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Fairy Tale Analysis

Fairy tale is not just something that is used by parents to entertain children but it also contains hidden meanings and messages behind it. It provides moral lessons for children. “ The most important and also the most difficult task in raising a child is helping him to find meaning in life”(Bettelheim 3) but fairy tales help parents with it. Also, every fairy tale is filled with Freud psychoanalytic theory especially on the concept of the id, ego, and superego. *The Little Mermaid* is one of the fairy tales that we can use psychological analysis to analyze the message behind it.

The Little Mermaid was written by Christian Anderson in the eighteenth century. This fairy tale is filled with the idea of Freud specifically on 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 I have to live in 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 does not allow her to think such things of becoming a human and tells her to live three hundred years under the sea. However, she ignores what her grandmother says to her and is willing to give up everything to be with the prince. All she wants is to be with the prince.

The ego is the reality and our conscious decision-making. It is our reality principle. It works in a realistic way to gain pleasure. In *The Little Mermaid*, the young mermaid wants immediate gratification. She did not think about her future and the dangers of reality of being a human. When she reaches the stage of the ego, it is necessary for the little mermaid to make decisions in her life. The witch says to her that "if you do not gain the love of the prince and the first morning after he has married someone else, your heart will break, and you become foam on the water"(Anderson 7) but she still wants to marry the prince. Her decision to become a human shows her determination. The witch also asks the mermaid to pay her. The witch asks in exchange of her legs the little mermaid needs to sacrifice her beautiful voice. The mermaid decides to give up her voice. At this point, she knows she needs to give up something in order to gain what she wants. This shows us that in reality it is necessary for us to give up something to gain what we want and being selfish isn't good.

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 become foam on the water, her sisters get a magical knife from the witch by sacrificing their hair. The little mermaid must plunge the magical knife in 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 us women's position in the eighteenth century. We know that mermaids in this tale do not have soul. 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 into your body and you would partake in human happiness"(Anderson 6). This shows that the life of women is given by father and husband. This is similar to *Sleeping Beauty*. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the princess falls asleep until the prince wakes her up. This shows male figures play an important role in fairy tales. In these fairy tales, the two princes have the power and authority to give a new life for the women. Therefore, we know women in the eighteenth century did not have authority over man and it also shows gender inequality.

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. This 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 to transform from dependent to independent. She separates from her parents and tries to live in her own life. Just as Bettelheim says that "only by going out into the world can the fairy-tale hero (child) find himself there"(Bettelheim 11). 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 to entertain but also provide moral lessons for children which they can apply these lessons in their life. 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 statue of women in the eighteenth century and gender inequality. It also contains heavy Freudian ideas on the development of mind such as the id, ego, and superego.

Work Cited

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