

THE ORIGINALITY AND COMMONALITIES IN MERMAID TRANSFORMATION
TALES: FOUQUÉ'S *UNDINE*, ANDERSEN'S "THE LITTLE MERMAID,"
DISNEY'S *THE LITTLE MERMAID*, AND MIYAZAKI'S *PONYO*.

by

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS, THE CREATORS, AND ADAPTATION THEORY APPLIED TO FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales are embedded in our society. As much as they are a part of our community, it is surprising that the research of them can be seen as trivial or juvenile. I teach high school, and even my high school students tell me that adults do not read fairy tales, and those who do are childish. Nevertheless, I tell them that fairy tales are rich in historical and cultural elements. Because of their whimsical plots, which make the stories palatable, we use them to teach morals and values to children, establishing them as building blocks of our society. Because their primary audience is younger, fairy tales may seem juvenile to the untrained eye. However, as with any piece of literature, rereading—especially when one is older—results in deeper learning and connection to the piece. While a little girl can watch Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* and daydream about being a princess and falling in love with a prince, her mother can watch it and notice the lack of a strong, positive female character. As much as a fairy tale influences a child, it may also affect an adult reader who shares the fairy tale with a child.

This thesis looks deeply into a specific type of fairy tale, the mermaid tale. It examines the morals, values, and culture the tale provides while analyzing various adaptations of the tale. When selecting the four versions, I started with Hayao Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* (2008) because of its variation from the Disney film I had grown up watching. After reading about Miyazaki and the influences on his movie, I came across an article that mentioned Miyazaki’s production notes on *Ponyo*. In these notes, Miyazaki talks about influences on his work, and he names Disney and Hans Christian Andersen. Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is based on Andersen’s “The Little Mermaid”

(1837). Reading about Andersen's possible influences led me to Leah Tyus and Joseph Lavery's article "Deciphering Spaces: The Mermaid & The Soul" and Jack Zipes's article "Critical Reflections about Hans Christian Andersen, the Failed Revolutionary" in which they cite Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* (1811) as an inspiration. This selection of the mermaid versions is a bit personal in that I enjoy and am familiar with these four versions. There are countless remakes and adaptations of the mermaid tale¹. However, because of research that links these versions together, and thinking of the works' separation into approximately equal periods, I have chosen Miyazaki, Disney, Andersen, and Fouqué's works as my focus.

Each of the four versions of the mermaid tale that I examine has a multitude of differences: the name, goals, and age of the mermaid, the side characters, etc. *Undine* has a water elemental, Undine, marry a male human, Huldbrand, to acquire a soul. Once married, she changes from playful seductress to dutiful wife. Undine becomes attached to a female friend, Bertalda, and they decide that Bertalda must go live with them as well. However, time passes, and Huldbrand begins to grow apart from Undine and closer to Bertalda. Undine warns Huldbrand that he could not treat her poorly near the water, or her relatives would take her back. Time passes, and Huldbrand flies into a rage against Undine while on the water. As she forewarned, his poor treatment of Undine results in her family instantly taking her back. After more time passes and believing Undine to be dead, Huldbrand and Bertalda marry, resulting in Undine killing Huldbrand. During the funeral, Undine transforms into a flowing spring and encircles Huldbrand's grave.

¹ *Goodreads* has a running list of "The Top 425 Best Mermaid Books," and that is just what the creators of the list deemed "the best." That is also just one platform that does not list movies, plays, operas, musical scores, games, etc.

In Andersen's version, unlike *Undine*, the little mermaid lives in the ocean and has never interacted with humans. When the mermaids turn 15, they are allowed to swim up to the surface. When the youngest was able to swim to the shore, she spots a ship and is entranced with the humans inside, especially the young prince. However, an approaching storm sinks the ship forcing the mermaid to save the prince. The little mermaid obsesses over him and watches him constantly. This obsession leads the mermaid to ask her grandmother about humans. The little mermaid finds out that when humans die, they continue to live through their eternal souls. She also learns that mermaids do not have souls, but they can obtain a soul by marrying a human.

In another deviation from *Undine*, the little mermaid needs to physically transform into a human, so she strikes a deal with the sea witch. With the price of the mermaid's voice, the sea witch splits the little mermaid's tail into two human legs and tells her that she must make the prince fall entirely in love with her or she will turn to seafoam on his wedding day. While the mermaid does become dear to the prince, without her voice, she is unable to make the prince fall completely in love with her. Instead, the prince falls in love with a neighboring king's daughter and decides to marry her. Thanks to her sisters, the mermaid has the option to kill the prince so she will not turn into foam. The potential death of the prince at the mermaid's hands is similar to *Undine* killing Huldbrand; however, the little mermaid cannot bring herself to murder the prince. In a twist, she transforms into a daughter of the air and is given the task of making children smile for three hundred years to earn her everlasting soul.

