

**UNIVERSITY OF  
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**WHAT DOES THE LITTLE MERMAID WANT? – A  
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF H.C. ANDERSEN’S “THE  
LITTLE MERMAID” AND WALT DISNEY STUDIO’S  
ANIMATED FILM “THE LITTLE MERMAID”**

**BA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

The present thesis focuses on analysing and comparing the wants and wishes of Andersen's nameless little mermaid from the tale *The Little Mermaid* and Ariel from Walt Disney Studio's animated film *The Little Mermaid*. The aim of the present thesis is to find out the main themes of what the little mermaids wish for, what are the similarities and differences between those wishes and to give some plausible causes to those similarities and differences. The analysis is done by grouping and comparing the ideas and evidence provided by several academic sources.

The present thesis contains five parts: introduction, three core chapters and conclusion. The introduction provides a generic insight into the background of the overall theme of *The Little Mermaid*, the original story and the animated film, brings out the main goal – finding out what both mermaids want, and summarizes the thesis statement – that the three main wishes of the mermaids are respectively human body/human world, prince (man)/marriage and (in case of the Little Mermaid of Andersen's) immortal soul/eternal life. The first chapter of the thesis analyses and compares topics concerning the little mermaids' wishes concerning gaining the human body and becoming a part of the human world. The second chapter compares and analyses the topic of Little Mermaid and Ariel and their relation towards the prince and marriage. The third chapter concentrates on Andersen's Little Mermaid's plight and motivations to gain immortal soul/eternal life. The thesis' conclusion summarizes the main findings of the three core chapters.

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Little Mermaid* is a story known worldwide, both to children and adults, chiefly because of its (in)famous adaptations, such as *The Little Mermaid* by the Walt Disney Studios and several world-famous films inspired by the same theme. But even though on the surface most versions of the “little mermaids” seem alike – even Ariel with her fiery red hair, spontaneously bursting into song every now and then – the stories themselves are rather different, especially if one delves a little deeper under their core.

The animating force of all these tales are the wishes of the mermaids and the trouble (and in Andersen’s original tale – pain and suffering) they go through to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, although the stories are driven by the will and wishes of the mermaid, what the Little Mermaid wants and what Ariel wants, can be quite similar – and yet very different, especially when it comes to their motivations.

The ambiguity of these tales has turned them into a popular academic subject, many essays and researches have been written about them, especially Andersen’s original story and the Disney adaptation. There are many different approaches to the theme, there are textual and literary researches, many comparisons between the original and any of its adaptations, with wider add-ons concerning anything (even vaguely) originating from or resembling *The Little Mermaid* (*Splash!*, *Ponyo*, *Aquamarine*, *Rusalochnka*, *Once Upon a Time* etc), a multitude of feminist and psychoanalyst readings, to name just a few fields.

What I proceed to do in this thesis, is to analyse the plot driving wishes of the original Little Mermaid of Andersen’s and Disney’s Ariel, their motivations, comparing them, finding the similarities and differences, supported by a selection of sources.

My claim is that the goals of the mermaids can be more or less firmly categorized into three groups, these being as follows: the wish to attain a human body and become part of the human world, the wish to attain the affections of the Prince and his hand in marriage,

and lastly, the wish to attain an immortal (=human) soul and thereby, access to a life eternal.

(The third and last wish belongs to the original mermaid only, I will explain the stripping of this major goal and the original's motivation later.)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

My primary sources are Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Little Mermaid", which was published in 1837 and has later been adapted to various media, including musical theatre, anime and a Disney animated film, and the lastly mentioned animation by Walt Disney Studio, *The Little Mermaid*, likely the most well-known mermaid tale in the world (or at least in the western part of it) that hit the screens in 1989, becoming the favourite childhood film to at least one generation. Its fame remains and has often overcome that of the original, meaning there are plenty of people most fond of the animated film who have little to no awareness of the existence (or difference!) of the original tale.

Aside from the primary sources, I found fifteen secondary sources during my research for the thesis, which I will briefly outline here, combining them into thematic groups when possible.

My first group of secondary sources are the critical approaches, whether concerning the animated film *The Little Mermaid*, the original tale by Andersen or often, both. To this group belongs, firstly, Linda Ågren with her article Linguistic sexism in mermaid tales (2013). It is a study of linguistic sexism in three different mermaid films – *Splash!*, *The Little Mermaid* and *Aquamarine*, and how harmful stereotypes are built using linguistic tools. The article also explains, how the childlikeness, passiveness and asexuality of the Little Mermaid is textually created.

Regina Bendix's *Seashell Bra and Happy End: Disney's Transformations of "The Little Mermaid"* (1993) is a critical comparison of the Walt Disney Studio's *The Little Mermaid* and Andersen's original tale, analysing a change in values and all the alterations that have been made to the story accordingly.

Albert Waller Hastings takes on a harsh critique of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* in his *Moral Simplification in Disney's "The Little Mermaid"* (1993), for overly simplifying

the film and stripping the original tale of its moral impact and core themes. The article lists all the obvious changes made and analyses them in depth.

Roberta Trites (1991) goes even further than Hastings, writing a heavy feminist critique on both, original story and the animated film (stress on the latter) in her article Disney's Sub/Version of Andersen's "The Little Mermaid". There is also a thorough comparison of the plotlines, character relations and core themes available in her work.

Vigen Guroian in his book *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (1988) highlights the moral impact classical stories have on people since the early childhood, stresses the value of *The Little Mermaid* and its theme of death, and heavily critiques Disney Studio for stripping this theme from their animated film. Though it is the earliest source in my list, published at 1988, the topics raised seem still very relevant today.

My second group of secondary sources involves a number of different psychoanalytic approaches to the theme, starting with the grand master of folklore, Alan Dundes and his colleague Lauren Dundes, sharing the credits for the article *The Trident and the Fork* in Alan Dundes' book *Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics* (2002). The article speaks of a male construction of an Electra fantasy and makes a psychoanalytic folkloristic take on the subject. The authors analyse the methods that Andersen has used and how he has changed the original mermaid myths, also, how the Disney's adaptation links to the folklore tales of mermaids. There is an in-depth analysis based on the psychoanalytic Electra-complex theory, especially concerning the transformations the Little Mermaid goes through.

Nancy Easterlin in her paper, *Hans Christian Andersen's Fish out of Water* (2001), is viewing the original text in the light of evolutionary psychology and makes a thorough analysis of the Little Mermaid as a changing, adapting symbol of human beings. The article

brings forth the theme of *otherness* and sheds light on the alternative versions of the mermaid myth.

One of my most cherished sources has been *Splash!: Six Views of the "Little Mermaid"* (1990), a collection of articles combined and edited by Pil Dahlerup, which consists of six different readings of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. (Of the six different authors I have left out only Thomsen and their article about structuralist models as irrelevant to the theme of this paper.) One of the articles in the collection is by Pil Dahlerup himself, titled "The Little Mermaid" Deconstructed (1990). It is a sub-textual analysis of *The Little Mermaid*, which draws on a variety of post-Freudian sources. Dahlerup also strongly critiques and analyses the passiveness of the Little Mermaid. Two main keywords of his paper are *confusion* and *complexity* (1990).

