Analyzing the disney's stories: snow white and the seven dwarfs

At the beginning of the twentieth century, " fairy tales reinforced the patriarchal symbolical order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender so did then all of Disney's productions". (Bálint, web) These provide patterns as to how one should behave and view one's place in society. They are aimed at both boys and girls, with the male learning to be rich and active while the female learns to obey. I'll firstly analyze the Walt Disney's first animated princess film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, created in 1937, from a structuralist point of view.

" For structuralism, the world as we know it consists of two fundamental levels— one visible, the other invisible. The visible world consists of what might be called surface phenomena: all the countless objects, activities, and behaviors we observe, participate in, and interact with every day. The invisible world consists of the structures that underlie and organize all of these phenomena so that we can make sense of them." (Tyson, 210) You are not engaged in a structuralist activity if you describe, for example, the structure of a novel to interpret what the work means or evaluate it as good or bad literature . You are engaged in a structuralist activity if you examine the structure of a large number of novels to discover " the underlying principles that govern their composition" for example, principles of characterization like the functions of each character in relation to the narrative as a single piece. (Tyson, 209)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs illustrates the features of a larger genre, namely the fairy tale. It contains many of the genre's most recognisable characteristics: the beautiful princess who has to suffer during the story, the wicked stepmother, the woodland setting with cute talking animals, the

generous helpers (the huntsman, the dwarfs), the high occurence of number three:, there are three queens: Snow White's mother, her stepmother, Snow White herself, then there are three drops of blood that drip from the first queen's hand, the wicked stepmother has to come up with three plans to murder the girl at the dwarfs" cottage, and the dwarfs mourn Snow White's death for three days before burying her. Of course, a very common feature of all the fairy tales, which is to be seen here, is the happy ending as we all know that the opponent will die or will be defeated. We always talk about a perfect ending in all the animated movies in the form of the stereotypical Disney scene which appears when the prince should kiss the princess in order to break the spell and that's when they live happily forever and ever.

According to structuralism, one important concept is represented by the binary oppositions, concept used to describe theidea that the human mind perceives difference in reality most readily in terms of opposites: " two ideas, directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other." (Tyson, 213) . For example, we percive light as the opposite of dark, female as the opposite of male, good as the opposite of evil, black as the opposite of white, and others.

In Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs the first binary opposition that comes to our mind is the one of the victim and the villain, more exactly the pure princess contrasted with the villainous queen. " The Snow White character is sweet, innocent, passive and domestic, while the evil stepmother is narcissistic, evil and unrepentant" (Walsh, 190). Then, we can identify two kinds of motherhood: an older, jealous, selfish type, contrasted with the young, sweet purity of Snow White. To say that the evil queen is a bad

mother figure is beyond understatement. Snow White, on the other hand, despite being a young girl right away becomes a mother figure to the seven dwarfs, earning her place by cooking and cleaning, telling them to go and wash, and generally being the perfect image of passive domesticity. As a result, Snow White gets her dream prince, and the bad queen dies.

Analyzing the narrative pattern we can identify a religious theme in the episode when the Snow White eats an apple and dies. It makes a strong comparison to Eve who ate the fruit from the tree of Knowledge, and causing Adam and herself to be banished from the Garden of Eden. As is the message in Christianity, so is the message in Disney's movie: curiosity, knowledge and power in a woman is wrongful and fearful. (Savanna, web). This is also reflected by the wicked mothers and female villains in other fairy tales.

Regarding the concept of gender roles, based on the fact that patriarchal societies dictate how one should act, think and speak, maintaining that biological sex and gender are one, Disney conforms to these norms in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs movie (Course handouts)

Walt Disney produced the story during the 1930s, a time when women were still associated with the domestic sphere and for the most part trapped in traditional gender roles. Thus, due in part to societal conventions, Disney's first princess was characterized as a passive innocent heroine. She is naïve as she gets tricked by her stepmother twice, and though she is a princess and a child, she is still taught that in order to be a good girl she must obey what she is told to do. This includes the cooking and cleaning what the

dwarfs ask. The other component of being a perfect woman is looking presentable at all times and looking better than everyone. This is where the queen in the story fits in. She has become so obsessed by the image in the mirror and being the best that she becomes evil. " The story is giving women mixed messages saying not to obsess about looks but be beautiful, and portraying a woman as the heroine, but still saying disobedience of the women's roles will lead to punishment." (Andersen, web) As a man of those times, the prince who comes in at the last minute to save his future wife, is only attracted by her physical appearance.

Contemporary fairy tales are now trying to give a voice to the previously marginalised women of the traditional tales. The silent females of the traditional tales have found a voice in modern fairy tales. This can be viewed as a deconstructive technique, and offers new perspectives into how the ideologies governing women today have changed, and also into how modern fairy tales treat their traditional counterparts" ideologies. (Walsh, 5)