

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

The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales by Bruno Bettelheim

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Plot Summary

"The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" by Bruno Bettelheim is a non-fiction work focused on analyzing fairy tales and how they play an important role in both ancient and modern society.

Bruno Bettelheim was a child psychologist and philosopher who was well known for his work with autistic children. Although Bettelheim wrongly assumed that autism was caused by neglect and the withholding of affection by the parents, particularly the mother, the author's insights into the origin and foundation of fairy tales allow the reader to explore the deeper meanings hidden inside each of these famous children's stories.

Bettelheim addresses many famous fairy tales, including "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Rapunzel," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Sleeping Beauty," "Hansel and Gretel," and "Little Red Riding Hood." Many of the tales were preliterate and were passed from generation to generation via the oral tradition. This process allowed the fairy tales to be shaped and changed to fit the audience and the times, often creating radical changes. Bettelheim states that in some cases, such as in the case of the Perrault version of "Little Red Riding Hood," the change was for the better. Perrault was known for belaboring the moral in the story and taking the fun out of the fairy tale, treating it more as a fable where the moral is blatant.

All of the fairy tales mentioned in the work have strong ties to the process of maturity including the oedipal issues a child faces as well as separation anxiety, fear, resentment, hatred, and jealousy. Bettelheim believes that the stories help children understand and cope with new and disturbing emotions that may not be addressed otherwise.

As a psychologist, Bettelheim has strong leanings toward the teachings of Sigmund Freud, a noted psychiatrist and the founding father of psychoanalysis. Freud was known for his theories on the Oedipus Complex, a series of behaviors and emotions that deal with the child's relationship with his parents regarding affection, attention, sex, and nurturing. Basically speaking, Freud believed that between ages three and five or six, a child will want to explore a relationship of a sexual nature with the parent of the opposite sex and want to kill the parent of the same sex. This theory is based on the myth of Oedipus who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother.

Also addressed by Bettelheim is the use of the id, ego, and superego in its various forms.

Overall, "The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" provides the reader with a painstakingly prepared look into the minds of children and the authors who chose to write for them.



Part 1: Chapters 1-7

Part 1: Chapters 1-7 Summary and Analysis

Part One: A Pocketful of Magic begins with Bruno Bettelheim quoting Charles Dickens on fairy tales. Dickens said: "Little Red Riding Hood was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss."

Dickens' statement backs up his belief that any child who is robbed of fairy tales suffers the loss of valuable learning experiences.

Bettelheim refers to the poet Louis MacNeice who believes that fairy tales can be more significant and have deeper roots than any novel. Fairy tales allow the child to discover his own identity and help form necessary experiences associated with character development. Fairy tales bring about the belief that no matter what happens there is always a reward as long as one does not try to avoid the struggle to get there. Also, many characters and fairy tales lead a child to believe that there is always a benevolent force that will come to his aid.

There has been a faction of parents and educators over the years who have denied children access to fairy tales because they are too violent or frivolous. If a child is allowed to experience a fairy tale, it is often a simplified version that takes away much of the significance and in turn creates "empty minded entertainment."

From a historical standpoint, a child's intellect was typically formed through experiences with the family and access to fairy tales, myths, and religious parables. The myths and religious aspects encouraged a child to form a concept of the origin and purpose of the world, and all its acceptable social ideals. In ancient times, many of the stories were derived from stories of gods and goddesses. Religious parables gave the child a view of morality, spirituality, and tradition.

Another character on which many psychological studies have been performed is Oedipus. The story of Oedipus regards a young prince who was sent away after it was predicted that he would kill his father, the King, in order to marry his mother, the Queen. For many reasons both psychological and societal, a man marrying his mother is unacceptable. For this reason, Oedipus was sent away. Many years later, Oedipus encountered his parents and, not knowing who they were, ended up killing his father and marrying his mother. This theme and its relative psychological implications, commonly termed as the Oedipus Complex, comprised a significant portion of the work of psychiatrist Dr. Sigmund Freud. Freud believed that this story and those like it illustrate the fact that no matter how one attempts to escape one's own ambivalent feelings about the role of his parents those feelings must be dealt with as the child matures.



As a general rule, fairy tales portray characters dealing with internal conflicts that are in various ways externalized in order to allow the reader or listener to identify with the issue and to develop a resolution on his own.

In many cultures, there is no clear delineation between folktales, myths, and fairy tales. This may be because the stories tend to be preliterate. In the Norse tradition, all stories are lumped together, and are called "Sagas." English and French tend to call everything "Fairy Tales" even when there are no fairies present in the story. In Germany, fairy tales are called "Murchen" and myths are referred to as "Sage."

Some fairy tales and folk stories have evolved from oral tradition and truth, while others incorporated myths and used embellishment to create a lively story. Bettelheim says that fairy tales and myths have a lot in common. In myths, the hero is someone who is introduced to the listener or reader as one to be emulated. The hero might express inner conflict through metaphor, although it may not directly express the hero's main concern. Myths tend to focus on a spiritual force, either using examples of the divine or mortals to exhibit supernatural powers. In any case, Bettelheim believes that myths are structured this way so that it everyone can relate to the hero in the story, even small children who may otherwise be made to feel a sense of inferiority.

Bettelheim discusses the fairy tale "The Fisherman and the Jinny." This is an age-old tale that tells the story of a fisherman who has caught in his net a copper pot. When the fisherman opens the pot, a Jinny (genie) emerges and instead of offering the fisherman three traditional wishes, the Jinny is angry and threatens to kill the fisherman. The fisherman must think quickly in order to save himself and taunts the Jinny by saying there is no way he could fit into such a small vessel. The Jinny falls for the trick and, after he returns to the copper pot, the fisherman slams the lid on it and tosses the pot and the Jinny back into the ocean. The story illustrates how the fisherman must use his wits in order to conquer the evil Jinny. The fisherman expected the Jinny to be grateful for being released from confinement but instead was punished for his efforts. Bettelheim relates this to a child who feels deserted. When a child is confined to his room, the initial thoughts are that he cannot wait to get out. After a while, the child becomes angry and feels deserted, much like the Jinny.

