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Fairy Tale Analysis

Fairy tales are not just used by parents to entertain their children, they also contain hidden meanings and messages behind them. They provide moral lessons for children. “ The most important and also the most difficult task in raising a child is to help them find meaning in life”(Bettelheim 3). This paper discusses how fairy tales can help with parenting and focuses on how Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, especially the concepts of the id, ego, and superego can be used to analyze the message in *The Little Mermaid*.

The Little Mermaid was written by Christian Anderson in the eighteenth century. This fairy tale is filled with the idea of Freud specifically regarding the concepts of the id, superego, and ego. According to Freud, the id looks for satisfaction of our wants and needs. At this level, the young mermaid desires to go above the sea surface, become a human being and to marry the prince . "Nothing made her happier than to hear about the human world above them" (Anderson 1) and she is willing to "give up all the three hundred years...just to be a human being for one day and then be part of the heavenly"(Andersen 6). This shows her strong desire to marry the prince and live as a human being despite her grandmother’s strong objection. However, she ignores what her grandmother says to her, and was willing to give up everything to be with the prince. All she wanted was to be with the prince.

The ego is the reality principle. It satisfies the id’s desire to obtain pleasure in a realistic way. It is our impulse. It makes us make rash decisions. The example of this in *The Little*

Mermaid is when she saved the prince from the accident and fell in love with him. Ultimately, she exchanges her beautiful voices for her legs and lives in the human world. This ultimately satisfies her need to obtain pleasure, but she is unaware that the sea witch is fooling her. This also teaches children that although sometimes it may be too good to be true. Children should think carefully when making important decisions and trust your family members that have been there for you.

The third element of Freud's psychoanalytic theory is the superego. Superego is our moral judgement. It determines what is good and bad. In this stage, we make decisions based on our moral values. In the ending of this tale, the prince decides to marry the princess from the neighbouring kingdom. In order for the little mermaid not to become foam in the water, her sisters get a magical knife from the witch by sacrificing their hair. The little mermaid must plunge the magical knife into the prince's heart, and let his blood flow to her feet in order to become a mermaid again. Now, "she alone was in his thoughts, and the knife shook in the mermaid's hand, but then she flung it far out across the wave"(Anderson 11). Her moral judgment stops her from killing the prince. She believes this is wrong, therefore she decides to sacrifice herself to save the prince. She saves a life which is the right thing to do. This shows the little mermaid has developed her superego.

The Little Mermaid also shows women's position in the eighteenth century. We know that mermaids in this tale do not have soul. The Little mermaid's grandmother explains that "only if a human were to fall so in love with you that you were more to him than his father and mother"(Anderson 6), therefore "his soul would flow over ...and ...would partake in human happiness"(Anderson 6). This shows that the life of women, in this case, is influenced by the father and husband. Just like women in the eighteenth century, men were expected to control and

have higher authority over their wives. This also shows that male figures play an important role in fairy tales. In this fairy tale, the prince has the power and authority, which is seen through the little mermaid's sacrifice. Therefore, fairy tales can show the background information of specific time periods.

In the tale we do not know where the little mermaid's mother is. We are told that "for many years the sea-king down here had been a widower, but his old mother kept house for him" (Anderson 1). His mother is in charge of taking care of his daughters which contributes to the reason why the little mermaid is so desperate to go out. Maybe she would not go on her journey if her mother is by her side. However, this journey helps her transform from dependent to independent. She separates herself from her parents and tries to live in her own life. It is the time for the little mermaid to grow up and leave her home to go on an adventure to find and develop her own identity. This is important for parents to know about this for their children's development.

By analyzing *The Little Mermaid*, we know that fairy tales are not only written to entertain, but can also provide moral lessons for children which they can apply in various stages of their transition to adulthood. For example, in this tale, the little mermaid did not kill the prince to save herself. This tale also contains many hidden messages such as the status of women in the eighteenth century and gender inequality at the time. It also contains heavy Freudian ideas regarding the development of the mind such as the id, ego, and superego.

Work Cited

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Reflection

Most of us consider fairy tales are just stories for children. However, through this assignment, I learnt that there are hidden messages behind every fairy tale and Freudian theories can be also applied to them. For example, the little mermaid's dream was to experience freedom and explore the human world. The lesson is that if we give up our dreams, we would not reach our dream and goal. But if our belief is strong enough, we can succeed. And it is necessary for us to sacrifice something to achieve what you want. I realized by applying Freud's theories on id, ego, and superego can help to have a deeper understanding of characters, reasons behind their actions, and the themes behind it. I also learnt that fairy tales contain positive learnings for children and ideas on issues such as self-sacrifice and female.