Snow white and the seven dwarfs: analysing the story in Freudian terms.

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Plot summary: One of the most memorable and fascinating stories ever told by Walt Disney, Snow white has brought people a joyful and simplistic view of a fairy tale story for generations, or has it....

Snow White’s name originates from her mother’s longing for a beautiful child “as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as this window frame”. When the queen finally got her wish she died after giving birth and her beautiful child was left fending for herself. Soon after the queen’s death the king re-married. The wicked step mother envied Snow White’s beauty and with her jealously she convinced the huntsman to kill snow white. The huntsman took pity on Snow White and spared her life, leaving Snow White to run for her life through the forest where she came across a cottage, living there were seven dwarfs. The dwarfs promised to shelter her in return for her labour and up-keep of the cottage. After numerous attempts on Snow White’s life by the queen, she eventually met prince charming and lived happily ever after.

In analysing this story we looked at three major contributors who, we felt, gave a psychological depth to this tale. Which were the id, the ego and the super-ego. We felt that these were represented by the mother figure, the father figure and Snow White.

ID: In all versions of this tale the mother figure represents an uncontrollable impulsive urge. This can relate to the ID in Freud’s Psycho-Developmental Theory. The evil step mother is filled with jealously and wants to kill Snow White as she is dominated by an over powering drive. The evil step mother shows signs of displacement, (choosing a substitute to channel her personal frustration) as a result of Snow White’s superior beauty. Her real mother longed for a baby and once she died her needs were met and faded from the story.

Ego: In this story the Ego is represented by Snow White, she is more rational and conscious of her actions and urges than anyone else in the tale. Snow White shows no feelings of revenge or anger toward her evil step mother, even though she tried to kill her. Snow White shows evidence of denial when she refuses to accept some aspects of her reality, e.g. her step mother’s attempt to kill her. As Snow White remains almost completely passive throughout the story, her character relates to the ego which is the “middle man” of three psychoanalytical bases of the psyche.

Super-ego: This is represented by symbolic internalisations of the father figure which is manifested by different characters in the story. The huntsman who takes pity on Snow White, as if she were his daughter, lets her go. Just like the Super-ego that works in contradiction with the ID, when the ID/evil step mother sends the huntsman/Super-ego to kill Snow White the huntsman spares her life. The dwarfs take Snow White into their home and provide a safe and loving environment for her to grow in. The dwarfs’ over protective nature can be represented by the Super-ego acting on the Ego; the dwarfs being protective of Snow White. Another father figure we noticed was the prince; he takes Snow White home.
and ensures her safety. The prince also gets rid of the step mother, once again where the Super-ego contradicts the ID.

ID, Ego and the Super-ego are represented at the very start of the story by the actual family. The Super-ego: the king and other father figures. The ID: the evil step mother. The Ego: Snow White. How the three relate and work together is because the story begins with all three, and the story ends with all three. Perfect balance of how the three co-exist from start to finish is an example of Freud's theory of the Psyche.