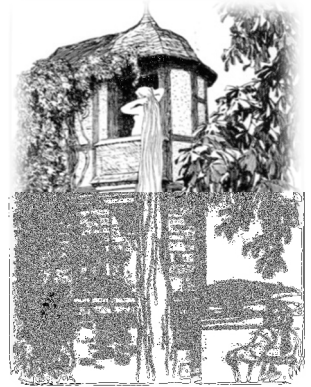


Letters from Lockdown

Hi everybody,

Greetings from Rapunzel's tower. I heard a good explanation from someone who was as equally 'thin on top' as myself, he said "I'm not bald, my hairs are simply maintaining social distancing!"



However, I got to thinking of the actual story of Rapunzel, which I thought I knew, but which I discovered was quite complex. Rapunzel is a German fairy tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm and first published in 1812 as part of Children's and Household Tales. But the story is an adaptation of a few earlier tales going back to 1634. (Wikipedia – yes, I know its shortfalls 😊)

[you can read it @ https://germanstories.vcu.edu/grimm/rapunzel_e.html]

This story has a number of subplots, twists and origins that rightly belong in an adult setting. One of the possible real-life inspirations for Rapunzel is the 3rd century Saint Barbara, who was locked in a tower and then beheaded *by her own father*, firstly, because she refused to get married despite her physical beauty and secondly, for wanting to be a Christian and to devote her life to purity. While the 'expurgated' version has a wicked witch as the baddie - in the real world it was her own father who was the villain. Rapunzel's story also has striking similarities to other tales from around the world: in the 10th-century Persian tale of Rudāba - included in Ferdowsi's epic poem *Shahnameh*, Rudāba is in a tower and offers to let down her hair so her lover Zāl can climb up to her. Just so in the earlier, unsanitised, versions of Rapunzel, the witch realises that he has been visiting because she is pregnant i.e. there are issues of morality.

One may well wonder how 'children's' stories came to be born out of such dark real-life contexts, but we should remember that in earlier days censorship was rather brutally enforced. Such stories

were often used (or altered and adapted) to remember truths that were at that time unpalatable for society or power to tolerate at the time. Even today there are things such as 'honour killings', and domestic violence, the inequality and disempowerment of women, discrimination, racism... These things are very much kept 'underground' even in our modern world and its societies and cultures. Although New Zealand may have become more aware of these issues there are still subtle memories of deeper prejudices that are brought to the fore through books and films.

The scriptures are actually full of these 'subversive' stories – hiding in plain sight. The biblical stories of Tamar (Genesis 38); Rahab (Josh 6); Ruth (Ruth); Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) and many more, are all stories of power, injustice and pain.

Likewise, Jesus taught people through subversive parables (read Matthew 13:13) in which the heroes were countercultural images: Despised Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors and 'loose' women. He relied on the dissidence of these stories to drive home his point to a set-in-its-ways upper-class culture. To illustrate it further, we also have the story of the woman 'caught in adultery' who was brought to Jesus (John 8) to trap him into a web of Religio-legalistic thorns. The words of grace he spoke will continue to echo through the consciousness of humanity through the ages.

Perhaps, as we think about what this lockdown has taught us about our common co-dependencies and shared world resources, we should pay more attention to our 'fairy tales', biblical or otherwise. If this lockdown is to teach us anything then we should come to acknowledge the hidden messages of unfair power relationships in our societies all over the world. The way we manipulate people and trade deals so that they restrict and possibly exploit others, imprisoning them in self-isolating towers of social expectations.

The story ends with Rapunzel and her rescuer going off into the distance both healed – to live happily ever after!

Maybe this is the true fantasy - but then we all need hope.

Till the next time I let my hair down, or my beard grows...Leigh