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‘Believe in happy endings’: Danielle Steel’s sugar-coating of reality.

Romance novelist Danielle Steel is said to have sold over half a billion copies of her tearjerkers all over the world and every single one of her seventy novels seems to vouch for the author’s obsession with happy endings. As one critic puts it, “she loves telling stories of perfect lives shattered and the overcoming of tragedy to reach happy endings”. It is no wonder then that when cosmetics giant Elisabeth Arden, Inc. asked her to launch her own fragrance, she chose ‘Believe in Happy Endings’ as the slogan for the campaign. This article aims at showing that the novelist has transformed this trite stylistic device into a trademark.

She herself admits to being addicted to happy endings. So, what could be interesting to delve into, as far as her novels are concerned, is her ability to avoid tragedy.

The golden letters shimmering on the cover of her fifty-eighth novel *Johnny Angel*, “a celebration of life, hope and forgiveness”, could summarize her entire body of work. Hence the question of interchangeability: is Danielle Steel always rewriting the same story? A close study of her texts might enable us to say so for the very same words are used repeatedly in the final paragraphs. It is all about “healing”, “loving”, “forgiving”, “kissing”, “witnessing miracles”, “being brought together” and “willing to believe that the best was yet to come.”

Many questions are thus raised: what is the link between ‘eucatastrophes’ and paraliterature? In this particular case, what seems to be at stake is the willing erasure of the Freudian principle of reality. Steel’s romance novels can be considered as escapist ploys to make us believe that everything will be fine and that tragedies are but temporary. Then, the link between her novels and the world of cosmetics does not date back to her exclusive global licensing agreement with Elizabeth Arden, Inc in September 1995 but to 1973, the date of her debut novel. Danielle Steel has always put lipstick on a pig: life itself.

Whereas literature unveils the complexity of the world, paraliterature seems to methodically erase what is not in keeping with the author’s and the readers’ desires. The pervading use of happy endings in Danielle Steel’s escapist novels can therefore be seen as an avatar of propaganda.

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