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***Den Lille Havfrue* against *The Little Mermaid*:**

The Female Other's Induction into Patriarchy

In the sea-breeze, vermillion locks flow like waves, yet burn like the sun in the eyes of man. She nestles herself on the rock, calm and serene, unfettered by her bare state nor by the crashing of the ocean against the land. “Siren”, “selkie”, “mermaid”, they define her, for it is true, her form of half-child, half-fish. The creature known as the mermaid, with the upper body of a woman and the lower half of a fish, has held its prevalent position throughout history, spanning from as early as 5000 BC with the worshipping of a fish-tailed Babylonian deity known as Ea, to today's many pop-culture representations (Scribner 53-4). For Western society, the image of the mermaid in the Western imaginary is largely based around Hans Christian Andersen's depiction in his 1837 fairy-tale, *Den Lille Havfrue*, translated literally as “The Little Mermaid”, a title popularized now by the 1989 remake of the same name from Walt Disney Animation Studios. At their cores, both narrations follow the tale of a young mermaid who is set apart by her overwhelming fascination with the world above the sea. Her desire to exist beyond her current limitations under the ocean leads to her assuming a human shape, and the transformation, which requires the loss of her voice and the splitting of her tail into legs, is made permanent if she gains the love of a human man. Yet, this transference from one realm to the next, places the little mermaid under the general image of the Other crossing borders, attempting integration into a society ignorant of her existence. The process of this figure of otherness' assimilation into a

patriarchal empire, not only requires the mermaid to conform to societal expectations, including established gender roles, but forces what can be considered a sexual awakening. Both texts produce the notion that a male-dominated society requires the Other's assumption of the female human figure to involve a simultaneous removal of identity and a creation of a sexually-able base creature, a subversion of her original intent to acquire "humanity". This corruption in form is referred commonly in academic analyses as the little mermaid's "castration", in which the removal of features that construe her own self and prowess (which are defined as "masculine abilities") results in a repressed female condition. Although both works present problematic feminine images and a reliance on traditional patriarchal values, Andersen's *Den Lille Havfrue* showcases the mermaid's rebellion against the binaries of man and woman, the empire and Other. With symbolic imagery and motifs of the splitting of the divine and body, of an ascendance beyond the world of man, Andersen projects the female Other's triumph and defiance against the patriarchal system. In contrast, Disney's modern remake of the tale, *The Little Mermaid*, depicts a resolution that confines and defines the little mermaid to and under the rule of patricentric society, perpetuating the little mermaid's symbolic castration while either repressing or vilifying all instances of feminine power.

Fascination into this specific representation of the female Other, the mermaid, has stemmed from the ancient past, growing in prominence after 16th century European imperial beginnings. Alleged mermaid sightings by sailors began to explode in frequency, making it seem that "wherever Europeans explored, it seemed they found merpeople" (Scribner 55). Notably, these reports oftentimes provided sexualized accounts of the mermaid form, combining this myth with that of the siren. The 16th century Belgian author Andrew Laurence is a model example of this use of overtly sexualized language, describing the mermaid as "a dedely beste that bringeth a

man gladly to death. . . . Her face hath an alluring Grace, more charming is her Tongue” (Scribner 54). It is worth noting that Laurence’s account compounds a dehumanization of the female form with an erotic description of her physical attributes, evident from the suggestive diction behind the modifiers “alluring” and “charming”. The prevalence of mermaid myth, as well as its accompanying emphasis on female eroticism arguably reached its height in the 19th century, due in part to the spread of Romanticism, an artistic movement that glorified nature and the individual. The half-woman, half-fish Other continued to be seized into the role of a manifestation of depraved seduction and gluttony for flesh. Yet this portrayal of a temptress was further complicated as Romantic artists began to additionally depict her in the manner of a demure bride-figure, connecting her particularly to the form of the Selkie and Melusine (two more aquatic female Others depicted in their legends as finding fulfillment in marriage with humans). As such, the mermaid began to be “both representative of a dangerous pagan eroticism and as a being striving for human redemption through love”, a strange combination of seductress and pure lover in the Romantic subtext (Wullschlager 169). Hans Christian Andersen’s mermaid was conceived from this Romantic amalgamation of mermaid with siren, Selkie, and Melusine, and his attention in crafting a figure that embodies both sexuality and purity was what led to his acquisition of a large following after publication of *Den Lille Havfrue* in 1837. Andersen’s fairy-tale continues to be influential in the present day, and the coincidental “discovery” of his text in a bookstore by Disney director Ron Clements was what led to the production of Disney’s work, *The Little Mermaid*, what would become a household name (*Treasures Untold*). The seemingly innocent tale of a little mermaid’s journey through sea and land is steeped in a long literary history of erotic undertones, and the large reach of the tale’s prominence today is perhaps indicative of society’s remaining fascination of connecting otherness with sexuality.