Sabrina Soracco's *A Psychoanalytic Approach* (1990) also belongs to the article collection *Splash!* and is a classical psychoanalytic approach to the text, using Freudian/post-Freudian and Jungian theories, and looking in depth at the division between matriarchal and patriarchal worlds in Andersen's story.

Aside from the more psychoanalytical approaches, there are also several analyses and readings from different points of view, and sources that do not necessarily concentrate on *The Little Mermaid* but use it at some point to draw an example or pass a critique. Athena Bellas' book *Fairy Tales on the Teen Screen: Rituals of Girlhood* (2017) deals with how youthful femininity is constructed, with contemporary teen revisions of fairy tales, including several mentions of *The Little Mermaid* as a constructed fairy tale, and makes an in-depth analysis of *Aquamarine*, a film inspired by Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*.

Leah Tyus' approach to the theme in her article *Deciphering Spaces: The Mermaid & The Soul* (2016) is both psychoanalytical and biographical, that divides the original story into three symbolic elemental spaces and examines Andersen's spiritual message in them,

based on the biography of Andersen and the written materials left by him.

Other two sources derive from the article collection edited by Dahlerup – *Splash! - A Folktale/Disney Approach* by Faith and Niels Ingwersen (1990) which is a comparison of the Disney film/original tale and a classical folktale build-up (hero passes series of tests/quests, gets a reward) and analyses the Little Mermaid and Ariel as classical folktale heroes. And secondly from the same series, Gregory Nybo's *A Synopsis* (1990), an in-depth analysis of the subtext in Andersen's story concerning the mermaid's quest for transcendence and the motivations behind it.

The last in this thematic category of sources would be *Flipping Their Fins for a Place to Stand: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Mermaids*, a paper by Bonnie J. Leadbeater and Gloria Lodato Wilson (1993), who examine the Little Seamaid and Ariel; one can see the evolvement of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century female prototypes, and, in which ways the stories have changed and possible reasons for these changes. There are several useful passages from Andersen's correspondence and diaries there.

And last but not least, my personally most intriguing source, considering the theme, the originality of the reading of both original text and the animated film, and a great number of excellent comparisons made - Leland G. Spencer and their *Performing Transgender Identity in The Little Mermaid: From Andersen to Disney* (2014), which is a transgender reading of both stories, the original and the Disney's adaptation, focusing on how the Little Mermaids' attempts to perform human relate to a transgender persons' path to their true identity and the problems they meet.

## CHAPTER I: HUMAN BODY/WORLD

Andersen's Little Mermaid and Disney's adaptation of her, Ariel, both want a human body and entrance to the human world (but for mostly different reasons). Andersen's Little Mermaid's wish to attain a human body and enter the human world is but a means of attaining her highest goal – an immortal (human) soul, whereas Ariel seems simply very fond of human trinkets and is obsessed with humans, or as Trites puts it:

Ariel wants to become human before she ever falls in love because she “just [doesn't] see how a world that can make such wonderful things can be bad.” She sings about the “neat stuff” that to her represents mankind. Ariel's original motivation to become human seems very materialistic (1991: 2).

Trites (1991: 1) also repeatedly mentions Ariel's obsession with humankind, one of the causes of it being her simplistic idea that humans have more freedom, wherefore she also wishes to become a human to enjoy this. Spencer (2014) agrees with the latter and furthermore brings out that the fascination both mermaids feel is there since the beginning of the story/film, contrasting the Little Mermaid to both, her sisters and other relatives and friends. In the original story, the usual curiosity the little seamaid's older sisters feel for the world outside the water is nothing when compared to the eagerness of the Little Mermaid. The gardens they keep clearly show this, and while the older sisters also have their gardens under the sea and plant all sorts of mer-flowers and plants there, the youngest “planted red flowers in hers; she wanted it to look like the sun” (Andersen 1837/1974: 58) (cited in Spencer 2014: 116). She also keeps there a marble statue of a human boy, something she has found, and which comes from the land above – and is later found to bear much resemblance to the human prince whom the Little Mermaid rescues, falls in love with and seeks to marry. Spencer (2014: 116) reads it with an added twist, finding that “the mermaid's fascination with humans mirrors many transgender people's fascinations with transgender role models.”

It seemed to her that their world was far larger than hers; on ships, they could sail across the oceans and they could climb the mountains high up above the clouds. Their countries seemed ever so large, covered with fields and forests; she knew that they stretched much farther than she could see. There was so much that she wanted to know; there were many questions that her sisters could not answer

(Andersen, 1837/1974, p. 65) (cited in Spencer 2014: 116).

Even without any specific reading, the childlike cheer of the Little Mermaid when she comes into contact with or even thinks of the world above, is clearly visible, especially in the film, where “the mermaid sings of her burning desires to walk and run and dance, to be free of her fins and watery restrictions, to have knowledge of the world beyond the sea, and to be seen as a member of the human race” (Walt Disney Company 1989) (cited in Leadbeater & Wilson 1993: 470-471).

Now 16, Disney's Ariel bums to come out to join the bright, young women exploring new shores, walking, running, jumping, and dancing free of her fins, free of her father's reprimands, free of the bonds of her watery home. She is filled with childlike wonder and excitement about everything human, but her early contacts with the world of people are clandestine, materialistic, and defiant (Leadbeater & Wilson 1993: 474).

The latter authors also remind the readers of the grand difference between the original Little Mermaid, who kept but a single marble statue of a charming boy in her garden of sun-shaped flowers, whereas Disney's Ariel is “the girl who has everything” (Leadbeater & Wilson 1993: 474).

For the nameless seamaid of Andersen's tale, things are, indeed, quite different – there is no such obsession with humans (or their trinkets), not until the moment when she finds out from her wise grandmother that mermaids do not have an immortal soul and that despite their much longer life, once merfolk die, they simply vanish. This is something the Little Mermaid cannot bear and thus she sets out to do whatever it takes to obtain an immortal soul, a human soul, that is, and thereby, eternal life. The obsession begins now, but as we can see, it is with transcendence (as also mentioned by Faith and Niels Ingwersen, who write about the Little Mermaid's attempt to “transcend her present level of existence” (1990: 413), and not with the means of achieving it. The original story deals rather with the opposite of any romance – the seamaid keeps busy finding means of achieving an eternal life, a life *after* death and *beyond* this world, given by Christian laws to humans alone. Instead of a tragic

love story or the like, we are given a “business version”, as Nybo (1990: 417) puts it – there are certain things the Little Mermaid must do to attain immortal soul – “if a mermaid can “make” a human being love her well enough, he may give her an immortal soul.” This makes it sound indeed like a business bargain, despite the other party (the prince) being blissfully oblivious of his share in it.

I myself am more inclined to believe that the truth in this lies somewhere in between, and thus think of it along the lines of less harsh authors, following Hastings’ conclusion, in which they state:

Andersen’s mermaid is driven to the surface world by two complementary but separable impulses: a romantic/erotic desire for the handsome prince whom she rescues from drowning in a shipwreck and a moral desire, privileged in Andersen’s telling, to attain a soul with the promise of an afterlife (1993: 85).

