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Hugvísindasvið

Happily Ever After

The Disneyfication of H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid"

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B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This B.A. thesis takes a close look at H.C. Andersen's classic tale "The Little Mermaid" published in 1837 as well as Disney's animated version The Little Mermaid released in 1989. Disney's works have become well known globally in the past few decades and the original tales and stories Disney uses for the animations have fallen into their shadow. Andersen's original tale can therefore come as a surprise to many that have only seen Disney's film. In the Disney version little mermaid no longer has the desire to leave her world under the sea to acquire an immortal soul but instead gives up her fin for a pair of legs and her voice to the evil witch so she can spend the rest of her human life with prince Eric. Spirituality is cut out and Disney adds sickly sweet and romantic notions instead.

Disney has throughout the years mastered the art of remaking old fairy tales and folklore and has with great success put together a formula that will not only catch the eye of the viewer in a heartfelt manner but also make a great deal of profit from it. This formula is what critics have been keen on calling Disneyfication. The term and its meaning has been examined thoroughly by many scholars but professor Jack Zipes is perhaps one that delved into the matter the most. When his studies on Disneyfication are applied to The Little Mermaid by Disney it is clear that the film has many of the characteristics that Disneyfication entails. The storyline and especially the ending have been changed drastically to fit Disney's formula and characters have been cut, added and altered. Zipes gives a good description on what both Walt Disney and the Disney corporation after Walt's demise have done in the past few decades to build an empire based on colorful animated films for children that has expanded to theme parks, books, clothing, toys and every other merchandise.

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Introduction

In the year 1837 the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, most commonly known as H.C. Andersen, wrote a story about a mermaid simply called "The Little Mermaid". As the title of the tale reveals it is about a young mermaid who also happens to be a princess and her journey to fulfill her dream to be loved by a human prince and ultimately acquire a soul along with the immortality that the soul brings. H.C. Andersen wrote "The Little Mermaid" as a children story. The moral of the story is quite mature despite the fact that Andersen aimed at it being read by or to children. As the story is read it is evident how much emphasis Andersen puts on the importance of faith and that the final result and reward of a life lead with well practiced faith and good-doing is the eternal life of the soul.

The moral of H.C. Andersen's story changed significantly in the movie and the purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast in a critical manner Andersen's tale and the Disney movie that was based on his story. This paper will not only examine but also prove how drastically different the movie is from Andersen's story as well point out the few similarities the two versions share. By doing so an example will then be made on how Disney usually works on changing classic tales and folklore into dreamy fairy tales made from a specific recipe, or what has also been named "Disneyfication" (qtd. in Hastings 83).

Disney's movie will be criticized from a feminist point of view as it puts forth both in an obscure but also a literal manner proper ways for girls to behave. Disney's formula usually consists of physical beauty, love, good versus evil and of course a happy ending. These elements hardly exist in Andersen's story of the mermaid. "The Little Mermaid" was first published in 1837 in a collection of stories called *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn* in Danish or Fairy tales, told to Children as it would be

directly translated in English. This collection was the third of Andersen's collections of fairy tales with that same title, the other two were both published in 1835. The Museum H.C. Andersen's House acquired the manuscript of "The Little Mermaid" in 1920. Along with a few of his other manuscripts, "The Little Mermaid" was found in an antique store in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France. It is thought that Andersen donated these manuscripts to the painter Anton Melbye, who was married to a French woman. The woman re-married a French major and moved back to France supposedly taking the manuscripts with her. In 1992 a very professional robbery was made at the museum where the manuscripts were kept. Among the things that were stolen was the manuscript of the story of "The Little Mermaid". None of the stolen objects have yet been retrieved ("H.C. Andersen: Den lille Havfrue").

"The Little Mermaid" is just one of many stories by Andersen that are known worldwide. In 1935 "The Princess and the Pea" was published as well as "Thumbelina". "The Emperor's New Clothes" was published in the same collection as "The Little Mermaid" and "The Little Match Girl" and "The Ugly Duckling" are among other tales that Andersen wrote and have become classic children's tales all over the world. H.C. Andersen has over the years become a household name in Scandinavia and the other nordic countries. If his name does not ring a bell the mentioning of a few of his tales most probably will but many of them are well known today even though Andersen is not always credited for them. The sad thing is that these stories have been republished so many times and rewritten and adapted by various different authors that the credits to Andersen are often forgotten. These newer versions usually alter the story either a little bit or change it to a large extent making it harder for the reader to identify the tale as an Andersen original. Personally, I grew up watching Disney's film versions of some of his tales and the thought of the story

originally belonging to Andersen never really entered my mind. It was two years ago that I first came across and read "The Little Mermaid" original by H.C. Andersen. Having still a vivid memory of Disney's version of the story it was somewhat of a surprise to read the original tale on which Disney based its movie and see how extraordinarily different the two versions are. The lack of a typical fairy tale ending in Andersen's story was the most noticeable difference to me, but what most people actually mean by a typical fairy tale ending is exactly the type of ending Disney has made famous.