The section "Fairy Tale Versus Myth" subtitled "Optimism Versus Pessimism" discusses how Plato and Aristotle viewed myths. Both men believed that myth equaled wisdom and allowed a child to develop a true sense of humanity. Modern philosophers and psychologists tend to agree. Many also believe that childhood fairy tales eventually evolve into dreams and daydreams for adults. However, there are significant differences between childhood fairy tales and an adult's dreams. Dreams tend to be less obvious than fairy tales and may use more metaphors to express what is openly discussed in a story.

Dreams cannot be controlled by people and are typically formed on an unconscious level. The fairy tale relies on both the conscious and unconscious mind as it addresses universal human issues and typically ends with favorable solutions. Bettelheim asserts that the complete story is what makes fairy tales popular and able to last through



generations. Additionally, because the fairy tale engages the conscious and unconscious, the story is able to feed all aspects of the mind, including the id, ego, and superego. Sigmund Freud was a well-known psychoanalyst that dealt with repressed or unconscious material that existed in myths and fairy tales and how it may translate into dreams. Carl Jung was a well-known psychoanalyst who taught that the characters and events and the fairy tales will conform to archetypical psychological phenomena and suggest that the listener is searching for a higher state of self.

Another major difference between myths and fairy tales lies in the ending. In myths, the ending is almost always tragic, while fairy tales offer happily ever after. Therefore, the myth can be seen as pessimistic and the fairy tale as optimistic.

The section titled "The Three Little Pigs," subtitled "Pleasure Principle Versus Reality Principle," talks about a character's choice between pleasure and reality. For many reasons children prefer fantastic stories over realistic ones, especially when it allows them to use their imagination. The story goes that there are Three Little Pigs, who are building houses. One built a house from straw, the other from sticks and the last from bricks. The Big Bad Wolf attempts to blow down each house and is foiled only by the last house. The tale shows that the last pig, which had planned carefully to build a solid house that could withstand the huffing and puffing of the Wolf, was victorious because he took the time to make an intelligent plan. Therefore, the story relates to the child that one can be victorious if enough work and forethought is put into the plan.

Bettelheim compares "The Three Little Pigs" to Aesop's fable of "The Ant and the Grasshopper," a story about a hard-working ant who stores enough food for the winter and the grasshopper who plays all summer and is in danger of starving during the winter. While "The Three Little Pigs" allows a child to draw his own conclusions and meaning, "The Ant and the Grasshopper" has a plainly stated moral truth.

Fairy tales and myths both answer age-old questions about the purpose of the world and how one might be a part of it. While myths plainly state the answer, fairy tales allow the child to fantasize and come to his own conclusions. This may be why children prefer fairy tales.



Part 1: Chapters 8-15

Part 1: Chapters 8-15 Summary and Analysis

A child's mind tends to contain a collection of ill assorted impressions that are only partially formed. Fantasy allows the child to fill in the gaps created due to lack of pertinent information as well as understanding and maturity. Fairy tales tend to work the same way as a child's mind. In the beginning, the story tends to start out in a realistic way. A child can typically relate to this because education teaches one how to recognize a problem and develop a solution. Fairy tales tend to relay this message in a fantastic way. Bettelheim uses the story of Cinderella. Although a child may feel that his treatment is unfair or that his siblings receive preferential treatment, no one is subjected to the same circumstances as Cinderella when she is forced to wait on her evil stepsisters, do all the cleaning or sit among the ashes. Regardless of the circumstances which occur following the introduction of the problem, the process of finding a solution is never far from the forefront. In other words, it does not matter how Cinderella gets out from under the rule of the evil stepmother, it only matters that the girl succeeds.

Bettelheim states that if children had the same type of complex dreams as adults there would be no need for fairy tales. The presence of fairy tales in a child's life is able to fill in the gaps between the dreams and reality. Regardless, a child should be encouraged to engage in fantasy and not be told that indulging is a type of deficiency.

Fairy tales begin to become truly meaningful about age five when the child is typically able to separate fantasy from reality. Bettelheim uses the example of the little girl who imagines that she is a princess living in a grand castle. When the child is called to dinner the fantasy is put away because it is not reality.

An adult who has not had the experience of being introduced to fairy tales might not understand the relationship between the internal and external worlds. However, a child can easily grasp that a fairy tale bridges the gap between fantasy and the real world.

A good example can be seen in "Little Red Riding Hood" when the grandmother is replaced by the Big Bad Wolf. An adult may see this as fantastic and implausible—a ridiculous turn of events. To a child, it is scary to think that the loving grandmother has been replaced by a fierce beast. Therefore, the child is able to divide the grandmother into two parts, which allows the child to preserve their grandmother's loving and kind image. Bettelheim compares this to a story of a young girl who divided her mother's personality separating the loving and kind mother from the angry one. This allowed the child to preserve her mother's benevolent self and keep it separate from the angry self that was prone to rejecting the child.

The separation of good and evil is often seen through the use of the wicked stepmother. It allows the child to be very angry at the evil side of the stepmother and retain a loving attitude toward the good stepmother. While one might think that this would promote



negative behavior in the child, the opposite is true. It reminds a child that there are two parts to the stepmother and that one should not get carried away with negative emotions and behaviors, because the good stepmother still exists in the same person.

Bettelheim addresses the oedipal period in a child's life, which takes place typically between the ages three and six or seven. While adults are generally able to integrate mixed feelings to make some sort of sense, a child is overwhelmed by them and tends to feel incomprehensible chaos. As a general rule characters in fairy tales are one-dimensional. An evil character in the beginning of the story is an evil character at the end of story. The thing could be said for the hero. Therefore, mixed feelings or a dual personality is very confusing for the child.

