

The evolution of Snow White: A close textual analysis of three versions of the Snow White fairy tale.

John Hanson Saunders

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The fairy tale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" has endured hundreds of revisions and retellings throughout the last several centuries. Each version of this story carries with it traces of the author or authors and of the culture that produced that particular version. The meta-narrative must remain somewhat intact for any version to be recognizable as a variation of the Snow White tale. However, the elements that are added or subtracted by each author or authors make each version unique. This work presents a close textual analysis of three popular versions of the Snow White fairy tale. The focus of this work is not to just highlight how versions are different, but rather to isolate the unique variants of each version. Once separated from the meta-narrative, these elements can be examined for the rhetorical choices made by each author or authors. I make the claim that by looking at what changed over time within versions of this one specific tale; one can read aspects of the individual cultures that produced each version. I examine the first published version by the Brothers Grimm, the Walt Disney film, and the Michael Cohn film. These three versions are separated by one hundred and eighty-seven years and were produced in three very different cultures. I briefly present aspects of the three distinct cultures, changes made within the three narratives with analysis of those changes, and character studies for how each character was adapted for a new version. This evolution of the story and characters over time displays unique cultural traces present in each version that can allow rhetorical scholars to examine and understand possible cultural influences as they are manifest in one metanarrative over time. This study explains how cultural traces can be seen in the variations between versions.

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