1. H.C. Andersen's Background

Hans Christian Andersen was born 2 April in 1805 in the town Odense on the island Funen in Denmark (Mylius 13). He was the son of a shoemaker and a housewife who later worked as a washerwoman. He had a half sister that he never knew as a child. His mother had given birth to her illegitimately six years before Hans Christian Andersen was born and given her away to be nursed. Andersen was only briefly contacted by her after he became a published writer but she came to him begging for money. She was extremely poor but a respectable washerwoman (Spink 6-7). As a child he dreamt of becoming an actor and despite the fact that his mother wanted him to stay in Odense and study to become a tailor he begged and pleaded until she allowed him to move out to Copenhagen and pursue his dream. He was only fourteen years old at that time (Spink 20-21).

Andersen struggled for a while in Copenhagen and tried hard to put himself forward and make himself visible in the theatre and singing community. He was frequently told that he needed an education as well as some maturity so he could become successful. During his first few years in Copenhagen Andersen had many benefactors that helped him in various different manners. He got free lessons in singing, Danish, German and Latin as well as dancing and acting (Spink 26). Andersen must have shown incredible potential since he managed to get help from so many people in all these various subjects. In the first three years he lived in the capital Andersen had submitted two plays to the theatre. The first one was so laden with grammatical and spelling mistakes that it was deemed utterly unusable. His second play, a tragedy, was also whisked away for similar reasons. A member of the theatre's governing body, Jonas Collin, saw with that play what Andersen would be capable of with some education. He therefore arranged for him to get his education at Slagelse

state grammar school (Spink 28). Despite his education Andersen never grew out of spelling and grammar mistakes and today he probably would have been diagnosed with dyslexia (Spink 40). Not only had Collin helped Andersen get an education but he became a father figure in his life as well. Collin's children were therefore somewhat like his siblings and the Collin family most likely appears in some obscure manner in Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling", a tale that has always been considered autobiographical (Spink 41).

Andersen described his own writing style once in these words: "The voice of the narrator had to be heard in the style, which therefore had to approach the spoken word. The stories were told for children, but the adult had to be able to listen to them" (Spink 66). Perhaps Andersen had not initially intended for the latter point to be the case in his stories but that is what happened to them and his later works had an audience that consisted mostly or wholly of adults. Even in his writings that were intended for children there are passages that are more appreciated and better understood by adults than by children and some of that quality can even be found in "The Little Mermaid". Andersen seems to always have had the adults and especially the parents in mind when writing for children and as he once mentioned: "I get an idea for grown-ups and then tell my tale to the little ones, while remembering that Mother and Father will be listening and must have something to think about" (Spink 66).

2. Andersen's Tale of the Little Mermaid and spirituality

H.C. Andersen wrote the story of "The Little Mermaid" that was published in a compilation of his tales on 7 April 1837 (Mylius 66). It is a lovely story of the merpeople that live under the sea. Andersen once said: "Most of what I have written is a reflection of myself. Every character is from life. I know and have known them all" (Spink 70). In regard to "The Little Mermaid" it is Andersen himself that represents the little mermaid and Louise Collin, Jonas Collins daughter, is mirrored in the tale as the prince (Spink 44). Andersen had shown romantic feelings towards Louise and she had dismissed him as she was in love with somebody else. Andersen's characteristics and spiritual thinking were certainly in accordance with the little mermaid's main objective in the tale.

The tale starts out with a dreamy description about the sea and how beautiful it looks. Under the sea lives the sea king, a widower who has six daughters. His mother, a wise old woman helps take care of her granddaughters and the youngest is the most beautiful of them all. Colours are used frequently in "The Little Mermaid" when objects and appearances are described but different shades of red, such as scarlet, crimson and fiery red are the colours Andersen used for describing the flowers under the sea especially the ones that the little mermaid was fond of. In the princesses' garden they each had their own plot where they could plant whatever they wanted. The sisters shaped their plots into shapes of different creatures of the sea but the little mermaid, who is described as quiet and wistful, shaped her plot round like the sun and placed red flowers around a statue of a handsome young boy which had come from a shipwreck. One of the flowers she planted was a "rose-colored weeping willow tree" that grew so tall that the boughs started to drape. "It looked as if the roots and the tips of the branches were kissing each other in play" (Andersen). This could easily be read

as a foreshadowing of the potential love between the little mermaid and the prince, the mermaid being the root at the bottom of the ocean and the prince the treetop upon land, the two different worlds trying to meet and unite.