Another from the list of the main reasons why the mermaid longs for the human world is her own *otherness*. Easterlin (2001: 262) defines it thus: “the specific character of her otherness identifies her not, like the traditional mermaid, with the nonhuman mysteries of the universe, but paradoxically with human needs and desires.” This otherness has several levels, depending on the angles and points of view of the researchers, varying from a simply atypical mermaid to transgender issues – a human born in a mermaid body (Spencer 2014). Whichever the reason, but this *otherness* makes a major cause for the mermaid to long for the human world – therefore escaping her own. The Little Mermaid has a fish tail, perfectly compatible with the underwater realm, and yet she “yearns for legs so that she might dance as humans do” (Trites 1991: 1). The little seamaid suffers from a deep dissatisfaction with her natural world, she is unfit for it in many ways and her otherness, her alien-ness does not begin in the surface world but long before in her own. Andersen has here taken the myths of sexualized half-animal beings and not only turned them around once, making her merfolk a race of supernatural beings who have little to do with humankind aside from some curious visits every now and then, and what may befall them from the sunken ships. Instead of being

actively luring and seeking contact by using their magic and their animalistic sexuality, they simply take what is given when it is given. And this is where Andersen has made yet another twist, taking the main character and turning her not simply into an alien supernatural being, but one at odds with that, and with the passiveness – she is not settled with what she has and is meant to be, with the practical everyday life of a seamaid. She has been written as “a dreamy child, different from the others not only in her beauty and her exceptional singing, but also in her yearning for the sun, the smell of air, of flowers. She’s a marginal mermaid and longs to fit in somewhere else” (Bendix 1993: 286). At this point, it is little wonder that this odd little seamaid has been taken as a clear projection of Andersen’s own troubled life.

Guroian writes:

The Little Mermaid invites great pain and suffering upon herself because she imagines more for her life and is dissatisfied with the limitations of life under the sea. She will not be resigned to the clear implications of her grandmother's explanation of the conditions of her existence and the difficulty, indeed near impossibility, of transcending those conditions (1988: 76).

And once the Little Mermaid learns that what sets her (and others of her kind, although she seems not to care for them, she has a personal plight – just like Andersen) apart from humans/the prince is that she does not have an immortal soul, the very thing that in myths and earlier folk tales the merfolk sought for rather dearly, marrying with fisher folk, luring suitable spouses, all in the hope of having a piece of the human-only spiritual immortality.

Ariel, of course, is very different, too, just of a much more diverse nature than the original seamaid. She is “a spirited, spunky teenager, who much in fashion of the youngest, spoiled child escapes palatial obligations and ducks the wishes of her father” (Bendix 1993: 286). She is also hardly ever seen in the company of her sisters (the Little Mermaid, to the contrary, was very fond of them) and keeps a secret cave full of human trinkets hoarded from sunken ships.

What they do have in common in their *otherness* is the desire for more freedom –

which humans supposedly have, and more knowledge. Leadbeater and Wilson have drawn an interesting parallel between the two mermaids and the independent educated women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Desiring freedom and education, both Andersen's Sea Maid and Disney's Ariel look remarkably like the independent, educated women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century called the "New Women" (Showalter 1991) (cited in Leadbeater & Wilson 1993: 470). What these "New Mermaids" want is access to the world of mankind (or people in the 1989 version), a world that appears far larger than their own but one to which they are denied entry because of their biology – their tail fins (1993: 470).

Considering how the tale of the mermaid can be read (and is likely meant thus, considering Andersen's own backstory and overall life) as a personal story of being different and deeply unsatisfied with one's current conditions (and body), it is little wonder that *The Little Mermaid* – and therefore, Disney's adaptation as well – has been taken to be read as an exploration into the struggles and coming-out story of a transgender person by Spencer in his article *Performing Transgender Identity in The Little Mermaid: From Andersen to Disney* (2014). Spencer says that the mermaid is simply "a human born in a mer body" (2014: 121) and speaks of how

"The film may be understood as a story about a character's struggles between her desire to perform a human identity and the societal and familial pressures she feels to perform as mer. A transgender reading of the film sees Ariel's quest as a journey toward performing human identity rather than foregrounding her romantic fascination with Eric" (2014: 119).

The main argument Spencer (2014) makes is about the relationship between Ariel and her friend Sebastian the crab and advice the latter gives Ariel, which is not so much about finding love or getting a man – human or mer – but **performing identity**. For Sebastian, Ariel as a mermaid belongs to the sea and should remain there and act as any of her kin, and he cannot fathom why Ariel would want to be part of something so "messy" as the human world. "Just as family, friends, and loved ones of transgender persons cannot always understand their loved ones' identity (performance), Sebastian believes that Ariel's identity is essentially connected to the body in which she was born" (Spencer 2014: 120). It takes the length of the film for Sebastian to understand that Ariel can only be happy as a human, and that any turning back to the sea – permanently, that is, and once again as a

mermaid – is impossible. To be happy, Ariel needs to be human. To be happy, a transgender person needs to be in their right body, accepted by those they care about.

These parallels with transgender people do not only derive from Ariel's story but from the original as well. Spencer (2014: 119) says that the fact that the little seamaid would rather surrender her life than return to the one she cannot abide clearly shows that

The mermaid's journey is not just for love but for a soul and an identity that fits.../...The mermaid's story was never (just) about love. The final decision of her life is an affirmation of the identity performance she most desires, to live - and die - as a human (Spencer 2014: 119).

Following this lead, it is only logical that the interest with stories and trinkets, and the glimpses the little seamaid has of the human world are soon not enough and the more passive approach is changed to a more active one – the Little Mermaid wants to go out and interact with the humans, “just as many transgender people move from reading articles to trying on clothes to meeting other transgender people” (Spencer 2014: 116).

However, going up to the surface world is not that easy – in the case of the Little Mermaid, she must be fifteen years old before she can even have a glimpse of it, since for the mermaids it is a kind of a rite of passage, and even then, the world of humans is meant only to be seen, not lived in. As for Ariel, anything above the surface is strictly forbidden. However, when the Little Mermaid obeys the order to wait, coming from her wise grandmother (yet another character chopped out by the Disney adaptation), Ariel has very little care for the taboo and she visits the surface with great regularity (Bendix 1993: 286).

It might be worth noting that the world of the Little Mermaid is heavily female dominated (in the original story, not in the film!) and several scholars, Soracco (1990), for example, see the story of the mermaid also as a battle between the matriarchal mer-world and the patriarchal human world, with the Little Mermaid passionately seeking to enter the latter, which, of course, gives cause to several Freudian theories, one of the most notable of those being that the Little Mermaid suffers from an Oedipal crisis.

Be that as it may, the Little Mermaid, even in the original tale, finally does visit the

surface, which, in Andersen's story, happens exactly on the little seamaid's fifteenth birthday. She comes to witness a storm that wrecks a ship, on which a beautiful prince, so like the marble statue from the Little Mermaid's sea-garden, had celebrated his own birthday. Both in the animation and the original story, the mermaid rescues the prince and afterward, "she grew to love human beings and wished that she could leave the sea and live among them" (Andersen, 1837-1974, p. 65) (cited in Spencer 2014: 116). At this scene, Spencer firmly points out that the Little Mermaid's love was for "human beings, not just the prince" (2014: 116).

And here is another question of much importance – when gaining a human body (to gain access to the human world), what does one lose? And what does one gain (well, apart from a human body, obviously)? By the opinions of several authors, there is much for the Little Mermaid to lose – her tail, her virginity (i.e. her tail), her voice, her access to the maternal world (of the original), and according to Nybo (1990), also her identity. As to what she may gain, it varies – her legs, her female parts i.e. sexuality, the access to the patriarchal human world, and according to Spencer's (2014) transgender reading – her true identity.

