Main Themes In The Fairy Tale Snow White

Fairy tales have always been full of imagination, mystery, magic, and happy endings. These are books for children to introduce the experience of adulthood and also fuel their imagination. Fairy tales in the 17th century are different when compared to contemporary ones. Most of the fairy tales have been adapting to the changes and were written differently for their readers. However, in the most recent times, with the advancement of technology, fairy tales have were made into movies to appeal to their audience. One such adaption of the fairy tales into a film – contemporary telling of the story- is Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. This book was originally written by the Grimm brothers in 1812. The story is about a young beautiful girl going through hardships and eventually finding love and happiness. Fairy tales were supposed to give us hope, promise a happy future, and have faith in humanity. This book was adapted into a film by Walt Disney in 1937. Disney picture books of the same, have also been published. Although the book and the film, both narrate the life of Snow White, these versions are distinct in nature. However, the theme remains the same. A damsel in distress, rescued by her prince, escapes the vengeance of her evil stepmother and now lives happily ever after.

There are several themes around this story. Beauty is seen as a weapon and has power. The evil stepmother envies snow white for her beauty and wants her dead. The prince, in the end, finds Snow White charming and falls in love with her instantly. To further unfold the story, there are two versions. The book and the movie. The book is elaborate and is less cruel than the movie. In the book, a queen wishes for a beautiful child and gives birth to Snow White. As the baby is born, the queen passes away. The king now marries another beautiful woman, who is self-involved and is seen as a narcissist – being self-obsessed. She has a looking glass that speaks to her and tells her she is the most beautiful in the land. As Snow White grew up, the queen became envious of her beauty. The looking glass now declares Snow White as the most beautiful and the queen wants Snow White dead. She hires a huntsman and asks him to kill Snow White and bring back her liver and lungs. When he sets out, Snow White pleads with him and he feels pity and lets her go. He returns to the queen with the liver and lung of a bear and assures that Snow White is dead. The queen eats the lung and liver. Meanwhile, Snow White finds a little cottage and enters inside. The house looks like it belongs to really tiny people. She finds something to eat and rests on a bed. The seven dwarfs to whom the house belongs, return home after a long day of digging mountains for ore and notice her. The next morning she tells them her story and they let her stay if she took care of the house and did some chores. Meanwhile, the looking glass, still declares snow white as the fairest, and the queen is enraged and wants to kill snow white herself. She disguises herself as a peddler woman and goes to Snow White. She sells some silk and suggests lacing her. She strangles snow white with a corset, making her fall unconscious. The dwarfs come back and release her and warn about the evil queen. The looking glass, on asking who is the fairest, still tells the queen, Snow White is the fairest. Now, the queen is furious and through witchcraft, makes a poisonous comb to kill Snow White. The queen disguises herself as another woman and visits Snow White and offers to comb her hair. When the comb touches her hair, Snow White falls unconscious. The dwarfs return that day and help her regain consciousness. They warned her again. The queen was sure that Snow White had died and asks the looking glass who is the fairest. On listening to snow white’s name again, she becomes outrageous. She makes a poisonous apple, which would kill Snow White for sure. She visits Snow White dressed as a farmer’s wife and offers the

fruit. Snow White is hesitant but the queen offers to eat the apple herself too. She eats the non-poisonous part and Snow White eats the poisonous part. Snow white drops dead on the floor and the queen leaves. On returning home from work, the dwarfs notice Snow White fell on the ground looking dead. They could not bring her to life even after several trials. They rested her body on a bier and sobbed for three days. They did not want to bury her because she looked alive. They placed her in a glass coffin over a mountain and kept watch over it. A prince visits the cottage to spend a night. He sees Snow White's coffin and requests to keep it and the dwarfs feel pity and give it to him. On their way back, the prince's guards carried the coffin and stumbled on a rock. The piece of apple chocking Snow White falls out and she regains consciousness. The prince explains to her what happened and proposes to marry her. Their wedding was a grand affair, and the queen was also invited to the feast. The looking glass one again tells the queen that Snow White is the fairest of all and now she could not tolerate this anymore. She goes to the feast but punishment is already set in place for her. The queen had to wear iron slippers, burned upon the fire, and dance until she dropped dead. The prince and Snow White lived happily ever after.

The other version, as previously mentioned, is a recreation by Walt Disney. A lot of details have been altered and the story was made short. The dwarfs are the heroes of this version. The story starts with Snow White being obedient to her evil stepmother who makes her do household chores. Snow white, although was diligent in her work, always dreamt of a prince coming to her rescue. She once sees a prince, while drawing water from a well but was scared to speak. As Snow White was getting older the mirror on the wall told the queen, Snow White was the fairest in the land. Angered at this, the queen hires a huntsman and hands over a beautifully carved box. She wants him to kill Snow White and bring her heart. The huntsman feels pity for her and lets Snow White run away. She finds a cottage and sees seven dwarfs coming home from work. They all had names, (unlike the first version) and worked at a diamond mine. They feel sorry for her and let her stay with them. The queen finds out Snow White is alive through the mirror and wants to kill her. She transforms into an old lady and goes down to the cottage. She offers a poisonous apple to Snow White. The birds try to warn her about the evil stepmother. But she shushes them, and eats the apple, and falls dead to the ground. The animals run to the dwarfs to tell them something is wrong. The dwarfs see the old lady sneaking away. They chase her until they reach an end of a cliff. The evil queen tries to kill them by rolling a stone, but she falls instead. They return to see Snow White is still dead and make a golden bed for her and watch her day and night. A prince comes to the forest, sees Snow White, and is awe-struck to see how beautiful she is. He kisses her and she comes alive and they ride away to his kingdom.