In Andersen's story the mermaid princesses are banned from rising to the surface until they become fifteen years old. The little mermaid is the youngest and therefore will be the last of her sisters to see the world above the sea. She has to make do with the stories her grandmother tells her and her older sisters experiences when they have become old enough to swim up to the surface. The little mermaid longs for the day she becomes fifteen years old and is so deeply saddened by the sight of her sisters rising to the surface together that she feels she would cry if she could. In Andersen's story mermaids cannot cry so their pain becomes even worse. At last she turns fifteen and her grandmother dresses her up in celebration of the happy day and clamps eight oysters onto the little mermaid's tale. As the little mermaid exclaims to her grandmother that the oysters hurt she replies "You must put up with a good deal to keep up appearances" (Andersen). The old woman is more or less teaching her granddaughter the old cliché that beauty is pain. The little mermaid finally swims to the surface and the first thing she sees is a birthday gathering for a sixteen year old prince on a ship. The little mermaid instantly falls for the prince's loveliness and watches him all night. Suddenly a storm comes with such a force that the ship breaks and begins to sink. The little mermaid is determined not to let the young prince die and holds his head above water and lets the waves carry them on. The little mermaid observes that the prince looks like the statue she has in her garden. When she has laid him down on a shore and hid herself from view, a group of girls emerge from a cloister and help the prince. Disheartened by the thought that the prince is oblivious to

the fact that she was the one that saved him, the little mermaid is even more quiet and wistful than she usually is and tells her sisters nothing of her experience up above.

As mentioned earlier, religion and faith play a large role in Andersen's story. In the first paragraph Andersen explains how deep the sea is with steeples "stacked one on top of another" as measurements (Andersen). The image of church towers is brought up again when the oldest sister tells the younger ones about her trip to the surface. She reports to them that the best thing about being on the surface was observing the people from the shore and "to see so many church towers and spires; and to hear the ringing bells" (Andersen). It is strange that the mermaids, who are never described as being religious, and have no knowledge of how life on solid ground is except for what their grandmother has told them, should be fascinated with church towers. The fifth sister also mentions church towers. She relates to her other sisters how the icebergs floating on the sea are considerably bigger than church towers normally are, but as that was her first time coming up to the surface she would never have seen a church tower before and does not mention having seen one on that specific trip. When the little mermaid has rescued the prince from drowning she lays him down on a shore where there happens to be a cloister close by. As this is narrated the little mermaid is said to wonder whether the building is a church or a cloister. However, she, like her sisters has never seen either one of those types of buildings before. When the little mermaid has rescued the prince she sees a building she thinks is probably a church or a cloister, a correct assumption despite the fact that she has never seen one before. All this mentioning of churches and spires adds to Andersen's theme on spirituality and religion but to a current reader it sounds strange and unrelatable for spires to be used as measurements.

In her review of Disney's film, Roberta Trites states: "To the Andersen mermaid, love is a means to an end rather than an end in itself" (2). There are at least three instances in the story where the mermaid favors an eternal soul and sees the prince as a way to get it. Ariel's grandmother tells her that mermaids turn into foam after a lifespan of 300 years and while humans live shorter than mermaids they have an eternal soul. To this Ariel replies: "I would gladly give up my three hundred years if I could be a human being only for a day, and later share in that heavenly realm" (Andersen). The little mermaid cannot get this idea out of her head even when she is singing beautifully at the royal ball and thinks of the handsome prince and "her sorrow at not possessing, as he did, an immortal soul" she would even "do anything to win him and to gain an immortal soul" (Andersen). In just this short amount of time the little mermaid is determined to change her life, to not have her body turned to foam in the sea at the end of her life but have her spirit live forever. Her unwavering faith in this newfound thing called afterlife is admirable in some ways but her decisions are never based on anything but stories from her grandmother. She makes the rash decision to seek help from the sea witch, one that she has never seen before but she fears.

Andersen's tale lacks sexuality completely. The little mermaid is indeed described as beautiful but there is no indication in Andersen's writing that he meant the text to be read as sexual. Again, it is the spirituality and faith that is perpetually evident in his tale but according to Roberta Trites underlying sexual issues can be read from the text: "The enchantress' image of flowing blood [when the little mermaid walks] prepares the girl for menarche, while the image of knife-like pain warns the girl about the potentially hymen-breaking phallus" (Trites 4). In my opinion that is not what Andersen meant for readers to be able to gather from the text when he wrote it.

Even though the language is often high-flown and maybe more relatable to adults rather than children this is a children's tale Andersen wrote.

