have wished them dead, particularly when they seemed to be favoured over you – even if you immediately rejected this wish. But fairy tales are a safe place where such guilty secrets can be played with and learnt from. Tootle leaves no room to play – it is a telling, not a showing.

I really liked this book, in fact, I found it quite confronting in places in ways I really didn't think I would. Not because of the castration myths or even that Little Red Riding Hood is really about a young girl exploring the dangerous side of her sexuality. But perhaps trying to know where one's place is within relationships is a lifetime's task and so something that is never fully finished with. If that is the case then fairy tales are always relevant to us, no matter what our age.

I've been thinking a lot about the story of Blue Beard lately after seeing The Best Offer. Bauman talks about this fairy tale in Moral Blindness – how the lesson of the story is that everyone needs somewhere to be able to hide their deepest secrets and that being prepared to accept that people – even people you love very much – should be allowed room to conceal some things from you is actually an act of true love. Our whole society rejects this, of course. Love is utter acceptance and so there can be no secrets between lovers. And although this seems to contradict what I said before about love being about acceptance of all of our scars – well, this is about love and growing and coming to understand ourselves – who said anything about consistency or making sense? You can go on and live happily ever after now.

Ana Rotea says

Au fost odat? ca niciodat? basmele, în prezent istorii demodate ?i desconsiderate pentru simplism ?i cruzime, f?r? de care îns? - zice Bruno ?i parc?-l cred - nu ne mai f?ceam noi mari. Sau, mai exact, nu ne mai f?ceam bine. Basmele se adreseaz? angoaselor ?i meschin?riilor incon?tiente din fiecare, ne educ? discret ?i f?r? cic?leal?, ne asigur? subliminal c? tot ce ni se întâmpl? (pierderi, obstacole, amenin?ri, conflicte) ?ine de

firescul vie?ii, la fel ca ?i finalul favorabil nou? - numai de nu ne-am abate atât de des de la c?rare.

Peter says

I'm about halfway through and have given up on this. It's as dry as a piece of old toast. I'm sure it was all very revolutionary when it came out, and probably influenced the likes of Marina Warner or Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood with their modern takes on fairy stories, but it all feels very dated and 60's Freudian. There are a lot more recent interesting books on both fairytale analysis and child development out there. 'The Child in the Mirror' and 'They f##k you up' on child development and 'The Seven Basic plots' and 'The Writer's Journey' (based on 'The Hero with a thousand faces' which I never managed to finish either!) on Fairytale analysis.

Amy says

Ugh. This book was a nightmare to read. It was assigned for my Storytelling class, otherwise I would've dropped it after the introduction. Bettelheim is a famous psychologist who worked a lot with children. This book details (and I mean DEATAILS) his view of the importance of fairy tales to children's subconscious. Think Freudian fairy tales. I'm serious. And so is Bettelheim. He's completely serious about his ideas, which come off as far fetched and laughable some times. Much of what he writes about is child psychology has been disproved and seems very behind-the-times. He definitely tried to prove HIS point, which was frustrating. I don't like books that leave no room for individual interpretation. Bettelheim certainly didn't hold to the Reader's Response theory of literary criticism; it was the Freud way or no way.

However, a lot of what he wrote was pretty interesting, even if I disagreed. And it wasn't so much that I disagreed with everything he had to say about fairy tales, because I DID learn a lot of fascinating things. Its more like I don't like the absoluteness of his statements, that children had basically the same subconscious needs and will get the same thing out of fairy tales that all children get. I'm sorry, but all human beings are just too complex to be able to group together like this. Yes, fairy tales are important and can teach many things in many different ways. But I'm on the side of individual reader interpretation, and what a child needs in literature, well, he or she will seek that out. You should read to a child what they love and expose them to many different types of literature.

Nandakishore Varma says

This was the first book which assured me that my enduring interest in fairy tales was scholarly and not something to be scoffed at as juvenile. Until then, I have been blissfully unaware of the psychological depth of fairy tales and how a lot of major literary works are inspired by them. Now there are fairy tale studies by the dozen, and many are fascinating; but Bettelheim is the first person who opened the door for me, therefore this book holds a special place in my heart.

I have read that, in the years since this book's publication, Bettelheim's analysis has been questioned. However, if you are new to the field of fairy tale studies, this may be the place to start. It is compulsively readable.