Scholarly criticism of both the original Andersen version and the Disney adaptation is similarly entrenched in a discussion of sexuality's role in the creation of gender dynamics, which is made even more apparent when viewing the diametrically opposed societies of land and sea. The first source that I will be considering in this analysis is an academic piece titled "Splash! Six Views of 'The Little Mermaid'", co-written by six researchers in which each offer interpretations of Andersen's text in relation to different modes of deconstruction. In a particular section written by Sabrina Soracco, her argument sustains that the young sea maiden's process of transfiguring into a human form, specifically through the removal of the tongue, is a repression of the feminine attributes in favor of integration into masculine society. She indicates that the half-fish entity, once "whole and possessing a beautiful voice in the matriarchal mer-world, enters the patriarchal human world severely disabled" as the loss of her ability to define herself is the cause of her downfall (Soracco 146). This essay goes on to support this interpretation with a observation of the Disney adaptation, indicating that the Disney's text goes on to repress feminine self-definition further by showing "only the negative side of feminine rule and the positive side of masculine rule", alluding to Disney's addition of the character of Ursula, a malevolent female antagonist in the film (Ingwersen 149). While Soracco details a fundamental point of the nature of female repression through a removal of language, there seems to be a failure in addressing the second part of the transformation of mermaid to human, the acquisition of human legs. The possession of legs implies the acquiring of a vaginal and sexual element, which can be construed as a movement towards femininity. Both aspects of the transformative process, the sexual awakening and the loss of language, will be expounded upon in my analysis, as well as a deeper comparison into the different modes of depicting female power between both Andersen and Disney versions. To proceed with this study, a secondary source by Roberta Trites titled "'Disney's Sub/Version of

Andersen's the Little Mermaid”, will be examined. Trites specifically interpretes the modern film as a perpetuation of sexist American values that produce only two extremes of women: a passive bride, Ariel, or a depraved witch, Ursula. Women are characterized as only “self-effacing or evil”, and yet are both also “incapable of creating their own responsible power” without a reliance on that of pre-existing masculine authority (Trites 152). While she offers a strong inspection into the portrayals of women in both versions of the tale, there is a sense that she glorifies *Den Lille Havfrue* in her juxtaposition of the two texts. Her argument clearly aligns in critiquing Disney’s minimization of female representation through its changes to the original and offers only a shallow acknowledgement of the male chauvinism that remains in Andersen’s work. Rather than interpreting the Andersen text as a wholly empowering feminist piece, I make the argument that the patriarchal values Andersen employs in descriptions of the dichotomy between the land and sea societies is what enables Disney to even further simplify the already limiting gender dynamics in their adaptation. In this manner, comparing the characterization of feminine roles in both versions of the little mermaid’s tale requires studying the female condition before, during, and even after the period of induction under the patricentric system.

In the beginning of *Den Lille Havfrue*, H.C. Andersen juxtaposes the little mermaid’s underwater domain with earthly natural imagery, exoticizing the sea as a quasi-paradisiacal realm. Instances of this juxtaposition immediately appears in the opening lines of the fairy tale, with the description of the ocean water as being “as blue as the petals of the brightest cornflower, and clear as the purest glass” (Andersen 35). The author’s usage of these superlatives to describe the sea, “brightest” and “purest”, sets up the natural inhabitation of mermaids as a fantastical and beautiful environment. Yet this comparison of the sea to a floral element of the earth and additionally to a man-made construction, glass, imparts a human influence to the sea. The narrative utilizes the

diction of the human world to define the mermaids' realm, rather than utilizing thalassic language familiar to these aquatic Others. This placement of the sea with land becomes an explicit piece of the tale as the narrator notes that at the palace of the ocean's royal family, "lay a large garden, with fiery red and dark blue trees. The fruit glittered like gold and the flowers like flickering fire" (35). This paradoxical association of the sea with fire and botanical imagery drives the implication of the ocean even more as a place of fantasies separate from rigid reality. The comparison of fruit to "gold" produces the sense of a society steeped in indulgence. This sense of opulence, however, is contingent on an understanding of a human monetary value system, knowing the preciousness of gold to the economy above the sea, rather than that of the mermaids' own system of material worth. In effect, the mer-world is exoticized using language singular to that of the land and set as a strange spectacle for the human reader to gawk at.