Because duality requires integration, it is important for a child to be introduced to fairy tales that can help one to understand. Bettelheim refers to "The Queen Bee," a story by the Brothers Grimm. The story shows the child that the queen has two personalities—she is able to make sweet, delicious honey, yet on the other hand can inflict a painful sting.

Another way this can be shown is through the use of siblings. One sibling may possess certain characteristics, while the other may exhibit complementary or opposite characteristics.

These fairy tales prepare the child to integrate different aspects of personality. In order to grow, the child must experience several developmental crises which are closely connected. Bettelheim refers to two of these crises, which center on personality integration. The child must ask himself, "Who am I really?" When confronted with a ambivalence and conflicting feelings, the child must decide which emotion is the most valuable and practical for the situation at hand.

The second of the two crises revolves around the Oedipus Complex. Through this state, the child begins to learn how to separate himself from his parents.

There are also fairy tales that teach the child that integration of these personalities is essential in order to achieve a pleasant outcome. If one chooses to completely ignore half of the personality, such as disregarding the ego, one is not fully realized and therefore is incapable of solving the problem.



Part 1: Chapters 16-22

Part 1: Chapters 16-22 Summary and Analysis

There is a reason that the number three is significant in fairy tales. Psychologists believe that each part relates to the three aspects of a person's mind, which are the id, ego, and superego. These aspects may be played out in the form of siblings such as Cinderella and the evil stepsisters. When the youngest child is portrayed as a simpleton there are typically two ways in which conflicts can be resolved. One is that the simple sibling will in the end save the family. The simpleton may not feel any responsibility because he is stupid and therefore the family expects nothing from him.

The three may also represent the mother or father and child. This is where Bettelheim refers to the Oedipus complex. The oedipal period in a boy's life is different than that of the girl. Regardless of popular belief, the Oedipus complex in this fashion has nothing to do with sex, but rather possessiveness and affection. In regards to a girl, the oedipal fantasy revolves around having a father's affections all to herself. However, because the girl is in need of a mother, a mother figure is split into two separate entities, such as the wicked stepmother, so that the wicked mother can be cast aside while the good Mother can continue to exist in the background and not stand in the girl's way. Meanwhile, the father is protector and superhero on which and whom no one can place any blame.

In the boy's fantasy, the child wants to have his mother's affections all to himself. Unlike the girl's story, the father tends to cease to exist in this fantasy. If the mother should do something to displease the boy, the child is most likely to split the mother into the good and evil entities so that there will always be the wonderful fairy princess to fall back on.

In either case, if the child feels that he or she is not receiving enough attention from a parent there will always be the princess or the prince that will come along and save the day.

Bettelheim asks why some cultures insist on outlawing fairy tales. Some parents who consider themselves to be modern and intelligent choose to deny their children access to fairy tales. Parents in the Victorian age, considered to be one of the strictest and most morally focused eras, encourage their children to enjoy fairy tales and delight in the fantasy and excitement these stories offer. Bettelheim states that it would be easy to blame narrow-minded and uninformed rationalist parents of being the ones to outlaw fairy tales, but this is untrue.

Some of those who are against fairy tales might object, because the stories do not create truthful pictures of life and therefore create unhealthy beliefs and behaviors. It typically does not occur to the adult that the truth of the child differs from the truth of an adult or that a child will ever mistake the fantasy contained in fairy tales for reality.



Others may believe that by sharing fairy tales with their children they are telling lies, something which children are discouraged from doing in the real world. This of course becomes a problem when the child asks if the fairy tale is true.

There are parents that worry that their children might become too involved in fantasy and come to believe in magic. As a general rule, every child believes in some form of magic. However, those beliefs often fade as a child matures.

Practitioners of psychoanalysis and child psychology often frowned upon fairy tales when it was discovered how destructive, anxious and violent a child's imagination can be. People who chose not to feed into a child's violent imagination overlooked the fact that if there are no monsters in stories than the part of the child that has the same feelings will not be allowed to exist or be expressed.

As a child learns to cope it is important for him to have contact with personalities outside the immediate family. While this helps the child to grow, it also assists in helping the child separate himself from his parents. The attitude of the parents begins to change and they realize the child is able to do more for himself. This tends to bring about severe disillusionment for the child to always expected to be taken care of the same way as when he was an infant. Until a child learns to understand this disillusionment and develop a solution to these feelings and problems, it is most likely that the child will lash out in a nonverbal ways such as having temper tantrums. As soon as the child begins to accept this new relationship with his parents, tantrums will fade.

As a general rule children do not understand gradations and are either in the pits of hell or gloriously happy. The black-and-white state of the child's thinking is typically addressed through the use of the kingdom in fairy tales. The kingdom is never actually defined in these stories. No one seems to know what goes on there, except that it is the home of the king and queen. In a child's mind, one is either a dominant or dominated. When a hero that starts out at the beginning of the story is somewhat downtrodden character, the child sees how the hero is able to work his way out to be a dominant figure rather than one who is dominated. Therefore, switching roles from the servant to the autocrat is very significant. However, when the child dreams of becoming the ruler of the kingdom, the existing ruler tends to simply fade away due to old age so that the child never takes the kingdom away from the ruler who obviously represents the parent.

Sometimes well-meaning fairy tales are a double edged sword. Bettelheim makes reference to "The Little Engine That Could," an uplifting story about a little engine who continued to try until he met his goals. The story is related to a young girl who became encouraged by the story and vowed to do her very best. When the child was faced with a challenging school project she became frustrated, because her efforts were not successful. The girl ultimately failed and began to believe she was not as good as the little engine, because she could not finish the project.

There are also a great number of fairy tales that deal with the achieving of autonomy. These often referred to a child venturing out into the world alone in order to discover himself and set upon the next phase of maturity.



