

# White as snow: internal and external beauty



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The Grimm Brothers' tale of Snow White and The Seven Dwarves uses the duality of hatred and good to deliver the idea that being a person of good morals and mind triumphs over being a person of hatred and the desire to hurt the lives of others. Characterizing the Protagonist of the story with the name of Snow White, already shows to the reader that this central character will be one of pure heart and good intentions for others. The use of symbols such as the name of Snow White is seen throughout this piece as a method for delivering the message that those who choose to turn to hatred rather than a morality that allows for the well being of others, will ensure the experience of a plight of some sort. Prevalent symbols throughout the story include the use of the color white as a means for characterizing all things clean, pure, and good, the symbol of darkness and all that surround it as having to do with fear, hatred, and plight, as well as the symbols of the animals that watch over Snow White's coffin standing for both what she is lacking, and what she is made up of. Grimms' extensive use of symbolism as a tool for delivering the messages of the story shows the audience that nothing was placed in the story without a purpose, that every color, animal, and move that Snow White makes has some level of significance to the story itself.

The title and protagonist of the story being named Snow White is an immediate use of symbolism as a mode of delivering a message of purity before even having to read the story itself. The story is prefaced with the reasoning behind the name of Snow White. Her mother stating " Oh that you had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the embroidery frame!" (KHM 53), prior to the birth of her child, shows that

her name will be a symbol for the things her mother encountered in her life prior to her arrival. As all good things do come to an end eventually, the queen's death being short after the birth of her baby, born "...with a skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony, and she was named Snow-white" (KHM 53), just like the way she thought her child would be born. Her mother's death and being replaced with the entry of the new, vain, beauty obsessed stepmother symbolizes the quick ability of a situation of good and purity to turn into a situation filled with hatred, and causing plight. Throughout the story, the stepmother queen constantly having to turn to her mirror for validation shows how she covers her self hatred with a constant desire for having an outside source tell her how beautiful she is, to disguise her from the destruction that the hatred is causing inside of her. Instead of seeing Snow White as the kind hearted, joyful, wanting good and respect for everyone girl that she is, the stepmother Queen sees her as miserable and someone who deserves to die due to her extreme jealousy of the princess. Comparing the "fair-ness" of the princess and the stepmother queen also relates to her name being Snow White, due to the word "fair" also relating to a fair, almost white pigmentation of the skin, only furthering that Snow White's skin being so pale is a symbol for her innocence in purity of the heart being a symbol of her inner beauty, as well as outer beauty that the queen envies so much. Another instance in the story where Snow White's beauty and fair exterior show that she is a person of fair interior as well is when the dwarves immediately assumed that she was not an intruder nor a person of bad intentions when they found her in their home and allowed her to stay, purely based on their initial assessment of her, which revolved around admiring her

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beauty. The great shock that the Queen suffers when the mirror tells her “But Snow-white fairer is than you” (KMH 53), uses the word fair in context to outer beauty, which coincides with Snow White’s inner beauty and down to earth personality. The immediate turn of her skin to a shade of yellow/green shows how skin color throughout this story is yet another symbol for good and bad.

The symbol of the skin of the stepmother Queen turning into a yellow/green color when she finds out Snow White is more “fair” in terms of beauty (value in the eyes of the Queen) shows the physical transformation that that the Queen goes through when she begins to resemble a person of hatred rather than good. Immediately, this symbol of darkness, the green color of the Queen, rather than the white of the Princess, jumps out to the reader of the story as a symbol of jealousy. The fact that the huntsman was unable to kill Snow White and ended up leaving her to fend for herself in the woods instead, shows how her good heart, fair beauty, and care for others ended up saving her life instead of aiding in plight. Another symbol of darkness standing for objects of fear, hatred and plight are the woods themselves. Snow White’s experience in the woods after the huntsman abandoned her (post deciding not to kill her per the Queen’s wish) was defined by, “Now, when the poor child found herself quite alone in the wild woods, she felt full of terror, even of the very leaves on the trees, and she did not know what to do for fright” (KHM 53). Snow White being a victim of the unknown, lead to her experiencing unnecessary fear, that could have been avoided if the Queen was not a person filled with jealousy and through that, desire to cause plight in Snow White. The fact that Snow White was able to come upon the