The little mermaid is unhappy down in the sea with the other merfolk and longs to walk upon land, experience love and end her life on earth with the knowledge that her soul will live on. In the end she is left with two difficult choices; she either has to murder the prince with a knife her sisters have provided her with or commit suicide by jumping into the sea and turning into foam. As she could not make herself stab the prince, while he lay sleeping with his bride, she threw the knife into the ocean with a trembling hand and then she threw herself into the sea instantly feeling her body dissolve into foam. The ending is tragic but hopeful at the same time with the little mermaid taking her own life but all the while being granted a second chance as a daughter of the air and in that way possibly acquiring her ultimate goal; an immortal soul.

3. Disney's Movie

Disney released the motion picture called *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, roughly 150 years after Andersen had his tale published. The movie received critical acclaim and was nominated for three and awarded with two Academy Awards of Oscars. The movie got awarded in the "Best Music" category for original score and original song, but that was for the song "Under the Sea" ("*The Little Mermaid* (1989)").

In the many years that passed between Andersen's story and Disney's version the values of society changed enormously and so, to be able to sell their movie to the audience the film company made changes that fitted the demands of the society at that time. Andersen put much emphasis on the notion of religion in his tale while Disney's emphasis was much more materialistic. The messages that *The Little Mermaid* sends out to its viewers, especially to young girls can be argued to be quite harmful to their self image and to put patriarchal views on a pedestal. Body image is one of the biggest themes in the movie. Your body is not good enough until it fits somebody else's standards. It can be read from the movie that being beautiful and having the exact body figure society has issued as a desirable one, is important in life and essential in love. One would have thought that with the over 150 years that passed after the publication of Andersen's tale and the screening of the movie about the little mermaid, sexist themes and patriarchal values would have evolved and become minuscule or even nonexistent. That however is not the case and those issues are even more prominent than in Andersen's story.

It is safe to assume that the time in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* only spans about four or five days. That is quite a short time to fall in love and get married. The little mermaid however, makes this possible or rather her supporting characters help make her dream possible. Although a leading character, she is also a bystander

waiting for the things she wants in life to happen for her. She relies on a strong male figure to be her leader in life and when her father does no longer support what she wants she looks for another male character that will. Eric takes that place after saving her life from Ursula and they sail happily married into the distance.

H.C. Andersen's story of the little mermaid has a folktale feel to it whereas the Disney movie is a fairy tale. In the movie the mermaid's reason for wanting to become a human being is not to acquire an immortal soul like Andersen's mermaid. Disney's little mermaid is obsessed with everything human, especially materialistic trinkets and she wants nothing more than to be able to use them in a proper way upon dry land. After she has saved Eric from drowning he becomes another reason for her wanting to become human. In Disney's movie, Ariel, as the little mermaid has been named, has a secret cave where she keeps man made things and knick-knacks she has found floating in the sea. Scuttle, the friendly and eccentric seagull, tells her what the different items are called and what they are used for but he rarely knows the actual names and functions of the objects and makes them up instead. That is why Ariel thinks a fork is used to comb hair. One of the items she has in her cave is a marble statue of the prince. She is fascinated by the statue and longs to be the prince's one true love.

Ariel does not have a grandmother in the movie but she has two side-kicks, the little fish Flounder and the seagull Scuttle as well as her little guardian Sebastian the crab. The sea-witch plays a very different role in the movie. Being more of a helper in Andersen's tale Ursula becomes the main villain of the movie with her moray eel minions, Flotsam and Jetsam by her side. The voluptuous witch does have one goal in common with the original sea-witch: she longs to have the most beautiful voice of the sea and quickly uses the opportunity to trade her potion with Ariel's breathtaking

voice. Once she possesses Ariel's beautiful voice her goals become greater and she intends to become the most powerful figure of the sea, that is, to overpower Triton and take over his role as the ruler of the sea. The sea-witch in Andersen's tale is more brutal in the way that she cuts out the little mermaid's tongue while Ursula just magically retracts Ariel's voice out from her throat. Andersen's mermaid also experiences constant pain in her feet when she walks whereas Ariel is merely a little wobbly the first time she tries to stand. Despite the little mermaid's pain and suffering the sea-witch is more of an enabler for her than Ursula is for Ariel. The sea-witch even gives the little mermaid a second chance to become a mermaid again after the prince has married the princess. Ursula's plans are to hinder Ariel from reaching her goal, that is kissing Eric with a kiss of love before her third day as a human is over. By preventing the kiss Ursula would then own Ariel and be able to trade her and get Triton's kingdom in return. It is interesting to see that Ursula as the villain is one of a kind in the movie, she is not a mermaid as the bottom half of her body is shaped like an octopus. Another noticeable aspect concerning Ursula is that she is the only character partly or wholly human that has darker skin. Her skintone is grey while the others are white. That might just be a coincidence or Disney may have thought the gray fitted the octopus bottom better, but one cannot help but wonder whether Disney intended Ursula to be of another race. The only other characters that are noticeably different are Sebastian, the little crab and chef Louis. Both of those characters differentiate themselves from the others with their foreign accents and not their skincolor like Ursula.