Tolkien claims that there are certain facets required to create a good fairy tale. These are fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. Consolation may involve recovery from despair or escape from a dangerous situation but it is important that the character be consoled in some way.

The need for this consolation is what makes fairy tales with happy endings the most popular for small children. Bettelheim shows that in a traditional fairy tale, a hero is rewarded for his efforts and the evil-doer meets a well deserved fate. This structure satisfies a child's innate need for justice. If there is no justice in the stories how is it possible that a child can hope that he will be afforded the same unbiased treatment?

Children are most satisfied when the fate of the evil doer mirrors the plans set out for the hero who ultimately prevails. Bettelheim uses the example of "Hansel and Gretel." The witch wants to lure the children into her gingerbread house and cook them in her oven. In the end, it is the witch who gets pushed into the oven and burns to death while Hansel and Gretel survive. To a child this sort of comeuppance makes perfect sense and seems appropriate.

Bettelheim adds an element to the four that Tolkien enumerates. Bettelheim states that an element of threat is vital to the fairy tale in that a hero's physical or moral existence is in danger. If one thinks about it, it is remarkable that the hero in the story rarely questions why he is in danger. In the "Snow White," it is never revealed why the evil Queen is so incredibly jealous of the beautiful maiden. In "Rapunzel," it is never explained why the enchantress wants to take Rapunzel away from her family. Bettelheim points out that Cinderella is a rare exception, because the stepmother's goals are quite clear and the reader understands that the stepmother wants to promote her homely daughters above Cinderella. However, it is not clear why Cinderella's father allows this to happen.

Bettelheim states that fulfillment and happiness are the ultimate consolation and that the consolation operates on two different levels. The union of the prince and princess symbolizes the integration of a child's different aspects of personality, mainly the id, ego, and superego. The victory of good over evil shows a child that evil can be eliminated and that one's separation anxiety can be solved as good prevails.

Fairy tales are meant to be told, not read. If the story is read from a book then it is important to be able to use sufficient emotion in telling the story, which will involve child. Telling the story is preferable because it allows the teller and the listener a greater opportunity to interact. Fairy tales have been changed millions of times during the telling, by all kinds of adults to all kinds of children. Each narrator, especially one who tells the story as opposed to reading it, tends to reshape the story to his liking, adding or deleting elements to make the story more interesting to the audience. A narrator who is not in tune with his audience risks changing the story to benefit his tastes and by doing so, may diminish the enjoyment of the audience, which is, of course, the whole point of telling a fairy tale.



Part Two: Chapters 1-4

Part Two: Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

Part Two: In Fairyland begins with an overview and analysis of "Hansel and Gretel." As with many fairy tales, "Hansel and Gretel" has a realistic beginning. The parents of Hansel and Gretel are poor and are faced with the predicament of how to feed their children. The children overhear their parents talking about the lack of food and imagine that the parents intend to starve them to death. As the mother is representative of the source of food for the children, it would seem that she is planning to abandon her role as caregiver and protector. Therefore, the children begin to see their mother as selfish, rejecting, and unloving. The children are taken into the woods and abandoned. Hansel manages to find his way back home, followed by Gretel. The parents continue to find ways to be rid of children. There is a great deal of denial going on with both the parents and children. The first time Hansel and Gretel are taken to the forest, Hansel has the foresight to use pebbles to mark the way home. The second time Hansel uses breadcrumbs, a poor choice because the birds ate them. Hansel exhibits denial by using the breadcrumbs, which he knew in the back of his mind would not work.

The gingerbread house should have represented shelter to Hansel and Gretel. Instead, the children were attracted by the instant gratification the shelter could provide in the way of food. The underlying moral is that one should be careful of giving in to temptation. The house also represents the offerings of the mother in the way of food, something that the children have been deprived of and are eager to regain. The evil plans of the witch make the children realize the danger of giving in to temptation.

At the end of the story the children inherit the witch's jewels and take them home to their parents. Upon returning home the children are able to overcome their anxiety and fear of the loss of security to find good parents once more. Bettelheim insists that the birds knew something that Hansel and Gretel did not—that by returning to their home immediately they would have been cast out once again. Venturing forth to face the adventures in the forest give Hansel and Gretel much needed insight and maturity.

What children learn from "Hansel and Gretel" is that the family home of the children is not completely separate from the witch's gingerbread house. Rather, the two are simply aspects of the same situation. When children begin to become involved in the chaos of ambivalent feelings, they may relate more to the family home or the gingerbread house and feel completely separated from the other.

The next fairy tale to be examined is "Little Red Riding Hood." There are two versions of the story, one in which the girl and the grandmother are devoured and eventually reborn, and the other version in which the Big Bad Wolf is vanquished, and no harm comes to the child or the grandmother.



The original version was written by Perrault and had different connotations. The story's beginning is the same, with Little Red Riding Hood taking a care package to her grandmother who is ill. The girl walks through the forest and meets the Big Bad Wolf. Although the nature of the Big Bad Wolf is to gobble up the little girl, he knows that there are wood cutters in the forest that will kill him if he indulges. Instead, the Wolf asks Little Red Riding Hood where she is going, and the girl says that she is going to visit her grandmother. This is where the basic comparisons end.

In Perrault's version, the Wolf does not dress up like the grandmother. Instead, he asks the little girl to join him in the bed. Little Red Riding Hood undresses and gets into bed but is shocked at what the grandmother looks like naked. That is when the girl begins to make comments such as, "Grandmother, what big arms you have!" and "Grandmother, what big legs you have!" These are followed by the familiar questions about the Wolf's eyes, ears, and teeth. Perrault sought to teach a lesson to small girls, which is that they should not listen to certain types of people who may try to lure them into unfortunate or compromising situations. Bettelheim states that this particular version destroys the fairy tale because of the overstated moral as well as the use of the Wolf as a metaphor. Many people believe that Perrault's version was not successful due to this point.