Jacqueline says

Anyone who needs to be convinced that the protagonist of a children's story should always solve his or her own problems without adult help should read this book. If you can get past the outdated Freudian theory, this book is a fascinating examination of fairy tale motifs and how they help children come to terms with sibling rivalry, fear of abandonment, and other anxieties children face on the road to maturity. Bettelheim compares various versions of familiar tales and discusses theme at length. He makes a compelling case for how fairy tales help children grow emotionally, and how violence in fairy tales meets certain psychological needs and should not necessarily be sanitized for the young reader.

Ugn? says

Labiausiai patiko tod?l, kad patvirtino mano poži?r?, jog viskas gerai su toms stebuklin?m pasakom, per daug ly?i? vaidmen? jos neformuoja, nebent t?vai patys tendencingai parenka, kad mergait?ms skaitysim tik apie princeses, o berniukams - tik ne apie princeses :) ?domiai parašyta knyga, skaityti buvo gana lengva.

Algirdas Brukštus says

Saldainis, o ne knyga. Privaloma literat?ra visiems jauniems t?vams ir seneliams.

Jason says

I don't think I could have taken much more of this. It has a definite entertainment value, absolutely, but come on - how can anyone take any of this stuff seriously? Part of me thinks Bettelheim is pulling our leg, he just has to be, but no - he's a straight-faced Freudian scholar of the reductive and ridiculous sort, and he's deadly serious about all of this. Here, check this out: the beanstalk in Jack and the Beanstalk represents a penis. Jack's climbing up the beanstalk represents Jack's discovery of masturbation. The giant's wife hiding Jack in the oven when the giant gets home? That's the wife putting Jack back in the womb (Jack is regressing, you see.) When Jack asks his mother to get the ax and chop down the beanstalk, that's Jack actually asking his mother to chop off his father's penis. The number three in fairy tales is always a reference to the penis with its two testicles. See? Count 'em - one, two, three. The snake in the Garden of Eden, incidentally, is also a penis. Oh, and the dwarfs in Snow White? Penises. You know why? Because, as miners, the dwarfs, and I quote directly, "skillfully penetrate into dark holes."

Okay, this is funny stuff, admittedly, and I thought I would just finish the book for some ironic purpose. But the annoying thing is, every once in a while, this crazyhead says something strangely apt. For some of the fairy tales, there clearly is an Oedipal dimension, especially when the tale involves intensely unhealthy relationships between the child protagonist and the parent of the opposite sex. And whenever Bettelheim is analyzing those tales, he seems to be on firmer ground. As the book went on, I grew fearful that I had become convinced. Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, and The Frog King are indeed about sex, and you know what? The frog in that tale being a metaphor for a penis - it actually makes a lot of sense, in context. Ghah! I know, I know. The Frog Penis. Jesus. So okay - this has some interesting and convincing analyses in

it. A few. And yes, some of this, I said SOME, might be about penises. Maybe.

But then, just as you're getting pulled into one of these readings of something, and you're starting to feel like the book is getting better, you're digging it, you're digging it, you're nodding along, all at once part of your brain clicks in and SPLASH, it hits you suddenly like a bucket of cold water, you shake your head, you take a breath, and you realize that everything you've just read, literally everything, every single word, is pure undiluted unqualified craziness. How can I have been taken in by this?? It's like I was hypnotized, like he did a Jedi mind trick, "these are all the penises you're looking for." Mice and doves all represent penises! Penises everywhere! All the penises you could ever possibly want! Wheee!

This book is an important stepping-stone on the path of fairy tale scholarship, and should be read for that reason if you're interested in the subject. Just keep your sense of humor about you, take much of what he says with a grain of salt, and you'll likely find a few gems in here. Just don't stop there - go on to other fairy tale scholars (Jack Zipes is another big one, with an entirely different approach), and find different readings of the tales. The worst, the absolute worst thing a person can do if he or she is interested in analyzing the content of fairy tales is to have this be the only book they ever read on the subject. As long as that isn't the case, it might be worth a gander, if only for a few laughs.

Adriana Scarpin says

Leia os livros de Marie-Louise von Franz. Por favor.

Cleiton says

O livro de Bettelheim, é verdadeiramente um livro surpreendente, ele mostra que os contos de fadas têm tanto sucesso entre as crianças por que representam elas mesmas, em seus incoscientes principalmente.

Mostra que as madrastas más são na verdade suas mães, a parte ruim delas, e que os conflitos edipianos são centro de várias histórias, mostra versões que eu não conhecia, mostra o contexto histórico em que os contos foram criados e em que ajudam as crianças. Por ex. em João e o Pé de Feijão é uma história masculina que ajuda os meninos a formarem sua masculinidade. Em A Bela Adormecida mostra o auge da feminilidade pra o autor e mais.