Alan and Lauren Dundes, who have taken a Freudian-Jungian approach when exploring the story of the Little Mermaid and the Disney's film, note that "For Ariel to transform into a viable human female, she must lose her phallic fishtail. The castration of Ariel is further confirmed in the original Andersen story by the cutting out of her tongue" (2002: 68). This could also be seen as part of a traditional passage rite, during which mutilation of the body, often also of the sexual organs of young girls, is a common practice, even in our own days.

On the other hand, the mermaid has to pay a price for gaining human sexual parts. Through a curious form of upward displacement, she is obliged to let the sea-witch cut out her tongue. In other words, she is forced to give up her upper part in order to have her lower part. In the Disney version, this is softened so that she loses only her voice. The voice, however, is also a sexual component as it is what attracts Eric in the first place (Dundes & Dundes 2002: 62).

Nybo calls this removal of both tail and tongue a "horrible mutilation" and a

“symbolic and radical denial of her own identity” (1990: 417), at which Spencer (2014), of course, would argue and counter that due to this transformation the Little Mermaid is finally allowed to gain access to her *true* identity, that is, *human* identity [emphasis mine – D.O.].

In Andersen’s tale, the mer-world is about ethereal bodies, asexuality, the power of voices, whereas the land above the surface is all about physical expressions. To be part of a human world and understood there, the little seamaid must turn into a physical being. Tyus calls it a “degradation” (2016: 3) and further continues, stating that “The once innocent and semi-ethereal creature is transformed into an empty vessel due to the compromising of her voice, deprived of her innocence, in order to obtain both her lover and a soul” (3).

The change from an innocent asexual being to a physical and sexually capable is the approach several authors have taken, and this does not merely concern the original fairy-tale, but also the animation, albeit considered a children’s/family film. However, the allusions are still there. The sexless tail has become human legs along with the rest of human lady-parts. The marriage needs to be consummated and would be, since, suddenly, the asexual and sexless little seamaid is sexually available (Dundes & Dundes 2002).

Still a mermaid, Ariel needs human legs and the requisite interstitial female genitals, in order to become Eric’s bride. Triton accomplishes this transformation with one flick of his mighty trident. Poof! The mermaid’s tail disappears and is replaced by human legs. It is the father who gives his daughter, his favourite daughter, the necessary sexual parts which will allow her to marry Eric and consummate the marriage properly (Dundes & Dundes 2002: 70).

## CHAPTER II: PRINCE/MAN/MARRIAGE

And hence comes the greatest difference in the stories of Ariel and the Little Mermaid. To the latter, as already mentioned, the Prince is but a means of achieving the ultimate goal, despite also being its symbol and the original lure, but the Little Mermaid's love for the Prince is never *eros*, nor does the Prince see the mute girl as anything more than a beautiful pet child, definitely not someone equal or as a likely love interest.

Andersen's mermaid does not find the hoped world where she will be accepted and loved as a woman. She is treated like a peculiar foundling, receives brotherly love and admiration for her dancing, and a pillow to sleep on in front of the prince's door much like a cherished pet. But the prince marries one of his own species and the mermaid dies (Bendix 1993: 286)

Nybo calls the entire get-man-to-get-soul most justifiably a "business version" --- "if a mermaid can "make" a human being love her well enough, he may give her immortal soul" (1990: 417). He also writes that "the more precise motive for the Mermaid's "quest" for the Prince's affections is therefore to sublimate human love, bring it under control, and make it serve a "higher" purpose. Her purpose" (417). Nybo beckons the reader to look at the subtext:

Her [the Little Mermaid's] early infatuation with the statue: her passion for it is not just a soft and Romantic dream (if that at all) of a Prince of flesh and blood, a sexual and changeable being who will reciprocate feelings of deep affection, but a cooler "passion" for a bloodless image cut in marble, fixed in substance and form (1990: 416-417).

Nybo's colleague Dahlerup (1990: 418-419) goes even further, insisting that the Little Mermaid does not even want the Prince, to which claim he makes proof of several accounts of the Little Mermaid having a chance to show herself to the Prince and communicate, yet choosing silence and hiding.

Several sources agree that "love is a means to an end rather than an end in itself" (Trites 1991: 2) or as Nybo so eloquently puts it – "her deepest longing is not for a Prince of flesh and blood, not even for a splendid wedding, nor indeed for a love that extends itself to another, but for immortality" (1990: 417). Tyus agrees: "The romantic element within the story becomes a tool to progress the plot for the little mermaid's advancement towards her

true desire, an immortal soul” (2016: 5). Spencer (2014), who otherwise echoes Trites’ opinion in this, differs only as much as that he puts a stress on the Little Mermaid’s performance in acting human, i.e. managing with the role of human that she sought out to become, since, Spencer once again points out, it is the key to gaining an immortal soul (the soul comes with the highest level of “human”, apparently). And the stakes are high, since should she fail, she will not only have lost all her mermaid-years but also her borrowed human life and any chance to an immortal soul, since she would die on the first morning after the Prince weds another. Yet both the Little Mermaid and Ariel are willing to risk it all for the seemingly impossible dream. What they do lack in the beginning, though, is the means to achieve it, until they chance upon a shipwrecked handsome human, and a prince at that. According to Leadbeater and Wilson:

With this twist of fate, the prince becomes the vehicle for their entering the human world. But strength and talent are not the keys for entry into the human race. The mermaids must win the love of a man with their beautiful forms, graceful walks, and speaking eyes (1993: 471).

No wonder that several sources have raised a question, what exactly does the little seamaid want – does she want the prince? The soul? Both? Could the two even be distinguished from one another? After all, it has been ambiguous from the start, with myths of the mermaid who has something magical taken from her that imprisons her to the surface world, often bound also in marriage with the thief of the magical object – or even if the faith is chosen by her, she has still left a backdoor open, never meaning to carry on this sojourn forever, but inevitably retrieving what binds her to the human world (an mirror, a comb, a sealskin etc) and returning to the sea.

According to Tyus, Andersen’s Little Mermaid takes upon herself a quest to “gain the love of the prince while gaining a soul in the process” (2016: 1), but it is a process full of much suffering and the stress of the tale is much more on that than any relationship the seamaid tries to develop with the handsome prince.

Guroian has written in argument to another scholar, Sale:

.../...Andersen reduces gaining "a 'soul' to a romantic and sexual prize. But I don't think that is it at all. Yes, romantic love is part of what moves the Little Mermaid to her decisions and undertakings. But a desire for the beloved and a yearning for an even greater love and communion are mingled in this haunting tale. *Andersen leaves us to wonder which the Mermaid wants more, a man or a soul; or whether it is even possible to disentangle her attraction to his beauty from her desire to have a soul and enjoy immortality* [emphasis mine – D.O.] (1988: 77)

On the other hand, it might be highly possible that one cannot get a soul from a man, since this would be below Andersen's standards and it is a rather logical belief that something so important, ethereal and bound to God cannot be obtained through something as frivolous as a romantic relationship with a mortal being. Or as Tyus has indicated: "Returning to the little mermaid's denied soul, it appears that Andersen allows his mermaid to undergo her trial in order to reinforce **the obtainment of a soul is not inextricably connected to man**" [emphasis mine – D.O.] (2016: 4). There is definite proof of this, since Andersen was an avid diary writer, and held correspondence with several people, all this data has later proved an invaluable insight into his works. One of these insights is that Andersen was personally rather cynical when it came to any sort of loving relationships (himself mostly lacking any, due to both his alleged sexual preferences and his overall "otherness").