One of the most popular versions was written by the Brothers Grimm titled "Little Red Cap." The Brothers Grimm offered two different versions of this fairy tale, which is not typical. In both stories, the little girl is referred to as "Little Red Cap" due to the red velvet cap that the girl loved. As with Hansel and Gretel, the main theme behind "Little Red Cap" is the fear of being devoured. The locations are basically the same. The family home is on the outskirts of the woods, while the small home located in the forest belongs to the witch and/or the grandmother. The family homes tend to offer a sense of security and comfort while the house in the woods represents the unknown, and often focuses on the child's inability to control the situation.

Bettelheim states that both stories regard oral fixation. With Hansel and Gretel, the children explore oral fixation when they eat the gingerbread house. In the instance of Little Red Cap, the child has overcome oral fixation yet it is exhibited in the Wolf. Unlike the original version, the Big Bad Wolf in "Little Red Cap" is not doing anything suspect, he only views the child and the grandmother as food, which is necessary to sustain life.

"Little Red Cap" also deals with the pleasure principle versus the reality principle when she wanders off the path to gather flowers for her grandmother. The girl's mother had instructed her not to wander off the path. However, Little Red Cap did just that and as a result met the Big Bad Wolf which led to a series of harrowing circumstances.

"Jack and the Beanstalk" is a story about maturity. Although there are many versions of the story, all originated in Britain before becoming disseminated and altered by the rest of the world. The basis of the story is that Jack trades a cow for a magic seed that grows into a beanstalk that leads into the sky and the boy's idea of heaven. At the top of the beanstalk is a cannibalistic ogre who possesses a goose that lays golden eggs. Jack conquers the ogre and takes the goose which saves his family from poverty.



An old version of this fairy tale on record is titled "Jack and His Bargains." In this original tale, the son and the mother are not in conflict; rather it is a battle for dominance between Jack and his father. In this version Jack is of little use to his father and is considered to be a wild boy. Although Jack is considered useless, the family sends him to the fair with one of the cows in order to sell it to pay debts. Along the way Jack encounters a man who offers to trade the cow for a magic stick, one that will beat its enemies senseless. When Jack returns home, the father attempts to hit Jack with a different stick and Jack turns the tables, hitting his father with the magic stick until the father begs for mercy. The story continues in this vein with Jack trading more cows. Eventually, Jack is betrothed to a princess, which has sexual connotations. The moral of this story is that sexual potency is not enough, that other things must be put into play in order for a person to become fully realized.

The more modern version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" begins before Jack reaches puberty. However, when Jack ventures forth to sell the cow he must come to the realization that he must participate in the running of the household and therefore takes his first steps into maturity. Throughout the story, Jack evolves from childhood into adulthood.

Bettelheim asserts that in this story, the cow is a metaphor for the mother. The cow, which had typically provided for the family's needs, stopped giving milk. Metaphorically speaking, Jack's mother had stopped nurturing him in the same way as he had come to expect and therefore Jack felt the need to cast her aside as the family did the cow.

The symbolism of the beanstalk means several things from realizing the phallic phase to realizing one's dreams. By climbing the beanstalk Jack is able to venture into a new social atmosphere and overcome his oedipal problems. Although Jack is on the border of fulfilling his masculine potential he is unsure of his abilities, and it nearly costs him his life.

Jack is able to steal gold from the ogre and return to the family. The family pays the debts but eventually the gold runs out and once again the family is poor. On the second trip, Jack realizes that he is risking his life by returning to the ogre's castle. Jack shows a sense of maturity when he steals the golden goose, knowing that one bag of gold is a limited supply, while the golden goose will continue to produce and provide. Eventually, Jack seeks more than financial gain and steals the golden harp. In the end Jack realizes that if he continues to rely on magic he will eventually be destroyed.

Jack cuts down the beanstalk in order to escape the ogre. The act of cutting it down allows Jack to free himself from the ogre which represents his father and shows that Jack is ready to relinquish his involvement in magic. Jack is now ready to live in the real world.

Bettelheim focuses the next chapter on The Jealous Queen in "'Snow White' and the Myth of Oedipus."



It is clear that fairy tales tend to find imaginative ways to address a child's stages of development. Many of these fairy tales focus on oedipal issues.

Although a child may be encouraged to work his way through oedipal problems, parents expect that the child will listen to their advice and warn that if the advice is ignored the child will suffer disastrous consequences.

In "Jack and the Beanstalk," the mother is not ready to allow Jack to become independent. In a similar vein, Snow White tells the story of the Queen, who is devoured by jealousy when Snow White grows up and surpasses her in beauty.

Bettelheim states that if children are unable to resolve the oedipal issues, it is likely that they will be revisited by ambivalent emotions when they have their own children.

Fairy tales never reveal exactly why the parent has a problem with a child's growing up. It is never fully revealed why Snow White's mother cannot enjoy her daughter's foray into sexual maturity and adulthood. The Queen's actions are simply ruled by her vanity. As with most fairy tales that involve one trying to kill another, there is karmic revenge. The Queen is forced to dance to her death while wearing red hot shoes, while Snow White lives happily ever after.



Part 2: Chapters 5-9

Part 2: Chapters 5-9 Summary and Analysis

Snow White is one of the most popular fairy tales on record. Although the story originated in Europe it has been told in various forms and languages all over the world for many centuries. In one version, Snow White is the child of the Count and Countess or the King and Queen. In another version, Snow White is found in the forest and becomes a surrogate daughter to the king, thereby invoking oedipal issues as well as the jealousy of the would-be surrogate mother. The more modern version of the fairy tale tends to leave the oedipal issues to the reader's imagination rather than forcing them into the forefront.

In each story, there is the use of three drops of red blood from the Queen. The blood represents purity, sexual innocence, and sexual desire. This is also to prepare young girls for the eventual onset of menstruation. It also allows the child to understand that without blood there can be no birth.