Even though Disney has made a nice little movie about mythical creatures finding love amongst humans, this movie does send some mixed messages to children and especially little influential girls. Extreme bodytypes are promoted and many of

the songs and lines in the movie suggest the kind of behaviour that is expected not only of Ariel but girls her age in general. An example of this is Ursula's song when she is luring Ariel into taking her deal. First she suggests with the images of two very unhappy merfolk that if you are too skinny and slanky looking as a man you will never get the girl you are fond of, and if you are not slim as a girl you will probably never find love. When Ursula demands Ariel's voice in her song she states that a voice is not a necessary feature for a young woman to have because she will still have her good looks and should never underestimate the power of body language. She advises Ariel that the men upon earth do not care too much for unnecessary blather and that a girl who gossips is a bore. On land it is much more preferred for a lady not to say a word and those are the ladies that the men fall in love with. The withdrawn lady who holds her tongue will be the one who finds true love (*The Little Mermaid*). The lyrics are very explicit and this song sends a clear message out to young girls as can be seen in the lyric fraction below when Ursula has demanded Ariel's voice as payment for her legs:

ARIEL:

But my voice, how can I –

URSULA:

You'll have your looks, your pretty face!

And don't underestimate the importance of body language, ha!

The men up there don't like a lot of blather

They think a girl who gossips is a bore.

Yes on land it's much preferred

For ladies not to say a word

And after all, dear, what is idle prattle for?

Come on! They're not all that impressed with conversation

True gentlemen avoid it when they can

But they dote and swoon and fawn

On a lady who's withdrawn.

It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man. (*The Little Mermaid*)

This song is beyond offensive to every woman in the world. It bluntly suggest that women should not even bother to speak as their words are meaningless to the other sex. Women should behave as is proper for a lady, hold their tongue and use their looks and body language to get ahead in life. Even Sebastian, the little Jamaican voiced crab, advises Ariel to use her looks and femininity in order to get the prince. He suggest she must look her best, bat her eyes and pucker her lips so that she has a chance of getting a kiss from Eric (*The Little Mermaid*). It is clear that Andersen never takes the issue of beauty to this extent. In his tale beauty is essential to get the prince but in the end the ultimate objective is still to be immortal and immortality will not require any beauty standard.

4. The fairy tale and the movie: major differences

The most obvious difference between the two versions of the tale of the little mermaid is the mermaid's ultimate goal: Andersen has her wanting to acquire an eternal soul while Disney makes Ariel madly in love with Eric, the human prince, in an instance. H.C. Andersen makes it the tales' moral that absolution of the soul is extremely important and a person's life on earth should be focused on achieving this absolution. The little mermaid tries to use love to gain her soul freedom but fails somewhat and her spirit is forced to try and earn immortality. To Andersen nothing apparently is supposed to come easy in life, everything has to be worked for and earned and the ultimate goal is never physical but should always be spiritual or on a religious note. This is certainly not the case in the Disney version as the whole theme of the movie is love. Love has become one of the staples in Disney's formula for making an animation. Love is universal and applies to almost everyone and has in modern times become increasingly more important than religion and especially in the media. In media, and Disney has helped establish this, love has become a cliché. Certain physical standards have been made a condition for achieving happiness.

Beauty in Andersen's tale is a prominent element. There it is not only the little mermaid's beauty that is noticeable but also the nature. Disney has not cut out this beauty factor in any sort of way but rather added to it. With the animation, Disney is able to make the beauty visible to the viewer but with that Disney automatically makes beauty more physical and something to visualize instead of something to perceive. In Andersen's tale almost everything is beautiful, the bottom of the sea is colourful and magical as is the world up above. As lovely as the floral and colourful descriptions sound when "The Little Mermaid" is read they cannot be compared to the actual colours the viewer sees when watching the movie. Disney has the advantage of

visual aid to project the loveliness of the sea. Sea creatures and plants are given lively bright colours to represent fun and happiness while the more evil places of the sea such as Ursula's lair is dark and gloomy looking. The most obvious beauty in both Andersen's tale and the movie is the little mermaid herself. Andersen describes her as the most beautiful of all her sisters as well as being the youngest of them, a common motif in tales like this. On more than one occasion he describes her as being "quiet and wistful" (Andersen). It is interesting to see Disney's perception of a perfect beauty, an unreal physique, thick luscious hair and big bright blue eyes. In the movie, Ariel is not really the quiet and plaintive girl Andersen had described her as. She is adventurous and bubbly despite being somewhat passive and has one wish only: to become a human and spend the rest of her life with the handsome prince she is in love with.