At the same time of Andersen's exoticism of the little mermaid's world, he constructs his mer-society as a largely female-dominated realm, standing in direct opposition to a traditional patriarchal system. This is first evident in Andersen's first description of the "Sea-King", the little mermaid's father. Initially, at his mentioning, the reader assumes the societal structure of the undersea world to be patricentric. However, the narrative emphasizes the role of the king's mother, stating that the "[Sea-King's] old mother kept home for him" (35). The phrase, to "keep home" implies a managing of domestic affairs, bolstering the little mermaid's grandmother to the head of the household, a position previously delegated to the father-figure. The diction of "home" also can be interpreted in the wider context as being the entire sea and, if true, speaks towards an even greater expanse of matriarchal rule. The grandmother's strength of character is then immediately emphasized as she is described as "a wise woman, but proud of her high birth...she deserved high praise, especially for her devotion to her granddaughters" (35). The repetition of

“high” elucidates not just the grandmother’s own worthiness as an individual, but also of the effective wielding of her power, her wisdom, that manifests as a guiding force for the little mermaid. In response to her granddaughter’s curiosity, the “old Grandmother had to tell her of ships and towns, of men and animals”, and in this regard, the elder assumes power as knowledge-keeper in the text as well (36). Whilst othering the mer-society, Andersen, interestingly, decides to include what seems to be a progressive representation of femininity by placing power in the matriarchal figure, strength that is present in other female characters as well.

Den Lille Havfrue’s main character, the little mermaid’s, own feminine prowess and autonomy in the mer-world remains apparent, despite her seeming obsession with the above-sea male society. The unnamed little mermaid is posed as an outcast in the realm of Others, said to be “a strange child, quiet and pensive” due to her intrinsic interest in the “world of man” more so than that of her older sisters (36). This fascination is demonstrated with her arrangement of her garden. “She made her [flower]bed as round as the sun” and adorns her plot with “rose-red sun-like flowers” surrounding “one fine marble statue...a beautiful boy, hewn out of pure white stone” (36). Soracco suggests that this garden composition is a projection of the mermaid’s desire. Both the statue and the repeated sun imagery, a traditionally male symbol, is representative of her vague yearning for a human man, which is later concretized into the form of a human prince she rescues from drowning after she is finally allowed to ascend up to the ocean’s surface (Soracco 148). While the sea maiden’s attachment to the upper-world is partly founded upon an idolization of the human masculine form, indicated by the mermaid’s increased interest in human affairs after her rescuing of the prince, it is arguable that Andersen places greater emphasis on this fascination compounded with celestial imagery, elements from a heavenly world untouched by man. The fairy tale states that “many a night [the mermaid] stood at the open window looking up...moon

and stars she could see... they look much larger through the water” (Andersen 36). Her prominent connection with divine bodies— moon, stars, and sun— speaks to the idea that her true desire is existence in a world much larger than the sheltered maternal womb that the ocean represents. Curiosity becomes the young mermaid’s defining feature; she becomes a personification of the desire for worldly knowledge, rather than a simple Other’s adoration of men. “There was so much she wanted to know” about the “world [that] seemed to her far greater than her own” (41). The mermaid’s agency is founded upon this curiosity as it motivates her erudite search for knowledge. Yet, this search would lead to her disastrous downfall with her assumption of “humanity”.

What prods Andersen’s female Other to assume the body of a human woman is the innate quest for permanence present in all organisms, human or not. After the sea maiden rescues the human prince, at which point her curiosity in both the realms of the land and heavens reaches its peak, she seeks out the wisdom of the matriarch, her grandmother, to garner more knowledge of the human form. The elder responds with a comparison of the human to that of the merpeople, detailing the concept of the immortal soul of humans. She states, “we have no immortal souls, — we never renew our life... Man, on the other hand, has a soul that lives for ever, — lives when the body is dust and ashes; it rises then through the clear air, up to all the shining stars” (42). Rather than the mermaid bemoaning her eventual death, her response is that of fear that she could no longer “hear the music of the waves, nor yet see the beautiful flowers and the ruddy sun” (42). Three realms of existence are indicated here— the “waves” as representative of the sea, the “flowers” as that of land, and the “sun” as that of the heavens— all of which would be lost to her with her eventual death. The maiden automatically resolves to gaining a soul, a want that receives a reaction of disapproval from her grandmother. The grandmother advises that the only means to gain a soul is if “a man should hold you so dear...with every thought and desire he clung to