By some unfortunate circumstance, Snow White's mother dies and is replaced by a stepmother. The stepmother is narcissistic and begins to become obsessed with Snow White's beauty and the fact that the girl is becoming fairer than she. Although there is no mention of Snow White's life before she is cast out, it is implied that the girl is in competition with the stepmother for the affections of her father, which only exacerbate the jealousy.

As with "Little Red Riding Hood," the man who appears to save Snow White is an unconscious representation of the girl's father. It is a child's oedipal desire that her father would disobey the dominance of the jealous mother in order to save the girl from peril.

Some may see the hunter in Snow White as weak. While he disobeys the Queen by not killing Snow White, he fails to save her from danger. Rather, the hunter abandons Snow White in the forest.

Although it may seem like the best solution, running away from home does not ease the oedipal conflict. The only way a child can resolve these issues is by working through the inner turmoil. If a child attempts to avoid this work the path ahead will surely be littered with great unforeseen danger.

The seven dwarfs in the story represent immaturity as they have no parents, spouses or children and no real responsibilities beyond survival. The only difference is that the dwarfs are dedicated to their work as miners and know nothing of recreation.

The dwarfs warn Snow White about the stepmother's plans yet the stepmother's temptations mirror those of Snow White and therefore, the girl is easily coerced. The stepmother makes another attempt at killing Snow White by lacing her corset so tightly



that Snow White becomes unconscious. This is the perfect opportunity for the stepmother to kill Snow White, yet she does not. Bettelheim states that this shows the stepmother's wish to stunt Snow White's development so that her beauty will not be surpassed nor her sexuality threatened.

Like "Snow White," "Cinderella" is a well-known and popular fairy tale. The origins of the story are credited to the Chinese in the ninth century. This can be seen in the reference to Cinderella's small feet as the Chinese relate small feet to beauty. It is clear that Cinderella is a story about sibling rivalry and degradation.

Bettelheim states that Cinderella is deceptively simple, about a young girl's wishes being fulfilled and true worth being recognized as well as the punishment of evil and rewards for the virtuous.

Like most fairy tales there are many variations of the story.

It is believed that Cinderella's filthy state relates to toilet training and worthlessness. If the child was to conform to her parents' wishes she would be clean and orderly.

The use of the hearth in the story is a metaphor for the mother and Cinderella's wish to return to the love and nurturing lost with the death of her own mother. Eventually Cinderella is able to mourn the death of her mother. To be covered in ashes and rags symbolizes depression, while shedding these things represents the end of the grieving period.

Perhaps most of all "Cinderella" is a story that instills hope. The girl's wishes come true through undying faith and show the reader that good things are possible even for someone in such a dire situation.



Characters

Bruno Bettelheim

Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990) was a writer, child psychologist, and philosopher.

Bettelheim was born in Austria and because he was a Jew, was forced to enter a concentration camp from 1938-1939 before he was released and managed to escape from his native land to America.

Bettelheim is best known for his in-depth work with autistic children. Bettelheim and his wife cared for an American girl for seven years while in Vienna. The author later determined that the girl was autistic and set out to uncover the mysteries behind this illness. Bettelheim returned to university where he eventually received a degree in philosophy. Although Bettelheim's curriculum vitae showed that he had received a doctorate in this field of study, it was later learned that the claim was unjustified.

Bettelheim's theory on autism was centered on the presence of a weak father figure and the neglect of the mother. When biological and neurological reasons for the illness were discovered, Bettelheim's theories were largely put aside.

"The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" was published in 1976. The book won two awards: the U.S. Critic's Choice Prize and the National Book Award for Contemporary Thought.

Bettelheim committed suicide in 1990 at the age of 86. After the author's death, there were a number of hidden truths that came out about the man, including falsification of documents and a reported Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality.

Brothers Grimm

Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), often referred to as The Brothers Grimm, were German publishers of novellas and also credited with creating popularity for a large number of fairy tales, including Hansel and Gretel, Rumpelstiltskin, and Sleeping Beauty.

Jacob Grimm, the eldest of the brothers, was a well known jurist and philologist who was known in part for the introduction of his works on mythology as well as the compilation of the German Dictionary.

Wilhelm Grimm was also a jurist who was politically active, a role that caused him to be fired from a prestigious post by the king.

Together, the Brothers Grimm embarked on publishing stories that had been passed down for centuries via the oral tradition. Although the brothers were not the first to



publish these tales, they tended to adhere to the age-old stories rather than the more modern adaptations which were often overly academic and less popular.

The first collection of stories by The Brothers Grimm was published in 1810 and did not meet with good reviews. Throughout their careers, the writers suffered disdain from a faction of critics who believed their versions of fairy tales were too dark and violent for the ears and eyes of young and impressionable children.

Lewis Carroll

Author of "Through the Looking Glass" and "The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland."

Cinderella

Fictional girl who overcomes horrible circumstances to become a princess. Cinderella is the basis of many fairy tales and modern love stories.

J.R.R. Tolkien

Creator of "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Oedipus

Mythical son of a king and queen who was predicted to murder his father and marry his mother. Freud uses this story to illustrate his theory that a son will always want to marry his mother.

Mother Goose

Fictional gatherer of fairy tales.

Chesterton, G.K.

Literary critic who believed that fairy tales are "spiritual explorations."

Sigmund Freud

Doctor and founder of psychoanalysis.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

A famous German writer and entrepreneur who asserted, before Freud, that fairy tales were important building blocks for children.



Objects/Places

Magic Spells

Magic spells are prevalent in fairy tales for a number of reasons. First and foremost, magic spells allow both villains and heroes to accomplish feats or overcome situations that may seem difficult or impossible to transcend in the eyes of a child.