Tyus reports in her article:

Maria Tatar's *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen* provides a diary entry written February 11, 1837 from Andersen where he discusses "The Little Mermaid" as presented in the following: I have not . . . let the mermaid's acquisition of an immortal soul depend on an alien creature, upon the love of a human being. I'm sure that would be wrong! It would depend rather a lot on chance, wouldn't it? I won't accept that sort of thing in this world. I have permitted my mermaid to follow a more natural, divine path (2016: 5).

Coming back to the chatty, cheery Ariel, then she seeks a man for marriage and a happy ending, the man himself being her highest goal, or as Trites so well puts it: "No goal matters as much as hunting for a mate" (1991: 3). This has got a lot to do with the most typical Hollywood trope where a mate (preferably female but in this case male!) is seen as the ultimate goal, and also a reward for any ordeals the hero goes through.

Easterlin writes in sharp critique: "The Disney film and probably many of the early twentieth-century versions and hatchet-job "translations" of this story make the prince the final focus of the mermaid's desire" (2001: 269). Trites quite agrees (1991), insisting that

whereas Ariel began with overall enthusiasm for the human world, collecting every little titbit she could get her hands (and fins) on, her love (at first sight!) for Prince Eric turns her wider interest into a narrowed and sharpened obsession for one representative of the human race, a “perfect” specimen to have and to hold. And within the very limited time, any love or relationship is lowered into a purely physical desire – the kiss. The kiss equals marriage; the mermaid equates it with love (Trites 1991). Trites has written: “Disney turns the process of human love into a rushed affair that requires only three days. Ariel will be rewarded if the prince kisses her within that time, which reduces love to no more than physical sexuality” (1991: 3).

Ågren concludes the topic of Ariel shifting the key point of her struggle after meeting the prince thus:

Ariel's struggle seems to be about parental control and a desire to explore the world, until she meets the prince (Giroux, 2010: 104) (cited in Ågren 2013: 17). **Marriage becomes the priority rather than becoming human**, and in the end her father gives his permission, restraining Ariel from becoming independent. **Her desire to become a citizen is now overruled by her desire to become a wife** (Sells, 1995: 181) (cited in Ågren 2013: 17). [emphasis mine – D.O.] (2013: 17).

Since Ariel, obviously, does not have to spend time suffering and throwing all her efforts into gaining eternal life/immortal soul, she can at ease concentrate on her romantic-erotic desires for the handsome prince (not that the Little Mermaid had been free of such urges, but in her case, due to the quest for a soul, any claim of her prioritizing the romantic relationship (which, in the story, they never acquire) will always remain dubious). Plus, as Bendix (1993: 285) points out, Disney has made even the romantic front much easier for the mermaid – they have omitted the main rival, the girl (the princess from the convent) who found the prince on the beach after the shipwreck and the seamaid's daring rescue, and who later became the prince's bride (due to her resemblance to the mermaid and the fact that the Little Mermaid failed to do anything to reveal the truth). “By eliminating the human competitor, Disney makes room for an alternate course of action and clears the obstacle for the happy end” (Bendix 1993: 285). Given the above, here lies the greatest difference

between the wants of the Little Mermaid and Ariel, or as Trites has said: “Andersen’s mermaid quests for a soul, but Disney’s mermaid, Ariel, quests for a mate” (1991: 1).

On the other hand, the attraction might not be to the prince per se, but the entire human world and human beings in it. Spencer draws examples of how the mermaid “grew to love human beings and wished that she could leave the sea and live among them. (Andersen, 1837/1974, p. 65) (cited in Spencer 2014: 116). Notably, her love is for human beings, not just the prince” (2014: 116), and another author, Guroian, agrees with this: “The beauty she sees in the prince reflects the glory of the world above to which she is so strongly attracted” (1988: 75)

The same goes for Ariel, in Spencer’s opinion:

**The argument that Ariel gives up her voice to get a man overlooks the chronological development of the story. Her fascination with humanity begins far before she ever sees Eric [emphasis mine – D.O.].** Indeed, Ariel’s interest in humans is revealed in the very scene that introduces Ariel to the audience. Ariel and her friend Flounder are exploring a sunken ship. Ariel is excited to discover a fork: “Oh my gosh! Have you ever seen anything so wonderful in your entire life?” she exclaims (2014: 119).

What he means is that Ariel’s fascination, as discussed in the previous chapter, begins long before she meets the prince – she has always collected human artefacts and desired to be a part of their world, making attempts and dreaming of performing human (as contrasted to performing mer). This has nothing to do with Prince Eric. “Ariel’s encounter with Eric only intensifies her understanding of herself as a human, and the story continues to focus on an identity conflict” (Spencer 2014: 120).

However, the world the Little Mermaid longs for, is a harsh place for little ladies, especially if they are used to a matriarchal world under the sea (the case of the original seamaid, whose main companions and influences were her wise grandmother, beloved sisters and a scary-but-totally-not-selfish witch (unlike Disney’s Ursula)). The human world is men’s world. Soracco claims, though, that this is exactly what the Little Mermaid longs for, having this “intense desire for the prince and the human patriarchal world” – a “phallic

desire” (1990: 408). Soracco (1990) has based a good part of his study on Freudian and Jungian archetypal myths, and in this light, the sun-shaped garden with the statue of a boy resembling the prince and the bodily transformation the Little Mermaid goes through to enter the physical world of humans can indeed be read thus.

Freud and Jung aside, but, once out of water, both the Little Mermaid and Ariel depend on the will of males (in Little Mermaid’s case it is the Prince, in Ariel’s case, there are at least two if not three dominant male characters, whose goodwill means everything – Ariel’s father, Prince Eric, and Ariel’s friend and nominated protector, Sebastian the Crab). With Little Mermaid, her fate at least to some extent depends on how the prince sees her and what he decides about her. Critics aside, but Alan and Lauren Dundes point out the serious and male dominant restriction of the original: “The mermaid in search of a soul can obtain one only if the prince allows his soul to “flow” into her body - the receiving body aperture is not indicated in this sublimated image of coitus” (2002: 60) It is obvious who is the “top” and who is the “bottom” in this relationship and in the overall plight in a male dominated world. And the same goes for the film and Ariel, as Alan and Lauren Dundes once again note: “She [Ariel] can remain human and marry Eric, not by kissing him, but by inducing *him* to kiss her” (2002: 60).

Ariel, despite being a lot more active than the original seamaid, is still much dominated by male power, and her goals, too, are male oriented, at least when we see those being connected to marriage and happy ending, and not so much to performing as an independent human. This clearly suggests that all the modern spunkiness that the film has given the Little Mermaid does not necessarily mean that she has any more self-determination than her actively suffering but otherwise passive predecessor or as Bendix rightly points out:

She nonetheless dreams of Prince Charming, she is willing to give up her identity as a mermaid and singer to reach this dream, and she fights for him only due to the instigation of her animal friends...In short, spunkiness and a fun-loving spirit are not necessarily evidence of self-determination and more enlightened view of gender roles” (1993: 288).