house of the Seven Dwarves and seek refuge in a place that seemed like a safe haven (compared to the terror she encountered in the woods), shows that Snow White was able to avoid death and impending plight in the woods due to her being a person of good rather than a person of hatred. Although Snow White endured three situations in which the Queen tried to poison her to death, with the help of the dwarves, and then the prince, she was able to come out as successful (by successful, alive, well, and married to a prince that appreciates her internal beauty and good heart as well as her external beauty), she had to overcome situations of possible plight, which were all characterized with features of darkness as well as frightful elements due to the unknown.

The animals that are mentioned as coming down to watch over Snow White's clear coffin after she supposedly died after the Queen's third attempt at poisoning are symbolic of the features and characteristics that the character of Snow White is made up of, as well as of those that she is lacking. The owl, raven and dove are all birds of red, black and white color, which could be linked to symbolizing the red lips and blood, white/fair complexion and black hair of the protagonist herself. Owls, being birds of wisdom, symbolize the lack of wisdom that Snow White has in her constant plight in trusting the characters that the evil Queen is portraying in her attempts to kill Snow White. Although Snow White tells the evil Queen characters of the old peasant woman and different dressed up versions of an old woman that "I dare not let anybody in; the seven dwarfs told me not to." (KHM 53), her lack of wisdom is seen in her getting easily manipulated by the Queen and letting her take advantage of Snow White and giving her whatever the poisonous

solution was (in either case, of the apple or the comb). The initial attempt at the Queen's destruction of Snow White could have put trust and good intentions of Snow White to blame, however the other two times that Snow White almost falls to her death can be called her own fault since she could have trusted the words of the dwarves and avoided poisoning. Ravens, just like owls, are birds of intelligence and wisdom, which symbolize the black color of Snow White's hair, and also symbolize her lack of intelligence in her trust and easy manipulation by the Queen. Although she was warned more than once, she still fell into temptation and was lured in by the Queen, and this is seen as a situation where if she was a character with intelligence rather than simply trusting that all people have good intentions, this case of plight could have been avoided. The white color of the dove as well as the traditional symbol of a dove as an object of innocence and purity is seen in the character of Snow White throughout the duration of the story. Her constant falls are due to her ability to see the good in people and expect them all to be characters of good morals and individual kindness, which are qualities that resemble people of pure hearts and innocence. Her fair appearance and pale skin is symbolic in connection to the white feathers of a dove, which just like the two other birds, looked over her deathbed, enforcing why she fell to this plight (where her good heart seemed to have allowed her to trust too many people, linked to her lack of intelligence).

The Queen's constant need of affirmation from the mirror telling her that she is the fairest in all of the land stands for her insecurities regarding her appearance and therefore, her character. Throughout the tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, there is a constant theme of connection between

external beauty standing for internal beauty. This is confirmed in the evil Queen turning a different color when she started to hate Snow White for the sole fact that her mirror called her more fair than the Queen herself. This jealousy (internal unattractiveness) caused external unattractiveness. Snow White is called fair in beauty due to her internal beauty in the fact that all of her intentions are for the well being of others, without seeking plight in anyone. At the end of the story, when Snow White ends up happily married and the Queen ends up dead, the moral of the story becomes even more clear to the reader; that being fair in beauty is heavily linked to being fair in heart. Although Snow White fell into many situations that put her life at risk, her constant ability to bounce back into life due to the help of others, showed that being a person of good heart will take one farther than the people full of hatred, misery and jealousy. The constant use of symbolism as a tool for delivering the message of being selfless and avoiding plight through avoiding hatred allows the story of Snow White to be one of moral good winning over jealousy.