One example of a positive magic spell can be seen in "Cinderella." Cinderella is a downtrodden and abused young girl who must endure the torture and jealousy of her wicked stepmother and stepsisters. There seems to be no resolution to Cinderella's problems until a fairy godmother appears and grants Cinderella's wish to go to the ball in a beautiful gown. The magic spell leads to Cinderella marrying the prince and living happily ever after.

One negative use of magic can be seen in "The Fisherman and the Jinny." The fisherman tries hard to catch food for his supper and struggles not to become frustrated each time he pulls up his net to find something useless. When the fisherman discovers the Jinny, it would seem that all of the man's problems would be solved. However, this is not so. The Jinny, full of rage, would choose to use his magic to kill the fisherman rather than reward him for rescuing the Jinny from his prison inside the copper pot.

Forest

The forest is used in many fairy tales as a metaphor or at least as a dark and scary place that can house all sorts of evil creatures.

According to Bettelheim, the forest often represents a child's foray into the unknown, into the uncertainty of adolescence. In order to succeed in achieving maturity and, eventually, adulthood, the child must go through a series of adventures, most of which contain a threat of physical danger and situations that must be solved through the use of planning, foresight, and intelligence. A successful end to such a journey is often noted by the villain being cast out or killed, showing the child's dominance and growth.

A good example of the forest as a metaphor can be seen in "Hansel and Gretel." The children are abandoned in the forest by their parents, a metaphor for the separation of parent and child, yet the children return, not yet ready. The second time the children are abandoned in the forest, they must face the perils before them, including the fear of being lost, starvation, and encounters with the witch. When the children vanquish the witch and return to the home with the witch's jewels—and their own maturity—their lives progress in a satisfactory state.



Kingdom

The final destination in many stories, it represents the state of happily ever after and place of ultimate security.

Greece

Origin of many types of myth often modernized and translated into fairy tales.

Never Never Land

Mythical place where a child never has to grow up.

House in the Forest

The house in the forest is a common metaphor used to represent a period of uncertainty in a child's life.

Germany

Home to The Brothers Grimm and birthplace to a large number of traditional fairy tales.

Nordic Countries

Birthplace of many myths, including that of Odin and Thor.

Beanstalk

The giant beanstalk is what grew from the magic seed given to Jack in exchange for the family cow.

Pigs' Houses

The Three Little Pigs each built a house to foil the Wolf's attempts to eat them. The houses were constructed of sticks, straw, and brick.



Themes

Fairy Tales

Fairy tales can typically be defined as a story that contains fantastic elements, as well as a lesson or moral. There is a distinct difference between fairy tales and fables although many cultures lump them all together. This is unfortunate, because the structure is quite different. In a fairy tale there is typically an underdog who faces a difficult situation. Through strength, fortitude and perhaps the intervention of a benevolent force, the hero prevails and the characters live happily ever after. The theme contained in fairy tales tends to be somewhat subtle. It still manages to get the point across to the listener. For example, a child may be fascinated by the witch in "Hansel and Gretel," yet is subconsciously learning the value of cooperating with one's siblings.

Fables on the other hand do not necessarily have happy endings. In fact many of them tend to end in a tragic manner, particularly if one of the characters does not take sage advice. Fables tend to be blatant in pointing out the moral of the story and many people feel that fables are instructional rather than entertaining. Bettelheim uses the example of "The Ant and the Grasshopper" to illustrate this point. The ant has worked all summer long in order to save food for the winter. The grasshopper on the other hand, spent his summer singing and playing instead of collecting food. Eventually the grasshopper learns the error of his ways when winter comes and he is faced with starvation.

By and large the popular consensus regarding fairy tales is that they allow a child to explore and grow, as well as permitting the child to have magical and fantastic experiences.

Maturity

A great deal of "The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" by Bruno Bettelheim deals with the impact of fairy tales on a child's maturity. With small children, fairy tales encourage fantasy and whimsy while instilling valuable lessons including cooperation and fortitude while offering positive reinforcement.

Since fairy tales are fun, the lessons are learned subconsciously; the elements of excitement and fantasy cause the stories to be long remembered. Bettelheim says that explaining the moral of the story to a child takes away the opportunity of self exploration and discovery. If a child is permitted to figure out his own solutions and draw his own conclusions, the story will be more beneficial to the child's growth.

One of the biggest issues faced during a child's quest for maturity is learning how to deal with oedipal feelings toward the parents. Children are taught to love and respect their parents but nature ensures that there must be an eventual separation, which can cause feelings of jealousy, resentment and hatred of one or both of the parents at one time or another. These feelings create a tremendous struggle for the child. In some



small way, fairy tales can help a child realize all aspects of his personality and know that it is okay to have and experience these emotions.

Fantasy Versus Reality

Young children have a very limited scope of the world and their place in it. It is up to the family to instill values and self-worth in a child while finding ways to help the child grow and mature. This may be done in many different ways. Bettelheim refers to fairy tales as being one of the tools used for thousands of years in addition to religious parables. There are many arguments for and against fairy tales and fables. However, the stories seem to be one of the things that stay with the child the longest, beyond any other literature.

One of the biggest controversies regarding fairy tales is the opinion of some parents and psychologists regarding recognizing the difference between fantasy and reality. Children are quite aware of their surroundings and typically have no trouble distinguishing the reality of parents and siblings versus the unreality of dragons and damsels in distress. Bettelheim uses an example of a little girl who likes to pretend that she is a princess, spinning around and dancing in her castle. However, when it comes time for dinner, the little girl understands that she will take her place at the table as she does every night, as this is her reality.

Many people assert that while fairy tales and fables both contain fantastic elements, fairy tales tend to be more effective because they allow the child to draw his own conclusions and make decisions about how he would have handled the situation in the story. Fables, however, tend to be more instructional and are typically less memorable than fairy tales.

Overall, fairy tales tend to offer the child a broader scope of the world beyond the four walls of his house, allowing the child to expand his horizons and experience some of life's lessons in a fun and magical way.