H.C. Andersen's story of the little mermaid is a quest for the true meaning of life, to find what you yearn for and be blessed from a higher spiritual power. For the little mermaid, love is just a tool that will help her further in her quest. For her love is not everlasting and she does not mourn the loss of it. In Disney's movie this is turned completely around. Love is Ariel's main objective and evil forces are what hinder her from getting it. The film is largely based on the theme of good versus evil. Typically good prevails as is the case in *The Little Mermaid*. The seawitch's motives are to gain complete power over the sea whereas in the tale she has more of a subtle, less evil role even though she would not be considered good there either. Hastings mentions this in reference to good and evil: "Like previous Disney adaptations, *The Little Mermaid* provides wish fulfillment without true sacrifice and neatly encapsulates all 'bad' desires within a figure of female evil" (Hastings 85-86).

In the movie, Ariel has the men in her life save her. Her father decides out of love for his daughter to sacrifice himself and thereby handing his kingdom over to Ursula. The prince is the one that heroically kills the bad sea witch Ursula while Ariel is simply a helpless bystander. In Andersen's tale it was the little mermaid who took matters into her own hands. When she understood that life with the prince was no longer an option she did not react with anger but rather with content. She denied herself the opportunity to become a mermaid again as that required her to murder the prince. She instead, chose the spiritual way and sacrificed herself by throwing herself into the sea and by that turning into nothing more than foam on the water. That self-sacrifice was seen by the higher spirit as a dignified gesture and she becomes one of the daughters of the air. At that moment she raised her spirit-like arms towards "God's sun, and for the first time her eyes were met with tears" (Andersen). Andersen clearly praises spirituality and religion and makes that the ultimate goal whereas love is the ultimate goal in the movie and spirituality and faith has just been bluntly cut from the storyline when the adaptation was made. In the end of the movie Ariel and Eric marry and sail into the sunset happily ever after.

Ariel has a fairly easy life. She gets almost everything that she wants handed to her on a silver platter without having to do much work at all. It is Ursula who tricks her into coming to meet her and thereby making her dream come true to become a human. By becoming human she gets the chance to be with the person she loves for the rest of her life. Ursula is the one that drives the story. Without her, Ariel would keep on dreaming about life above the sea but would probably never have acted on anything, as she is made to be quite a passive character in the movie. Hastings observes this change of plot in such a way:

The most marked change, however, comes through a reversal of the active

center of the mermaid's relationship to the sea hag. Andersen's mermaid conceives of the transformation herself and must pass through deadly obstacles to reach the sea hag; the hag tells her of all the drawbacks to the scheme, then – at the mermaid's insistence – gives her a potion to be taken only when safely on land. The dangers and pain are all generated by the mermaid's own desire; the sea hag assists, but does not actively plan for evil to befall the mermaid. (Hastings 86-87)

As Hastings correctly remarks, the sea witch is more the drive of the plot in the movie but in Andersen's tale she is only the little mermaid's helper, she aids her in her quest for what she desperately wants in life. In the movie it can be seen that as soon as things start to go wrong for Ariel upon land it is not Ariel who takes matters into her own hands. First of all, she has the cute and cuddly little animals that help her and then her own father as well as Eric the prince. What Disney seems to be suggesting is that if you are a young beautiful woman all you need to do is rely on the men in your life and you can just sit back and relax. No responsibility has to be taken by the young woman and she is able to live peacefully in ignorant bliss within that patriarchal society. This view of the world and how women, that is to say the good looking ones, act in it is very typical for a Disney fairytale. Jack Zipes has written a thorough article on Walt Disney and how he managed to build an empire by turning old folktales and fairy tales into flashy animations. Zipes' article reveals that even though Disney was used to changing the storylines of the tales he used for his animation drastically, there was one aspect he rarely changed. He always preserved the characteristics of the tales that fortified patriarchy. This may sound odd considering that Disney movies predominantly have a female character as the protagonist. The viewer must however be observant of the fact that even though the

females are portrayed as beautiful and charming they are indeed "pale and pathetic compared to the more active and demonic characters in the film" (Zipes 349). When matters need to be handled the young women, who act more as needy decorations, are almost neglected.

It is no exaggeration that H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" and Disney's version are two very different tales. Disney has managed to use an old tale and turn its morals and actions in such a way that it hardly is recognisable any more. Although typical fairy tale undertones are visible in the old tale by Andersen it can not exactly be compared to the fairy tale stamp Disney has put on its movie. Disney's version goes all out there, young girl, beauty, love and lust and a handsome prince are contradicted by a evil witch who stops at nothing to gain control and dominance. Patriarchal society is modeled with a submissive little beautyqueen in the foreground with her adorable animal friends loyal by her side. Although Andersen's tale can sound a little brutal in pushing the moral of spiritual importance over physical importance his tale is relatively much more accurate and can be viewed as more truth to the world that we live in than the Disney version where good always prevails evil.