No wonder feminist critics are furious about the Disney's adaptation, since the studio took an already passive mermaid (albeit one with at least a matriarchal background), and turned her into a subject of her father and other male counterparts, thus making the film culminate with the wedding scene, which feminists – and for a very good reason, it seems to me – see as:

An insidious continuation of a patriarchal conspiracy to keep women enslaved. The Little Mermaid is initially controlled by her father Triton, the king of the sea, who eventually hands her over to her husband Prince Eric. Never really free, Ariel is allowed only to transfer her allegiance and abode from one male to another (Dundes & Dundes 2002: 59).

In such a patriarchal process, the mermaid is bound to lose herself – her body parts, her identity, constantly giving up pieces of herself for the men of the world (both worlds, in Ariel's case) and surrendering to the patriarchy. The men have it easy; Little Mermaid is a story of female suffering. Castrated, in order to become Prince Eric's bride – “the mermaid's fishtail is not only a denial of the vagina, but it could symbolize a penis” (Lederer, 1986, p. 251; Roheim, 1948, pp. 22, 33) (cited in Dundes & Dundes 2002: 68), having given up her voice, her liberty to speak and use it for magic (feminine magic – thinking of the alluring supernatural voices of the mermaids-sirens) to secure the “affections of a man, subscribing to a heteronormative narrative in which female suffering is the price for the ultimate reward that the tale promises—a ‘happily ever after’” (Bellas 2017: 195), to which Trites adds, agreeing, that “Disney has its mermaid take human form so that her identity can be defined by mortal love” (1991: 2).

Alan and Lauren Dundes find Andersen guilty of the same charges that Bellas did the Disney's adaptation – “Transforming the traditional seductive, aggressive mermaid figure into a passive self-effacing heroine who sacrifices her own goals and fulfilment for the sake of the happiness of an unattainable male prince” (Lederer, 1986, p. 251; Roheim, 1948, pp. 22, 33) (cited in Dundes & Dundes 2002: 59)

Such simplifications, or, more precisely, scraping of any subtext and any “higher”

goals, as noted above, are very much Disney-esque and therefore also much critiqued by researchers and lovers of the original tale. Or as Easterlin so well puts it:

Through the elimination of the mermaid's desire for immortality from the recent Disney film might suggest that the original story is hopelessly dated for contemporary audiences, in the long run the human themes of the story give it a lasting significance that the fundamentally superficial film lacks. Fashioning its version to the norms of the predominant genre, Consumer Romance, Disney peels away, like a desiccated rind, unfulfilled desire, loss and suffering, loneliness and pain. (Eidsvik in Haase, p. 198) (cited in Easterlin 2001: 274)

Such heavy critique does not come as a surprise, since the Disney adaptation has wholly stripped the Little Mermaid of her highest goal – the quest for an immortal soul (Ariel already has one that she bets with the made-up villain, the sea witch Ursula, to get Prince Eric), bringing it down to a typical *Hollywoodish* happy ending, of a (very mortal) man+marriage+mortal life. Recalling what Trites said about it (and I quote a second time): “Andersen's mermaid quests for a soul, but Disney's mermaid, Ariel, quests for a mate” (1991: 1). Therefore, the final chapter will have to speak of the Little Mermaid alone, since her story does not end with the Prince and the rainbow.

### **CHAPTER III: IMMORTAL SOUL & ETERNAL LIFE**

Hastings (1993), Faith and Niels Ingwersen (1990) and Easterlin (2001) all agree that the ultimate goal of the original Little Mermaid is transcendence into a higher level of being, the gaining of immortal soul. There are many ordeals the Little Mermaid goes through to achieve her goal, and once the first means (i.e. the Prince and the marriage) are depleted, she is even given a second chance – by joining the spirits of air and doing good in the human world, she may still in time have a soul of her own. Hence, as we can see, this is very far from simply being kissed by Prince Eric and marrying into the “neat” human world. The prince is merely a means, or a symbol, but never the main goal, my sources agree (more or less). To this category falls also some of the harshest (and in my opinion, well justified) critique of Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*. The two most relevant errors that the scholars and critics have mentioned is that the Disney version completely ignores the key theme of Andersen’s tale, aka the little seamaid’s longing for transcendence and soul, and Ariel having very base and earthly motives for wanting the prince (since the rest has been cut). As Leadbeater and Wilson write: “The religious tone so fundamental to Andersen's tale is gone from the Disney version. Concerns over ephemeral, mortal life are absent” (1993: 474). It is also worthwhile mentioning that Ariel already has a soul, as do apparently other merfolk, and she carelessly enters this soul into bargain with the sea-witch Ursula, despite getting a good look at the fate of other “poor unfortunate souls” who have made such bargains and failed to deliver their ends. But other than the small, almost carefree scene, there is no other mention of souls in “The Little Mermaid”.

Therefore, here it is that this paper must abandon the spunky, yet strangely submissive Ariel and concentrate on the mermaid who wanted something much grander than just a mortal man. Several scholars – Easterlin (2001), Alan and Lauren Dundes (2002), and

Faith and Niels Ingwersen (1990) - agree that a soul, i.e. the promise of afterlife, an eternal spiritual existence, is the Little Mermaid's highest goal and moral desire. She strives for transcendence "knowingly and unknowingly" (Ingwersen & Ingwersen 1990: 414). The question remains, why?

Spurred on by her growing love for humans, the mermaid asks her grandmother if they ever die. The grandmother, explaining that humans have an immortal soul, relates how "they rise up to unknown, beautiful places that we shall never see" (Andersen 1990: 45) (cited in Easterlin 2001: 269). Hearing this, the little mermaid no longer feels content to live three hundred years in the sea, preoccupied as she is with the prince and the wish to "possess, like him, an immortal soul" (Andersen 1990: 46) (cited in Easterlin 2001: 269) (Easterlin 2001: 269).

Looking into the motives behind the little seamaid's quest for immortality, some academics have gone further than others, with Nybo (1990: 417) insisting that the driving energy behind the Little Mermaid's actions is fear of death – the fear of vanishing into sea foam and thus ceasing to exist is what makes her go through all the horrible ordeals. Then there is the analysis written by Soracco (1990), who examines the story using Freudian-Jungian archetypes, thus seeing it more as a battle to achieve individuation and a longing to leave the matriarchal world (the sea) and enter the patriarchal human world.

Despite all her efforts to gain a soul, is a mermaid even capable of getting one? Tyus (2016: 1) explains that since *The Little Mermaid* by Andersen is adapted from a much earlier tale, that of Fredriech de la Motte's *Undine*, then they share certain similarities, one of which is that *Undine* itself draws its data from Paracelsus, who claimed that nature spirits, despite their overall resemblance to humans, do not possess a soul, thus echoing the beliefs of early Christians. Even in those ancient times (around 600 AD), the Christian priests debated over the mermaids' (and other nature spirits') desire to gain an immortal soul (considering it was taken as the one ultimate thing to set humans apart from all other beings – the gift of God given to Adam which set him and his kind ruler above all the rest of the Earth) and decided that mermaids could indeed gain a soul but only through a holy matrimony with a Christian man.

