Psychoanalytic critical perspectives on fairy tales psychology essay

Fairy tales have continued to be narrated and passed from on generation to another of almost if not all communities of the world. They are short narratives that in all aspects resemble folkloric characters. The similarities can be felt on goblins, trolls, fairies, elves, dwarves and giants that are usually enchantments (Biechonski, 2010). But differences can be seen from other types of folk narratives like precise moral tales and legends. The term " fairy Tale" is used to express a narrative that will have a happy ending. Therefore all the fairy tales must bring joy at the ending by either get rid of the suffering of a perceived hero or any other event that will ultimately spur joy. The tales can be found literary form and/or oral form. They are intended for both the adult and children audience though they are most associated with children.

This work addresses a number of factors, first it acknowledges that for better understand of the link between culture, psychoanalyst and fairy tales then there should be an overview of each one of this (Tatar, 2004). Therefore it defines culture and psychoanalysis and its theories and lastly analysis one of the fairy tales and links it to the application of psychoanalysis.

Culture

The term culture can be used to refer to many different things and as such it has different meaning to different people (Jung, 1964,). However its use can be attributed to three very basic senses; a collection of pattern in human belief, behavior and knowledge that depend on the ability for social learning and symbolic thought, a set of shared values, practices, attitude and goals

that define a group, a given organization or even an institution and lastly, excellence taste in humanities and fine arts also referred as the high culture.

The concept of culture has grown over time and when it first emerged in Europe, it referred to the process of improvement or rather cultivation. It is from this that words like agriculture and horticulture first appeared (Cramer, 1991). It was later to be used to describe the process of a person refinement and betterment through education and other empowerment processes. The twentieth century saw anthropology come with a whole new meaning of culture, identifying it as one of its core concept that take into account all human aspects and phenomena that are not inherited (Biechonski, 2010). It encompasses two meaning: the developed human ability to represent and classify incidents with symbols, and act not only imaginatively but also artistically. Secondly, the discrete manners in which persons living in distinct parts of the globe organize and symbolize their experiences and act in a creative way.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis also known as the Freudian Psychology from the developer Sigmund Freud an Austrian neurologist is the study of human psychological behavior and functioning. This study concerns itself with three core components (Wallerstein, 1986). First it aims to find out how the human mind works and how a person thinks. Second it looks on a number of theories attempting to explain human behavior and lastly ways of treating emotional and psychological illness. In a more simplified definition therefore,

it is an investigation specifically of the mind that seeks remedy from that given investigation (Eagle, 2007). Therapy is of paramount importance here and hence it is more inclined to psychotherapy than the culture and art in general.

Theories

The different psychoanalytic theories can be grouped in to a number of schools of thought. All these differ from each other but almost all of the put emphasis on the strapping manipulative power of the unconscious elements it has on persons mind or mental lives (Coulacoglou, 2002). Topographic theory is derived from Freud's work " the interpretation of Dreams (1900) (Freud, 1896). The theory divides the mental apparatus into three systems; the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious (Eliade, 1968). These systems in this case are seen as mental processes and not physical structure of the brain.

Structural theory posits that the psyche is divided into the super-ego, the ego and the id. It is presumed that the id exists at the time of birth and warehouses the very basic and fundamental instincts (Bettelheim, 1976). It is unconscious and completely unorganized and operates on mere pleasure principle with no foresight or realism. The ego on the other hand develops gradually being dictated by the id and other factors of the external world, its operations and existence are those of a reality principle. The super-ego is purely judgmental and reflective; it is here that self-criticism, self-evaluation

and observation operate. Both the ego and the super ego are partly unconscious and partly conscious.

Ego psychology first suggested by Freud in his work inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety (1926) and refined and developed by Hartmann, Kris and Loewenstein suggests that the ego is autonomous and that the mental functions are independent of origin (Eliade, 1959). These functions are: the motor control, sensor perception, logical thoughts, abstraction, adaptive ability, judgment about danger, symbolic thoughts, executive decision making, concentration, orientation, speech and self preservation among others (Zipes, 1993). Inhibition is pointed out by Freud as one method that can be used by the mind to interfere with these functions in order to avert painful emotions. However, deficit and delay occur in such functions. For example Schizophrenias is characterized with the deficit or the inability to organize thoughts. Adult who suffer from psychosis are known to have deficit in self preservation as well as in the abstraction ability (Tatar, 1999).

Object relation theory: the theory attempts to describe how variability of human relationships between others and self are structured. Here we examine clinical characteristics and symptoms that point out problems associated with object relations such the interference of a person ability to feel trust, warmth, sense of security, consistent emotional closeness, empathy, identity stability and stability in relationship with a given group of people (Bettelheim, B. 1976).