you...Then indeed his soul would flow over into your bosom, and you would obtain a share in human bliss” (42). In a fantastical manner, the gaining of a soul is equated with the gaining of love, a love that is stated by Trites as “a means to an end rather than an end in itself” (Trites 146). To elaborate on Trites’ explication, the little mermaid’s subsequent pursuit of the human prince, through transforming into a woman, is not a product of a fanciful crush, but her own agency in rejecting a pre-destined path, rejecting her eventual decomposition towards inanimate sea foam. As such, the little mermaid displays a unique sense of feminine empowerment by deciding her own fate and having the will to “risk all to gain...an immortal soul” as she seeks out the sea-witch (43).

In stark contrast to Andersen’s representations of female power in the underwater world, the 1989 Disney version, “The Little Mermaid”, transfers all power originally delegated to female characters onto masculine forms. The introduction to the mer-society parallels the Andersen piece’s opening due to the similar concentration on the affluence of the underwater world. The underwater opening scene showcases the convergence of all manner of aquatic creatures towards an opulent palace, glittering a bright golden hue (3:24-3:30). The Disney version goes as far as to inscribe Greco-Roman architectural design onto the palace, seen through the excess of columns and towering dome structures. This reinforces the association of the sea with decadence and locates the mer-society under a Grecian / Roman context, ancient societies marred with a history of female oppression.



The film makes this connection to ancient Greece and Rome explicit by modifying Andersen's "Sea-King" into the form of Triton, a mythological god. Disney introduces this character by presenting a masculine show of domination with the image of this male ruler riding on a chariot propelled by horse-like dolphins whilst brandishing his token of power, the trident, a scene that is reminiscent of riding into war (3:53-4:05). The grandmother, the voice of wisdom for the little mermaid, present in *Den Lille Havfrue*, is completely absent in the Disney version, therefore this is a removal of the little mermaid's (named Ariel in the film) primary source of guidance. The grandmother's role is filled in inadequately by the inclusion of the male characters Flounder, Ariel's cowardly fish companion, and Sebastian, Triton's crab servant tasked as Ariel's overseer, both characters unable to provide the maternal guidance that Andersen's mermaid has. The sea-realm morphs into a male-dominated society with the lack of feminine allies to Ariel and the inclusion of Triton's oppressive reign.

Disney's little mermaid remains in an oppressed and weakened state as all attempts to satisfy her yearning for the realms above the sea are met with fierce reprimands by the paternal figure. A notable example of her loss of autonomy occurs after Triton's discovery of her brief ascension to the ocean's surface. The patriarch demands her subservience, stating "as long as you live under *my* ocean, you obey *my* rules" (13:17-13:21). He goes as far as to silence Ariel's voice, cutting through her pleas for understanding by declaring "not another word" (13:22-13:23). This

dichotomy in power between Ariel and her father is symbolized through the contrast between Triton's mighty trident and Ariel's fork she finds in the wreckage of a ship.



Lauren and Alan Dundes explains that “the size of the fork (when compared to the trident) emphasizes the differential proportions of adult and child”, and with that their respective societal authorities (Dundes 122). To expand upon this observation, Ariel remains in the role of a child completely subjected to the command of the father figure. Her power is a diminutive imitation of his that only manifests in her creation of her secret sanctuary of sunken treasures, containing objects like that of the fork and a statue of the human prince she idolizes, Eric (34:30-34:48). In this way, the cavern sanctuary parallels Andersen's mermaid's garden plot. Yet, her materialistic focus on objects from the human realm traps Ariel both into the land's and mer-world's patriarchal systems.

In contrast to Andersen's sea maiden's quest for permanence motivating her transformation, Ariel transforms only to remove herself from her father's repressive patriarchal state, which leads to a transfer into yet another male-dominated society. After the discovery of her sanctuary by Triton, followed by his immediate enraged destruction of her treasures, Ariel assumes passivity, remaining bent forward on the broken statue of Prince Eric (36:16-36:18). Even in this state of destruction, there is no outright assertion of self, and she would remain prostrated if not approached by the servants of the sea-witch, two eels that cajole her into

fulfilling her desires by seeking out the witch, Ursula (36:53-38:10). Trites indicates that Ariel's decision to seek transformation is at the prospect of being able to "reject her father's culture to embrace Eric's culture" (Trites 146). Her choice, this "autonomy", if that could be called as such, is a choice between two men, father and potential lover, but in actuality is just a transfer from one patriarchy to the next patriarchy without any consideration of a life beyond male control.

