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Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters- Psychological Meaning

As a child one of the many fairy tales that was attention catching was *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* is an African tale that teaches us the importance of morale and dignity. The fairy tale dives into the deep truths about sibling rivalry, identity search and character symbolism. Reading this as a child it seems like a simple right from wrong story; however, from a psychological perspective the fairy tale teaches us more than we realize.

Beginning with the introduction of Maynara and Nyasha, Mufaro's daughters, we understand there are two sides of the tale. Maynara is the wicked sister, who induces pain and suffering on Nyasha, the noble and kind daughter. Starting off the tale, we notice the good and the bad take shape, never overlapping. The figures in fairytales are not ambivalent-not good and bad at the same time, as we all are in reality (Bettelheim 9). We may think that fairy tales stress the good parts and highlight the bad as things we must stray away from, but in reality fairy tales show us both sides of the coin with the purpose of embracing the beauty and darkness in ourselves. The ying-yang, Maynara and Nyasha portray is developed further along when their father receives notice that the King is searching for a wife. Reacting to this news, Maynara begs her father to "sacrifice her" instead of Nyasha knowing well she doesn't stand a chance against her sister. Maynara's selflessness and greed is a projection of her own insecurities, while all the

townspeople praise Nyasha she proceeds to build up hate for her sister. Sibling rivalry costs Maynara her relationship with her sister, as she lets jealousy overpower her moral compass. Maynara represents the id in us all, leaving her family and taking her own journey to the King's palace, we are reminded of the negative consequences, following our id will eventually lead us to. Just as Maynara must learn to suppress her id, fairy tales teach the anxieties and learning tasks of the young child who must overcome and sublimate his primitive incorporating and hence destructive desires (Bettelheim 160). With the persona split of Maynara and Nyasha the story develops the dangers of sibling rivalry and the double sided good and bad that exist in us all.

Furthermore, not only do we learn about sibling rivalry, but we also learn about one's journey and hardships. Throughout the story both Maynara and Nyasha embark on self-discovering journeys. Maynara encounters three figures on her path, each asking her favors that would humble her, however to each figure she responds with mockery and scorn. These figures represent the opportunities Maynara had to better herself; for example", when the little boy asked for food she simply said she brought only enough for herself, or when the old woman had asked her to not laugh at the trees, Maynara did just that, disrespecting her orders. Reading this from a younger point of view, we see what Maynara does is naughty and wrong, but the fact is she is going through the hardships of her journey and failing miserably to realize her mistakes. We think of fairy tales as fantasy. Yet the illusion is that reality is wrapped in fantasy. The trials of life, the hopes and fears – and ultimately the triumphs (McAleer). In addition, along Maynara, Nyasha goes on her identity path. Through all the negative comments and ridicule Nyasha had to endure with Maynara, she never once lost her temper. For example, when Maynara told Nyasha she would become her servant as was her place, Nyasha responded with kind words that she

would be happy to serve her sister, “I will be pleased to serve you, but why do you say such things? You are clever and strong and beautiful”. It seems highly unrealistic for a person to uptake: “But when I am queen everyone will know your silly kindness is weakness”, insults and hate in an honorable manner”,” however the deeper meaning is to teach children to bear the bad and act in a superego manner, which will eventually lead to our ego. As we mature, all three institutions of the mind-id, ego and superego- become ever more clearly articulated and separated from each other, each able to interact with the other two without the unconscious overpowering the conscious (Bettelheim 55). Throughout the tale”,” the importance of embarking on one's personal journey is emphasized, because it is the only thing that allows growth, such as Maynara in the end.

While sibling rivalry and personal journeys are key parts of the fairy tale”,” they wouldn't be possible without crucial symbols and figures. In the beginning of the tale, a snake that roams Nyasha's garden is introduced. From biblical to social understandings, snakes are prominent symbols of temptation, disillusion and cleverness. The snake follows both sisters on their journeys, taking different shapes and providing valuable lessons. While the snake in the garden is a reminder of Adam and Eve, in this tale it does more good than harm; the snake gives Maynara opportunities to change her ways, however she ignores these signs. Furthermore, not only is the snake an important symbol of truth and guidance but the forest/woods both sisters take to the King's palace represent a spiritual finding, allowing us to build our own meaningful path (Gadd). In addition, not only does the forest allow for the characters to trail their own lives but it offers a refuge/protection for the character, It symbolizes going into the unconscious aspects of ourselves to make them conscious (Gadd). Furthermore, the father also is a representation of the super-ego

figure in the story. The Father may or may not be aware of his daughters character traits, and yet he chooses to send them both before the king. The father does what he sees as correct, even if Maynara is acting in accordance with her Id, he values both of his daughters never choosing one before another. From the snake to the forest to the father, each shape is a symbolism for something much greater, a projection of the characters emotions and self.

In conclusion, *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* is a timeless psychological fairy tale, with multiple messages and deep meanings to learn. As children our natural instinct is to be selfish, greedy and manipulative. Children want things when they want it and never take no for an answer, this state is known as Id which is what Maynara portrays. Meanwhile Nyasha portrays the state of ego, where Id and supero-ego are balanced out through multiple trials and tribulations. Nyasha isn't able to grow and realize her full potential until she goes through the journey with her sister and learns how to stand up for herself. Through sibling rivalry, identity search and symbolism development, children are able to build their own experience and grow learning the deep truths that make them up.

Citations Page:

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