Modern conflict theory: the theory is a modification of the structural theory. It examines the importance of character traits and emotional symptoms as the fundamental and most crucial solution to complex mental conflicts. Differs with the concept of a set ego, id and super ego and thus sees the unconscious and conscious conflict of emotions, wishes, guilt and shame as dependent on the said character trait and emotional symptoms (Eliade, 1959). The very core goal of this theory is to change the equilibrium patients' conflict and letting them rethink on those issues seem to be less adaptive to make them more adaptive. In essence the solutions are to be found within one self's ability to be adaptive to different conflicting emotional issues.

Self psychology lays emphasis on building an integrated and stable sense of self through interaction with other people imagines as " self objects" (Shedler, 2010). They play a significance role in the development of self through idealization, mirroring and twin ship.

Jacques Lacan psychoanalysis: It integrates the Hegelian, semiotics philosophy with psychoanalysis. It advocates return to Freud and emphasizes on the necessity of reading Freud work and not partial. His work concerns the " mirror stage", the imaginary, real and symbolic (Freud, 1953).

There are other types of psychoanalysis such as the interpersonal, culturist, relational, interpersonal – relational, inter-subjective and the modern psychoanalysis (Eliade, 1967). Modern psychoanalysis was coined by H Spotnitz, it is a collection of theoretical and clinical advances that are drawn

from the extension of the Freud's theories with an aim of addressing emotional disorders and come up with potential treatments of the thought untreatable pathogens by the classical methods (Freud, 1896).

Snow White

Snow white is a fairy tale with its origin in German, though it came to spread to most part of Europe. The tale talks of a queen who sits at window sewing and pricks her finger (Freud, 1896). As she watches blood drops flow on the snow, she makes a wish that she had a daughter with a skin as white as snow, hair as black as ebony and lips as red a the blood. Soon after she gives birth to a daughter of her exact wishes calling her Snow White. Soon the Queen dies and the King marries another wife (Eliade, 1959). The new queen has in her possession a magical mirror from whom she seeks to know who is the fairest in the land and the mirror would always reply you my queen. But upon the Snow white reaching the age of seven the mirror gives a completely different answer.

Though appreciating that the queen is fair, is claims that the Snow white is the fairest. The queen filled with jealous develops a plot to kill the princess. She directs the Hartman to take the girl to the woods and murder her (Shedler, 2010). However, the Hartman does not kill the young princess and instead returns home with heart of a young deer to deceive the queen. But later the queen learns that the young princess is a live having been sheltered but the seven dwarfs and the mirror still insisting that Snow White is the fairest. Thereafter the queen plans a number of missions to kill the

princess with little success (Eliade, 1959). Eventually, the queen is able to poison the princess leaving her unconscious, the seven dwarfs thinking the princess is dead put her in a coffin made of glass.

The prince traversing the land lays his eyes on Snow's coffin, overwhelmed by her beauty he falls in love and request the dwarfs that he carries the coffin along with him (Freud, 1896). The servants take with them the coffin but as they do so they go through the bushes and the movement dislodges the poisoned apple out of her throat and she awakens. The prince later marries the princess. On their wedding the queens steps in and she is made put on heated iron shoes and dance in them and there dead she drops.

The unwanted and horrible thoughts experienced by human being originate from their internal thoughts which are in essence planted in our perceive of reality. Interestingly these perceptions emanate from our imaginations (Blackman, 1994). It therefore goes without saying that it is through imagination that we can best address the bad and unwanted thoughts. Fairy tales are designed to do exactly that, they invoke our imagination and as that are key psychotherapy. In our case, the queen refuses to accept the fact that there is some one who is prettier than her. This evoke our imagination as to why at the sub-conscious level of a woman mind would she not accept those facts. The answer cannot be more than her sexuality. It helps us understand that psychoanalysis does not stop at the level and stage of ego's analysis but deeper to try and understand the unconscious process (Freud, 1896).

The fairy tales are designed to reach people in a deeper emotional sense, permit serious debate without personal revelation, they provide alternative ways and means of looking at disturbing issues in a non threatening manner (Freud, 1896). Thus help people examine their thoughts and feelings. In the above tale reading from the aftermaths of the Snow stepmother, one is forced to examine his thoughts and what their end results may turn to be.

In conclusion fairy tales are a crucial part of the psychoanalysis both in understanding the culture aspects of a given society and also in helping evoke ones imagination. In doing one examines his ego and super ego acting both as a source reach enough with information to address human conflict as well as one of the important source of the psychology related disorders.