As different as both motivations to transform are, the metamorphosis of mermaid to human woman in both versions of the fairy tale similarly invokes the idea of the mermaid's castration and sexual awakening, a production of a mutilated and incomplete being who is prodded into an unknown society. *Den Lille Havfrue's* mode of transformation, the Sea-witch, is a neutral being, presented as an elderly mermaid seemingly uninterested in the little mermaid's personal affairs, yet having peculiar insight in the younger's desire for immortality. The witch proceeds to warn the mermaid of the particulars of this permanent transformation, stating, "your tail will split in two... and you will feel as if a sharp sword cut through you...every step you will feel as if you were treading on a sharp knife, and the blood were spirting out of you" (Andersen 44). Andersen's description of this separation of the tail is reminiscent of menstruation, the beginning of sexual maturity from girlhood to womanhood. Efrat Tseëlon deconstructs this splitting even further in describing the fish tail as an "imaginary maternal phallus" (Tseëlon 1021). The removal of what made her whole and beautiful in the mer-society, the fish-tail, symbolically castrated her with this physical weakening. Furthermore, the assumption of the vagina with this splitting not only transfigures the mermaid into a human, but also into a sexually-able woman. The seemingly positive assumption of feminine traits, however, makes the female Other more vulnerable in the male-dominated society she soon would place herself into. This crippling of the little mermaid is compounded with the loss of her voice as a necessary price for

the witch's services. The witch proceeded to "cut out the tongue of the Little Mermaid. She was dumb now; she could neither sing nor speak" (Andersen 43). The loss of the tongue is also a symbolic castration. Soracco indicates that the "lack of language is what will prevent [the mermaid] from participating in the symbolic order" because the mermaid now lacks the ability of self-definition and identification (Soracco 146). Overall, Andersen thematizes the necessity of the elimination of feminine power and the assumption of sexuality in order to become a part of the masculine societal order.

Disney's representation of Ariel's own transformation roughly follows Andersen's structure of the castration process, but the corruption of the neutral Sea-witch into the evil of Ursula details Disney's greater assumption of patriarchal ideals. The audience garners the malice of Ursula in her introduction in the film, in which she angrily details her revenge plot against Triton who overthrew her rule over the sea in the past (11:35-12:00). Disney personifies villainous envy in Ursula with her desire to obtain Triton's masculine prowess contained in his trident. Yet, this evil seems to be correlated with the sexualization of Ursula's mature female body. When Ursula tempts the young maiden into accepting her aid to achieve the love of Prince Eric, Ursula's large voluptuous form is juxtaposed with the severely thin frame of Ariel, giving an even greater impression of the witch's menacing appearance (41:40-41:46). What clearly separates this witch from all other entities in the film is the noticeable octopus-like tentacles; the dark tones representative of an corrupting force.



Trites makes the argument that these “appendages also make Ursula a perversion of femininity; her tentacles could be interpreted as eight phalluses” (Trites 150). The assumption of phallic imagery, and therefore masculinity, onto the form of this female villain garners the implication of her lust for male power, a power materialized by the trident in Ursula’s case. Disney’s reliance on a female villain, the only female character to display any sort meaningful authority, to construct the primary conflict of the film indicates a clear problematic minimization of female representation as either passive and demure or sinister and power-hungry.

To move back towards *Den Lille Havfrue*, the process of becoming human requires castration, which paradoxically prevents the mermaid from truly reaching “humanity”. Once discovered by the human prince that she idolized before, he refers to her as “his little Foundling” and “allowed [her] to sleep on a velvet cushion outside his door” (Andersen 46). The female Other turned human is then identified by the male patriarch, the prince, as “his Foundling”, his child, his possession. Furthermore, the connotation behind the word “allowed” likewise suggests the masculine prince to be in a greater position of power with this ability to seemingly dispense what he considers a “reward” for her as his property, his pet. Without her voice, the little mermaid’s previous identity is lost, and her new sense of self is solely dependent on the prince’s definitions of her. The sexualization of the mermaid similarly degrades her further with this animalistic and savage association with her form. The deterioration of mermaid’s power in the