Style

Perspective

The perspective used in "The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" by Bruno Bettelheim is purely academic. Bettelheim examines the history and longevity of various fairy tales, myths and fables, their meaning and appeal to both parents and children. There are significant differences between cultures when it comes to fairy tales, myths and fables; however the context of the stories shows the similarity. Bettelheim shows that the child's perception varies depending on the level of reality contained in the story. Bettelheim offers the perspective of both sides, those who believe that fables and myths, which do not promise a happy ending, are more realistic and therefore beneficial to a child, versus those who believe fairy tales allow children to fantasize and explore and ultimately learn to problem-solve on their own. Those who support the use of fairy tales often believe that the success of the hero in a fairy tale will tend to make a child hopeful and confident. Bettelheim utilizes studies and theories from Freud and Jung were regarding the impact of fairy tales on the psyches of children.

There is much written about the impact of the Oedipus complex in regards to the maturity of boys and girls and how fairy tales address this crucial phase of development. All together the combined perspective of writers and psychologists offers the reader a complete unbiased view of this important part of literature.

Tone

The tone of "The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" by Bruno Bettelheim is typically neutral while explaining the fairy tales and their origins. Because the opinion of the authors mirrors Freud's analysis of fairy tales, fables, and myths, Bettelheim seems to discount some of the theories generated by earlier versions and how the original concepts may or may not have contributed to the fairy tales' success.

The history surrounding fairy tales allows Bettelheim to remain objective. It is proven that many fairy tales, fables, and myths predate the written word and were passed down via oral tradition. Oral tradition allows the narrator to make changes as he sees fit, which contributes to the flavor and modernization of some of the tales.

It is clear through the tone used in the work that Bettelheim is a child psychologist with leanings toward the teachings of Freud. In this way, the text seems to take on a slightly partisan feel, particularly when the topics include the Oedipus Complex, its meaning and the metaphors used in the fairy tales to exhibit this turbulent period in a child's life.



Structure

"The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales" by Bruno Bettelheim is a non-fiction work containing 307 pages. There are a total of 32 chapters. The shortest chapter is 2 pages in length; the longest chapter is 41 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 9.6 pages.

The book is split into two parts, Part I: A Pocketful of Magic and Part II: In Fairyland.

Part I: A Pocketful of Magic is the longer of the two parts. It addresses the need for magic in a child's life and the underlying meaning of various symbols and metaphors used throughout various types of fairy tales, fables, and myths. It also notes the differences between the three and how each affects children's literature and the overall character development of the listener.

Part II: In Fairyland focuses more on the actual fairy tales and the hidden psychological importance and meaning within each story. Although the Oedipus Complex is dealt with in the first section, it is further dissected in the second section as it relates to the stories. Bettelheim shows how the struggles of adolescents to venture forth into maturity are etched deeply within each story, helping a child learn valuable lessons while enjoying an entertaining tale.

Throughout the entire work, Bettelheim uses his knowledge of psychology to dissect this aspect of children's literature and by doing that, exposes the value contained within these stories.



Quotes

"The delight we experience when we allow ourselves to respond to a fairy tale, the enchantment we feel, comes not from the psychological meaning of the tale (although this contributes to it) but from its literary qualities—the tale itself as a work of art," p. 12.

"Through most of man's history, a child's intellectual life, apart from immediate experiences within the family, depended on mythical and religious stories and on fairy tales," p. 24.

"Like all great art, fairy tales both delight and instruct; their special genius is that they do so in terms which speak directly to children," p. 53.

"Only on repeated hearing of a fairy tale, and when given ample time and opportunity to linger over it, is a child able to profit fully from what the story has to offer him in regard to understanding himself and his experience of the world," p. 58.

"These stories tell that, despite the bad consequences, which evil witches have, with goodwill and effort things can be righted again," p. 71.

"Maybe if more of our adolescents have been brought up on fairy tales, they would (unconsciously) remain aware of the fact that their conflict is not with the adult world, or society, but really only with their parents," p. 99.

"Why do many intelligent, well-meaning, modern, middle-class parents, so concerned about the happy development of their children, discount the value of fairy tales and deprive the children of what the stories have to offer?" p. 116.

"Some people claim that fairy tales do not render "truthful" pictures of life as it is common and are therefore unhealthy," p. 116.

"The trouble with some of what is considered "good children's literature" is that many of the stories peg the child's imagination to the level he has already reached on his own," p. 133.

"The shortcomings of modern fairy stories highlight the elements which are most enduring in traditional fairy tales. Tolkien describes the facets which are necessary in good fairy tales as fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation—recovery from deep despair, escape from some great danger, but, most of all, consolation," p. 143.

"To attain to the full its consoling propensities, its symbolic meanings, and, most of all, its interpersonal meetings, a fairy tale should be told, rather than read," p. 150.

"One must never 'explain' to the child the meaning of fairy tales," p. 155.



"Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood' loses much of its appeal, because it is so obvious that his wolf is not a rapacious beast, but a metaphor, which leaves little to the imagination of the hearer," p. 168.

"Fairy tales deal in literary form with the basic problems of life, particularly those inherent in the struggle to achieve maturity," p. 183.

"Since the fairy tales deal in that simply with the most important developmental issues in all our lives, it is not surprising that many of them center in some way on oedipal difficulties," p. 194.

"By all accounts, 'Cinderella' is the best-known fairy tale, and probably also the best-liked," p. 236.



Topics for Discussion

If your parents believed in the use of fairy tales, did they read to you or tell the stories?

What was your favorite fairy tale as a child? Why?

Did you ever wonder about the moral behind the fairy tale or simply enjoy it for the story?

Do you think fairy tales are too violent for small children?

What might be the difference in the personalities of children who read fairy tales versus those who did not?

Do you agree that explaining a fairy tale to a child robs him of the experience of figuring it out on his own?

Was there a fairy tale that seemed too scary for you as a child? Which one?