Além de mostrar com muita veemência que os contos de fadas, por mais fantasios que forem não atrapalham o desenvolvimento das crianças, muito pelo contrário, as ajudam a crescer sem traumas e a administrar seus desejos anti-sociais e egoístas, pois só expressando o que sentem de forma fantasiosas seus desejos anti-sociais, é que as crianças podem continuar a vivirem sem se culparem por tais desejos e a chegar ao dia em que se livrarão deles e crescerá.

A fantasia não é má conselheira e sim boa companhia para as crianças, pois a ajudam a entender o mundo e o que há nele, sem se envolverem em explicações que não entendem por estarem nesse momento de amadurecimento. Um ótimo livro, um livro psicanalítico, apresenta caracteres sociológicos e alguns antropológicos. Uma boa pedida, todos deveriam ler, inclusive os que são pais.

Poderia dizer mais, mas o espaço é curto.

Kaycie Hall says

I suppose this book was ground-breaking when it was first published, but honestly, I thought it focused way too much on the idea of all children having an oedipal complex and maybe not enough on how the violence and darkness in original fairy tales address something in a child's imagination (which the sugarcoated Disney tales leaving wanting).

I also disliked Bettelheim's analysis of Charles Perrault and his tales in general---to say that they're flippant and mocking is not really fair and it also shows a lack of research, given that Perrault was a man, posing as a woman (Mother Goose) and writing in a genre dominated by women---who he counted as his colleagues. Perrault did not accept the fairy tale as an equal to the classics, but of course he was a 17th century academic, and he also defended fairy tales, their writers, and the common language against other academics of his time.

While parts of this book were interesting and I agree with Bettelheim's argument as a whole, and I accept that this text is dated by now, I honestly feel that other parts, well, I could have written them myself...and without being a psychologist.

Nikki says

In terms of the psychoanalysis here, which is heavily based on Freud's work, it sounds like a lot of rubbish to me. And if you know Bettelheim's work from his work on autism, you're not entirely safe from that here — he only mentions it once or twice, but it's still jarringly wrong. Still, some of his analyses of the texts on a literary level do make sense, and his suggestions of how some people might apply their own lives in understanding and interpreting them are fascinating. As a literary work, *The Uses of Enchantment* is a bit of a classic, and if you're a first year English Lit student wondering why Red Riding Hood's signature colour signifies her coming to sexual maturity, well, it's got you covered.

Reading it now, eh. I can appreciate some of the stories he tells about the way people relate to stories, even if the psychoanalysis behind it is laughable at times. (Warning: I was raised by a psychiatrist. I haven't read Freud for myself, just absorbed a healthy disdain through my mother and what I encountered as a lit student.) Some of his comments on why fairytales endure while modern morality stories don't work, too. But overall... shrug?

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

J. Mulrooney says

Recommended for anyone who deals with children

Bettelheim was an old-fashioned Freudian psychiatrist -- the kind who talked to patients instead of drugging them -- and a Holocaust survivor. After the war, he emigrated to Chicago, where he did terrific work with children suffering from serious psychological problems.

The book uses a Freudian framework, but you don't have to believe in a literal id, ego, and superego to appreciate the insight Bettelheim brings to stories and how they are absorbed by children.

Bettelheim believes that fairy tales -- he focuses on the Grimm brothers', but any real fairy tale -- are terrifically helpful to children as they work through the problems (large and small, real or imagined) in their lives. He also believes the converse -- by depriving children of fairy tales, you deprive them of a strong resource critical to their psychological maturation. He hates the edited, tidied up, sweet versions of the tales: it's important that the evil stepmother in Cinderella be made to dance in red hot shoes until she falls down dead. "Children feel real rage, children have real experience of evil. If well-meaning people remove the rage and evil from stories, children believe they alone experience these feelings. They will grow up believing that they are monsters."

Bettelheim distinguishes between real fairy tales and other kinds of stories -- "In a fairy tale, all the characters -- the princess, the prince, the wicked stepmother, the witch, the little boy and the little girl -- are all the child hearing the story. And what happens? The child learns that his evil part will be overcome by his goodness, that his helplessness, his sundered, alienated inner princess, will find the other half he longs for, his inner prince, he learns that he may be lost and alone in the hairy forest but it is just there that he may find the stream whose waters turn his hair to gold."

A great antidote for your friends who think that fairy tales are too violent, that the witch is just misunderstood and a victim of poor communication, that the princess's helplessness is some kind of plot against women.