transfer from sea to land is what simultaneously led to the dehumanization of her form in the imaginary of the patriarchal society, and the cause of her downfall. The prince mistakes who truly rescued him from drowning with another, his sense of gratitude propels his eagerness to then marry the false bride. The mermaid realizes that her failure to garner his love would soon “bring her death, and turn her into foam on the sea”, as per the conditions of the transformation (47). However, instead of killing the prince, which would ultimately save the mermaid from her own death, in an act of sacrifice, the mermaid casts herself away and “leaped into the waves, and she felt how her body was melting into foam” (49). Tseëlon notes this action as typical to the “patriarchal tradition of female masochism”, specifically in which the woman’s life is seen as lesser in value to that of male existence (Tseelon 1019). The resolution of *Den Lille Havfrue* details the little mermaid’s suicidal action as being rewarded. Her sea foam figure is able to ascend as vapor into the heavens and she becomes a “daughter of air”, winning herself an immortal soul with her good deed of suffering (Andersen 49). The little mermaid is able to achieve her initial goal despite failing in her initial means of pursuing a love with human prince. And whilst the nature of her ascension presents a problematic message that female masochism towards men is somehow beneficial to the sacrificial woman, it is clear that the little mermaid is able to break free from the patriarchy that once defines her. The female Other no longer relies on being bound to a human male to achieve her immortal soul and her autonomy returns once again with her resumption of voice.

In contrast to *Den Lille Havfrue*’s hopeful ending, despite Ariel’s victory of obtaining a requited love with Prince Eric, the nature of her victory still alludes to her perpetual subjugation under male domination. Although perhaps not to the same dehumanizing degree as Andersen’s mermaid, despite Ariel’s assumption of a human form, she is similarly presented as a comically

ignorant Other, effectively alienating the mermaid still. For example, during her first dinner with Prince Eric, her mistaken usage of the fork as a comb is met by faces of disbelief and confusion by the male officials that witness her act (51:42-51:49). And similarly without her voice, Ariel becomes an object to be admired for its beauty, her personality and identity erased. The prince likewise finds it necessary to define her, randomly calling her “Mildred, Diana, Rachel”, in a flippant attempt to guess the right identity, a failure as Ariel’s overseer Sebastian supplies the identity for him (1:00:54-1:01:01). Even with the obtaining of the name, Ariel remains as a self-effaced Other without her voice, until the defeat of Ursula who has subsumed the masculine power of the trident and has become an gargantuan sea-monster. However, Ariel does not retrieve her voice and victory through her own actions, as the defeat of Ursula relies on Eric’s killing of the sea-witch turned monster by piercing her below the breast with the bowsprit of a ship (1:14:36-1:15:05). Rather than a female incarnation of evil defeated by a female good, it is male power that defeats the corrupt feminine evil, making clear the Disney film’s male chauvinism. Even with the defeat of the personification of evil, Ariel is left dissatisfied as she cannot exist with Eric as her fish-tail and asexuality has momentarily returned after Ursula’s defeat and must be removed to become the human prince’s bride. To grant this wish, Ariel is castrated once again, assuming the human legs, this time by Triton’s masculine power (1:16:15-1:16:24). Dundes explicates the significance of the father giving the daughter “the necessary sexual parts” as a symbolic “defloration ritual” as she gives him a flower in gratitude (Dundes 127). Ariel is fully entrenched under male domination with both men, Eric and Triton, as her fate hinges upon their will and power. She, now permanently, is locked under the rule of the patriarchal system, permanently castrated as well, unable to break free nor even having the wish to break free like Andersen’s mermaid. Her fairy tale ending hides her tragedy.

Both texts' utilization of traditional patriarchal values serve to repress feminine representation and empowerment. But where the Disney film fails by perpetuating a male chauvinistic cycle of female dependence on the superior male figure, Andersen attempts to subvert this conformity by allowing his sea maiden to achieve self-actualization, with her overcoming of the castrating elements that plague her. Despite *Den Lille Havfrue*'s more feminist ideals, Ariel remains as the popular model of the female Other in which the young audience is mistakenly led to strive towards the ideals of feminine passivity and self-effacing tendencies as the means to achieve their aspirations. The mermaid remains on her rock, remains quiet and bare to the human imaginary in which patriarchal values are continually inscribed on her body.

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