Given the above, could it be concluded that love equals soul, or at least that love is a key ingredient in acquiring a soul? Considering all the proof from selected sources and previous discussions, I would say that love, although possibly a prerequisite in acquiring an immortal soul – namely, the prince (man) will have to love (fancy) the mermaid enough to want to marry her, because only by marriage would his soul split and flow into the soulless mermaid, granting her a piece of Heaven as well, but since the little seamaid seems more concerned with eternal life and soul than any mortal love, it does remain important, but merely as a vehicle on the way to the true transcendence. Or as Tyus has indicated, that “The crux of the tale lies in the protagonist’s attempt to gain a soul. The romantic element within the story becomes a tool to progress the plot for the little mermaid’s advancement towards her true desire, an immortal soul” (2016: 5).

Both Dahlerup and Trites bring this equation even closer to a balance. For Dahlerup (1990: 420), the Prince is a symbol of Heaven, just as the sea is a symbol of Earth and the Earth the symbol for Heaven – gaining humanity, the little seamaid would also gain the life beyond. And Trites has written:

Little Mermaid equates the ideas of “love” and “soul”, because she believes immortality depends on first gaining human love... The soul is placed last, in the climactic position, because the mermaid considers happiness in eternity more important than happiness on Earth (1991: 2).

Having already considered that the soul might be equal/tightly bound to the Prince *id est* mortal love, there is yet another angle to analyse, that of the importance of the human body (or in a wider sense, material world) in the process of gaining eternal life. Spencer (2014: 116-117) argues that the chance of acquiring a soul is what strengthens the Little Mermaid’s will to perform as human, thus making the soul an asset in a bundle – the most precious asset, but still part of a collection, not a separate entity as others have seen it.

The little mermaid desires to perform the human identity that feels natural for her and wants to be in a relationship with the prince (unnamed in the story and called Eric in the film), but the question of identity is complicated in the short story by the introduction of immortality. .../...The desire for a soul strengthens the mermaid’s urge to perform as a human. She wants both the handsome prince and an immortal soul: “I would dare to do anything to win him and an immortal soul!” she thinks to herself (Andersen 1837/1974, p.67) (Cited in Spencer 2014: 116-117). The obsession with performing as human is less clearly distinct from the mermaid’s affection for the prince in the short story than I will argue it is in the film because the mermaid in the film sings an entire song about how she longs to be part of the human world; however, the importance of a successful performance as human is amplified in the story. (Spencer 2014: 116-117)

As it is evident from here, the human life of the mermaid is much valued, it is not just another vehicle to getting the one thing mermaids do not possess – a soul – but the soul itself is rather taken as a proof that one truly has become human, assumed the *true identity*. Which makes the prince, too, into another such proof, but since, in Spencer's view, the individual process is more important, then what the mermaid achieves for herself is also more important than what another being could give her, so the prince's love is something the little seamaid gets for herself, and so is her soul.

Spencer's claim includes both mermaids. However, when it comes to Andersen's seamaid, then at least Tyus opposes, making an argument that the Little Mermaid's plight has never been about the body, or for that matter, anything material, and that Andersen had

...Strategically planned for his mermaid to be a more or less spiritual creature. If we consider the soul within a religious context, it is an immaterial substance. .../Andersen's deliberate unfolding of the text is to create a distinction between the divine and non-divine, the soul and the body (Tyus 2016: 4).

Just as Spencer (2014) deemed the entire performing human the most important and valued, so does Tyus seek to prove that it was never intended thus - as partially covered in Chapter 2, of how the mortal prince is, but truly is not essential in the quest of obtaining an immortal soul. Thus, here we have two scholars on polar sides of an opinion – Spencer taking a reading which claims that the mortal human life (with all its benefits, soul included) is everything and Tyus (2016), who, basing a good portion of her arguments on the biographical material about Andersen, his diaries and personal correspondence included, makes a point that the original's author himself planned the seamaid as one type of ethereal being on a quest for becoming another ethereal being (and, almost accidentally, ending up as a third type, a daughter of the air, that is).

Motivation and means aside, but one is certain – the seamaid cannot have a soul without making sacrifices and suffering, just as a common Christian belief held it – one suffers in this life, so that if worthy, they could have a life everlasting in the world beyond. And so does the Little Mermaid, because she hopes, that through the pain and self-denial she would gain eternal life (Trites 1991: 4). True – Andersen's tale is one long description of just how much the poor little mermaid has to suffer – her tongue cut, her tail severed into two legs that hurt terribly and bleed at each of her step, tossed into an alien world where nobody understands her, or even tries, much, attempting to succeed in a mission doomed to fail, constantly knowing that if she does, she will lose absolutely everything and that the only

ones to mourn her would be the few she left behind. And yet she carries on.

It was not easy for her to leave her family the first time. Now she must repeat that decision. But she remains true to her deepest yearnings for the Kingdom of Heaven, even, ironically, by making a decision that she can only believe promises her own death and extinction (Guroian 1988: 83).

The ultimate sacrifice of the mermaid is her own body, which she abandons

.../To earn the reward of an eternal spiritual existence. The tale is then an expression of Andersen's personal fantasy, infused with Christian morality, which helped Andersen overcome the trials posed by his own troubled sexuality (Bendix 1993: 283).

Because feeling alien in his own era and world, among people who should have been his kindred but hardly ever were, and torn by feelings that both his faith and his community considered forbidden, Andersen truly was the little seamaid, unfit to either world and with a hope that perhaps through all this suffering and if he gets lucky and the children are good and smile, then, perhaps, in a 300 years, he would find himself a true home.

Just that, despite (and because) of the high goals, all the suffering and sacrifices, the Little Mermaid fails. She fails performing human, thus failing to win the Prince's love (he still treats her as a favourite asexual pet). In whatever it takes to get a man, she has failed. He is to wed another. Mortal love and mortal life are lost to her. And by this failure, she knows there will be an even greater one – the soul she has sacrificed everything for, well, she will lose that, too, before ever gaining it. It has all been for nothing. She has failed – both as a mermaid and as a human, the cost – her life and (her) human soul. Or as Spencer explains:

The mermaid's identity performance is focused on her desire to be with the prince, but, on the whole, her grief is centred on the larger concern of losing the opportunity to acquire a soul. The prince's choice of another partner also represents a rejection of the mermaid and implicitly of her identity (performance) as a human. (Spencer 2014: 118)

She fails because she is too passive, argues Dahlerup (1990: 419), and I am, at least partially, inclined to agree. "The Mermaid, in fact, does not want eternal life either. She gives up fighting for it and for marriage at the first opportunity" (Dahlerup 1990: 419). Her last but one sacrifice seems to be her dream of marriage and love – she gives no grand final battle (not that she would likely win, but she makes *no* attempt) for the Prince's hand and surrenders before even the flags are out.

This would make an utterly devastating end to an already morose tale full of suffering, unless...

Her grim failure to gain an immortal soul is softened only by the fact that she is given the chance to become one of the daughters of the air who may, after three hundred years, redeem themselves and through good deeds earn immortality (Bendix 1993: 283).