The little mermaid longed to go up to the surface when she was still too young to be allowed to go but Triton had forced upon Ariel and all his daughters a rule that banned them ever to surface no matter what age they were. Ariel continuously breaks this rule and surfaces whenever she needs information about humans. That information is mostly supplied by Scuttle. Scuttle is an eccentric seagull that is in his opinion an expert on humans and the objects they use. The fact is he knows very little and for example names a fork that Ariel found a "dinglehopper" and her newfound smoking pipe a "snarfblatt". Not only does he name the objects wrongly but he also has no idea for what they are used. Scuttle tells Ariel that the "dinglehopper" is used

to comb hair and do nice hairdos and that the "snarfblatt" is a musical instrument. It is these objects that Ariel has an obsession for collecting that start to make her long for life above the sea. She has acquired these things that are useful to humans and she wants to be able to use them, touch them and experience them the same way human beings do. This is never the case in Andersen's tale, the little mermaid never materializes life as a human and merely uses the opportunity to become one as one step closer to her actual and final goal: an immortal soul.

5. Disneyfication

Walt Disney, the man behind the fairy tale empire, shaped numerous different folk tales and fairy tales into a mould that has more and more frequently been called "Disneyfication" (qtd. in Hastings 83). His branding on those tales is so significant that people in his time and after no longer recognize those works as originally by Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Perrault or the Brothers Grimm to name a few. These tales are now mistaken as a Disney original. "If children or adults think of the great classical fairy tales today, be it Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, or Cinderella, they will think Walt Disney" (Zipes 332). In Zipes opinion Disney did alter the fairy tales in drastic ways and made people look at them differently. Disney's "revolutionary technical means capitalized on American innocence and utopianism to reinforce the social and political status quo" (Zipes 333). It is interesting and perhaps a foreshadowing on what was to come that when Disney made his first fairy tale adapted animations in 1922-1923 he related to them on such a level that he made it his livelihood. Those animations he made in fellow with Ub Iwerks and they were adaptations from "The Four Musicians of Bremen", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Puss in Boots", "Jack and the Beanstalk", "Goldie Locks and the Three Bears", and "Cinderella" (Zipes 339). It has been noticed by critics and others that the first animators were keen on drawing themselves into the animation. Many have read this with Freudian or Lacanian theories in mind. The pen drawing the pictures is then seen as a phallic symbol (Zipes 340). The pen was often shown in the animation to be changed into something else, often a tail of an animal. Walt Disney often drew on this with Julius the cat, a character from the Alice Comedies. Julius could be seen using his tail as a "stick, weapon, rope, hook, question mark, etc. " (Zipes 340) "It was the phallic means to induce action and conceive a way out of a predicament" (Zipes 340).

Freudian readings are not for everyone and in my opinion his theories should not be taken very seriously. However, if there was anything I could take out of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* and see it as having phallic meaning behind it it would probably be Triton's trident. The one who holds it also holds power over the sea.

When Walt Disney first started making animation films the effects and the technological aspect of the film-making were what counted the most. Plots were minimal and irrelevant and narrative voices dependent on the way the animator designed the movie (Zipes 342). Walt Disney started straight from the beginning to sign his work with his name and it was always placed on the screen in a very noticeable way. Because the animation was what was to be the focal point and not the story itself the fairy tale and its actual story line had little importance. If the audience was not left in awe over the technological aspect of the film it had not been a success. "As a result, the fairy tale as story was a vehicle for animators to express their artistic talents and develop their technology" (Zipes 342). The animators' goal was to make such an impression that the audience would when they thought of a fairy tale only recall the images from the animated film and not images they made in their head when they had read the fairy tale or had it read to them. The animators essentially wanted the animation to replace the written word (Zipes 342).

Walt Disney, being one of the earliest animators, is undeniably the most famous one and in Zipes' words this is why:

Of all the early animators, Disney was the one who truly revolutionized the fairy tale as insitution through the cinema. One could almost say that he was obsessed by the fairy-tale genre, or, put another way, Disney felt drawn to fairy tales because they reflected his own struggles in life. After all, Disney came from a relatively poor family, suffered from the exploitative and stern

treatment of an unaffectionate father, was spurned by his early sweetheart, and became a success due to his tenacity, cunning, courage, and his ability to gather around him talented artists and managers like his brother Roy (343).