The story of Snow White by the Grimm brothers portrays the character of Snow White in such a way, that it creates sympathy for the audience. She is a young girl, who is hated by her evil stepmother and wants her dead. The role of her father was never mentioned, as opposed to real life. The father should be the head of the house, making decisions and looking out for his family. Whereas, the role of a mother should be a caregiver. However, the book Snow White has depicted the role of each character as very different from real life. In this story, the Grimm brothers convey that the world is a bad place, sometimes it could be your own house. The princess, Snow White, regardless of her status was humble and obedient. People that belonged to the upper class are seen as selfish and arrogant, especially the children, because they are spoilt with luxury. The book focuses mainly on Snow White and the evil stepmother's life. She makes several attempts to kill Snow White, only because she envies her. It is absurd to even think that someone in your family would hate you so much that they want you dead. However, Snow White also finds true love. Although her life seemed like it ended, she was rescued and

lived happily forever. All of this happened to her because she was beautiful. Beauty did more harm to her than good. The prince was also charmed by her beauty and decides to take her home. On the other hand, envy, cost the queen her life and robbed Snow White of peace, and made her fearful. The looking glass, that the queen would speak to, may have not been magical after all. The person we see in the mirror is us and she spoke to herself because of her self-obsession. It was this mirror that caused her content and also, discontent.

The Disney version of the story is a film adaption of the book. The role of women in fairy tales kept changing with time. In the Disney version, the queen had the power to transform herself into an old woman. Women, in real life, are seen as nurturers, taking care of their offspring, cooking food, and upkeeping the house. Her role was limited only to the house. However, in these fairy tales, women possessed power. They could kill people and also had the courage to die, making them the heroes in some cases. Also, women are seen as naïve and easily trusting, which was the character of Snow White. She was being her best self despite being treated as a servant by her stepmother. The prince meets Snow White at the beginning of the story, however, they do not speak. Snow White desires for a man to save her from her evil stepmother. To kill Snow White, the evil stepmother uses only the apple but she dies instead. The dwarfs play a very important role in this version. It was because of them, that the evil stepmother died. The dwarfs each have names: Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Dopey, Bashful, and Sneezy. Interestingly these names describe their distinct characters. They took vengeance in place of Snow White. This version has more frightening images and evil depictions than the original book.

However, the main topic in both these stories is how Snow White is rescued from the clutches of her evil stepmother. Although the two versions narrate incidents differently, the story begins and ends the same way. A helpless young woman, finally rescued. Apart from the several alterations in the different versions, the main one seemed to be, who saves Snow White. In the first version, the prince’s men carry her and stumble, bringing her back to life and in the second version, the dwarfs kill the evil stepmother, but the prince’s kiss awakens Snow White. As much as it seems like the prince saved her, he did not actually rescue her in the way a prince should. The idea behind this could be, that a prince in shining armor is not always there to rescue. Sometimes it’s the people around you or someone else insignificant, that saves you.

The whole idea of Snow White is to show how dangerous beauty is and to what extent a person can go if they envied you. Bitter feelings are not good, they might even end your life. Snow White, being a princess and beautiful, had to face hardships even though it looks like she had it all. So are our lives. We envy things and long for what we do not know is dangerous. The story gets us thinking about life and what we make of it.

Despite what was happening, Snow White does not give up hope or lose faith in man-kind, unlike us. Even one mistake by another, scares us for life, making it difficult to trust anyone else. Snow White is naïve, but also hopeful, cheerful and most of all, a good person. None of her experiences made her evil. She is, subtly, a role model as to how a person should lead their life. Despite hardships, she was hopeful and finally lived a life she always dreamt of. She got love, freedom, and happiness.

However, Erika Bell, a blogger, finds fairy tales hard to believe. In her opinion, fairy tales give false hopes of beautiful lives which isn’t the case for everyone. She finds the film adaptions of the fairy tales dramatic and unreal. In the words of Bell, “ The story may twist what exactly

happened to each character, but it does so in hopes of finding a greater happiness for all characters.” She believes, the movie adaptions of these films, give more power to the characters, making them greater heroes. The fairy-tale versions are modest and more relatable to her than the movie versions.

To catch up with the times, everything, including fairy tales has undergone alteration to appeal to the current audience. What has appealed to children in the past isn’t the same anymore. Because of technology and changes, children want their superheroes to have powers, fly, fight, and be the ultimate savior. Hence, the roles have been altered. As much as it seems that fairy tales have to be preserved the way they have been told and written over the years, adaption is the only key to connect to the upcoming generations.