...she is given a new chance, one that, I think, Andersen had in mind ever since the

beginning, considering his expressed opinions about these matters that I have shown before, because it is one in which the mermaid does not depend on mortal love (or that of opinions of other (mer)people), something that she can earn for herself (well, despite the fact that, too, depending somewhat on the goodwill of human beings – the children). And what gave the Little Mermaid this new chance was, ironically, her final sacrifice – her life, her immortality for his (Guroian 1988: 82), and here I would not even take the Prince as an individual but simply as a (innocent) human being. With the cost of an innocent life, the mermaid might have gotten her previous life back, but she chose not to, because, I claim, it was not what she wanted in the first place (else she would never have left), secondly, she had already drifted so much apart from the mer-world throughout all her ordeals, and thirdly, she was simply incapable of murdering another being – especially the one she so childishly and childlike-ly loved.

Andersen concludes the tale with the transformation of the little mermaid into a daughter of air after she enacts the role of a martyr by willingly sacrificing her life to save the prince. In this section, the religiosity of the text is evident in that the daughters of air are in a quasi-purgatory state. These spiritual beings must work to gain an immortal soul and be with God. (Tyus 2016: 3-4)

So there it is – more hard work, but still, this feels like the little seamaid is half-way there, so at least she has been given some credit for all her sacrifices, and she can carry on in the company of similar beings (which raises a curious question whether the other daughters of air were born thus or perhaps had had a fate similar to the seamaid...) until finally purged and ready to enter Heaven.

What seems clearly visible here, is the importance, the impact of Andersen's tale – even if a person's attempt at individuation fails, there is yet hope. Hope was something Andersen wanted his readers to have, since it was something he himself so greatly needed. And so, his stories, although full of Christian morals that might strike an odd note these days (and likely did so also when the animated film was made, since they got stripped to make a more family-friendly film and surely a better sales article). However, those same morals, whether they were Christian, Andersen or a mixture of both, were there for a reason – to teach the readers something, teach the children and educate them even about the harsh themes, which are often those that younger readers seek after (especially since they are not very often bound to meet them). Guroian, although writing this in 1988, raises the same

issue:

And there is no doubt in my mind that.../...The Little Mermaid continue to address the need that children have for satisfying answers to such questions as: "What happens to us after we die? And where do we go?" The renowned psychiatrist Robert Coles, who has devoted a long career to the care and study of children, writes concerning the deep curiosity that his child patients have about immortality (Guroian 1988: 63).

This is definitely a question no child will find an answer from the redheaded singalong Ariel, so a pause for thought – does underestimating children (readers, viewers) really pay off, in the... long run?

## CONCLUSION

The thesis sought to find out the main goals of the two seamaids – the Little Mermaid of Andersen’s and Disney’s animated film’s heroine Ariel – and the possible motivations behind their strivings, in comparison and apart from each other, with the help of a selection of academic sources.

The analysis clearly shows that the Little Mermaid and Ariel share two main wishes – that of becoming part of the human world by transforming themselves into a human, in which their motivations are the most similar, and that of winning the affections of the handsome Prince and his hand in marriage, at which the motivations vary, since for the Little Mermaid of Andersen’s the Prince is more the vehicle in achieving her ultimate goal, the eternal life, whereas for Ariel Prince Eric is *the* ultimate goal. The third grand wish belongs to the Little Mermaid alone – that of transcending to a higher level of existence, on which she could escape death and reach the Heavens side by side with humans. Ariel, though, thanks to Disney’s stripping adaptation, gets her man, her marriage, and her (way too) many sequels, with most of the original’s moral impact being lost in the process.

What I would like to take away from here myself, is, firstly, the fact how much impact a story can have on people, not just in the era when it was written, but hundreds of years later, and how many questions and ideas it still gives rise to; and the same goes for the Disney’s interpretation, which has drifted far apart from its source, hence creating almost an original story of its own, with spinoffs and almost a greater impact on not just regular viewers but also the academics. It takes a unique and powerful tale to stand so long and shake the world thus, and I am eager to learn, which lengths will this story of a little alien seamaid still go. We shall see.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Diana Ostrat**

**What Does Little Mermaid Want? A comparative analysis of H.C. Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and Walt Disney Studio's animated film *The Little Mermaid***

**Mida Väike Merineitsi tahab? H.C Anderseni *Väikese merineitsi* ja Walt Disney Studio animatsiooni *Väike merineitsi* võrdlev analüüs**

bakalaureusetöö

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Käesolev bakalaureusetöö analüüsib ja võrdleb Hans Christian Anderseni nimetu Väikese Merineitsi ja *Walt Disney Pictures* animatsiooni *Väike Merineitsi* peakangelast Arieli, võttes põhivaatluse alla nende põhilised eesmärgid. Antud töö püüab välja selgitada kahe Merineitsi soovid, ning need põhiteemade järgi grupeerida, et neid võrrelda ja leida nendevahelised sarnasused ja erinevused ning leida võimalikud põhjendused nende eesmärkidele ning nende sarnasustele ja erinevustele. Selleks kasutatakse erinevate akadeemiliste allikate grupeerimist ja ideede võrdlust.

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö koosneb viiest osast: sissejuhatausest, kolmest sisupeatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatus annab üldise ülevaate kahe põhiallika taustast ja olulisusest kultuuriruumis, selgitab lühidalt animatsiooni ja Anderseni muinasjutu teemat ning toob välja antud bakalaureusetöö põhieesmärgi, milleks on: välja selgitada, mida mõlemad väikesed merineitsid tahavad. Sissejuhatus võtab ka kokku eeldatavad merineitsite eesmärgid, mis on jagatud kolmeks põhiteemaks: inimkeha/inimeste maailm, prints (mees)/abielu ja (Anderseni Väikese Merineitsi puhul) surematu hing/igavene elu. Esimene peatükk analüüsib ja võrdleb erinevate sekundaarsete allikate abiga Väikese Merineitsi ja Arieli soovi saada endale inimkeha ja koht inimeste maailmas. Teine peatükk võtab vaatluse alla kõik, mis puudutab kaht merineitsit ja nende suhet Printsiga ning suhtumist abiellu. Kolmas ja viimane peatükk keskendub Anderseni Väikese Merineitsi ülimalle eesmärgile saada endale surematu hing ning tema võimalikele motivatsioonidele.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et Anderseni Väikesel Merineitsil ja Arielil on kaks ühist eesmärki – nad mõlemad tahavad saada inimeseks ja osaks inimeste maailmast, ning ka nende põhjused on siinkohal enamvähem sarnased, ja mõlemad üritavad võita printsi armastust ning temaga abiellu astuda, ent siinkohal lähevad nende põhjused suuresti lahku, kuna Väikese Merineitsi jaoks on prints enamal või vähemal määral vahend, mis aitab tal saavutada tema ülimalt eesmärki – saada endale surematu hing, samas kui Arieli jaoks on ülimalt eesmärgiks abielu printsiga. Kolmas suur soov kuulub seega vaid Anderseni Väikesele Merineitsile, kuna tema üksi loodab kannatuste hinnaga ja läbi maise armastuse jõuda kõrgemale tasandile ja saavutada võrdväarsus inimestega – surematu hing ning koht Paradiisis. Ariel aga piirdub tänu Disney Stuudio kärbetele mehe, abielu ja õnneliku lõpuga.

Märksõnad: Väike Merineitsi, Andersen, Disney, võrdlev uuring, kriitika, soovid, identiteet.

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