Walt Disney used his own life as inspiration for his animations and often changed the fairy tales he was animating so they would be a better fit to what had happened in his life. In 1922, Disney released one of his earliest films, *Puss in Boots*. The original tale is by Perrault, a fact most people nowadays would not know and would rather associate it with Disney. That film is a perfect example of how Walt Disney intertwined his own life into the fairy tale, and the storyline of that film is so far from the original that critics are not even sure if Disney actually knew the original text by Perrault or if he was going by another source (Zipes 343). Like in *The Little Mermaid* Disney turns away from the original plot in *Puss in Boots*. Puss is no longer the main character that survives dangers he faces by cunning both a king and an ogre. The main character for Disney is a young man who falls in love with a princess and with help from the cunning Puss he manages to jump the necessary hoops in order to get the princess (Zipes 343-344).

By using the cinema as a medium Disney was able to reach a large number of the public with his films, and in that way, those stories and tales as far off from the original as they might have been, were brought back to the people. One thing that Zipes points out is the fact that Disney was using the animation to portray the brilliance of technology and also his own brilliance. With this technology and machinery Disney was able to bring the audience exactly what he wanted them to see and basically put his envision of the story into their minds. Zipes goes on to relate the narrative of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* that Disney made in 1937 (345). The sexist narrative in that film can be detected in various other Disney movies, *The Little*

Mermaid being one of them. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* the princess is the protagonist, as is Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. Even though the movie is mainly about her every other character is needed, the male protagonist and the female antagonist, to make the story move along. Zipes states that *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* "follows the classic 'sexist' narrative about the framing of women's lives through male discourse" (348). That is exactly what happened with *The Little Mermaid* and even though Walt Disney himself was not alive for the making of that movie the corporation has continued using his very successful formula to make award winning animations. That formula most often consists of a young woman who is supposed to be the heroine but is instantly excluded in every action scene. These "heroines" are more like dainty ornaments all portraying similar characteristics while the female antagonist or the witch is more independent and determined as well as more erotic and disruptive. That kind of character is often more interesting to the viewer than the subtle and nice little princess (Zipes 349).

Walt Disney was able to create his empire with hard work and a solid vision but he always made sure that he had everything under his control and left no decisions small or big for anyone else to make except himself. Disney ended up revolutionizing the fairy-tale film genre and his way of adapting the original story to the screen made various changes in the genre. As Zipes points out the story itself was just a cover to convey the incredible abilities of the technology. The characters are made to be one-dimensional because they have a role to play in the film, there is no need for an in-depth characterization. Disney's films are "American" fairy tales, but the formula is made so as it "colonizes other national audiences. What is good for Disney is good for the world, and what is good in a Disney fairy tale is good in the rest of the world" (Zipes 352). In Disney's opinion that means to have a problem that involves a

beautiful young woman and a young male hero to save the day. Despite there being ways to scratch the surface of Disney's fairy-tale movies and delve into deeper meanings it is quite obvious that the surface is what Walt Disney meant to be the main focus. This simple branding of old tales became a success and Disney took that opportunity and with his movies as well as all the merchandise that comes with it he managed to create an empire that until this day is still standing strong.

6. Conclusion

Most people have heard of the story of the little mermaid. Most people think the mermaid's name is Ariel and that she is the creation of Disney. It is sad to think that time can make people forget about originality and H.C. Andersen truly wrote an incredibly beautiful story when he wrote "The Little Mermaid". The two texts obviously have some of the same characters but are in essence two different stories. While, one of the stories focuses on spirituality the other focuses on mass appeal by simplifying the story and cramming it into a pre-existing mould. Disney has in *The Little Mermaid* managed to portray almost all of the traits of Disneyfication and succeeded in reaching a wide range of people. Despite the fact that Andersen's original sits in Disney's shadow there are numerous people that have discovered or re-discovered Andersen's tale because of Disney.

Disney's version goes all out there: young girl, beauty, love and lust and a handsome prince are contradicted by an evil witch who will stop at nothing to gain power and rule the sea. Patriarchal society is modelled with a submissive and beautiful princess in the foreground with her adorable animal friends loyal by her side. Andersen reveals his views on how young women are supposed to act and behave. He, like Disney, places the image of the most beautiful princess in all of the sea, but the moral of the story and the aspiration for a higher place in the afterlife exceeds any materialistic gain.

Disneyfication is Disney's concoction or formula to make animated films made for children that adults can enjoy as well. This has unequivocally worked out for them, turning Disney into a household name and a childhood memory for almost every person in the last few of decades. So, there are positive and negative sides to the industry Disney has created. On the one hand he has brought back so many old classic

fairy tales and stories that were forgotten or not known commonly any more, but on the other hand he changed those stories so drastically that now they have a Disney fairy tales stamp on them and their originality has been lost.

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