Similar to Andersen, Disney has a mermaid, Ariel, swim up to the surface and catch a glimpse of a human, Prince Eric, on his ship. The ship is wrecked in a storm, and

Ariel saves the prince. Comparable to Andersen's mermaid, Ariel thinks of the prince often after their encounter. The king shortly finds Ariel's cavern full of human relics and realizes that his daughter has fallen in love with a human. In anger, he destroys everything in the cave. His rage sends Ariel straight to Ursula, the sea witch. Similar to Andersen's tale yet again, Ursula makes a deal with Ariel; she will turn Ariel into a human in exchange for Ariel's voice. Ariel must make Prince Eric fall in love with her and share "true love's kiss" for Ariel to become a human. If she is unable to perform the task, she would belong to the sea witch instead of turning into seafoam, matching Andersen's mermaid.

Even without her voice, it is clear that Prince Eric starts to develop feelings for Ariel. To ensure this does not happen, Ursula transforms herself into a human and tricks the prince into marrying her. The wedding is stopped, but Ariel is unable to kiss Prince Eric before the sun goes down, so she becomes Ursula's. Ursula makes a deal with King Triton to trade Ariel for the king. Luckily, Prince Eric steers a ship into Ursula's giant form, killing her and releasing the king. With King Triton's power fully restored, he turns his daughter into a human, allowing Ariel and the prince to marry with his blessing.

Similar to the little mermaid in Andersen's tale and Ariel, Ponyo lives under the water, but as a goldfish. However, Ponyo is magical, resembling Undine. Ponyo's father, Fujimoto, is a caretaker of the ocean. While he uses his elixirs to help the sea thrive, Ponyo escapes. Afterward, she gets caught in a glass jar and is rescued by Sôsuke, who, similar to the prince in Andersen's version, keeps her as a pet. Ponyo meets Sôsuke's classmate, Kumiko, and gets jealous of her. Ponyo's father, Fujimoto, takes Ponyo from Sôsuke, and Ponyo begins to transform into a human-like state to be more akin to Sôsuke.

To stop the transformation, Fujimoto surrounds Ponyo's form and physically forces her back into a goldfish. She escapes, and she lets in sea life, exposing everything to her father's magical elixirs, including herself. With her magic boosted by the elixirs, Ponyo creates a tsunami that brings her back to Sôsuke. She fully transforms into a human, which is remarkably similar to Undine, who could alter her form and control the elements.

When she meets up with Sôsuke, he recognizes her as Ponyo, and his mother takes both children inside due to the raging tsunami. Sôsuke's mother leaves to check on the seniors, and when Sôsuke wakes and realizes that his mother is still gone, he sets off on an adventure with Ponyo. Upon seeing that Ponyo has escaped, Fujimoto enlists the help of Ponyo's mother, the goddess of the sea, to get back Ponyo and fix the imbalance of the ocean. Meanwhile, Ponyo uses her magic, and Sôsuke uses his endurance to help each other make it to the senior center where their mothers are waiting. Different from all three versions, the two are not married, but the questioning from Ponyo's mother when she asks the children if they want to stay with each other mimics the vows asked during a wedding.

While the four versions have their differences, such as following Undine's entire life and stopping with Ponyo around the age of five, they have many similarities. Their similarities cause a connection between the four and highlight their variances. These differences come about because of the shifting creators, times, and cultures.

Creators

The authors make these works original. The fairy tales we were fond of as children, namely those by Disney², are retellings of retellings. The fairy tales we study, some by Andersen, can be traced back to oral tales. Zeljka Flegar, in “A Tale Within a Tale: *Mise En Abyme* Adaptations of the Twenty-First Century,” expands on the “why” of fairy tale repetition by saying, “during the course of history, fairy tales have been adapted to suit the needs of culture, society and authorship” (364). To survive, the fairy tale must adapt and stay relevant to either the audience or the creator, similar to Fouqué’s rebellion, seen through *Undine*, Andersen’s autobiographical elements, seen through “The Little Mermaid,” Disney’s reflection of changing women's roles, and Miyazaki’s³ strong female protagonists in *Ponyo*. When breaking “The Little Mermaid” down, the mermaid’s quest for a soul is in the predated tale *Undine* by Fouqué. The transformation of a beast or an animal into a human is seen in the lineage of the tale, such as Jean D’Arras’s tale about Melusine in 1393. Additionally, Jane Yolen states, “the *retold story* changes, too, but it is a particular teller who shapes it as much as the culture” (240). Each author of a retelling takes what came before and puts their own spin on it.

Fouqué’s *Undine* has ties to a variety of influences, including a sixteenth-century scholar, German Romanticism, and Fouqué’s society’s norms. He is believed to have

² “Disney” is in reference to Walt Disney and The Walt Disney Company, which creates films that are from the work of a collective of people. Walt Disney died in 1966, and *The Little Mermaid* was released in 1989. Walt Disney looked over the story in 1930 and decided to release a different film. So, while the film was released after his death, the story and songs were created when he was alive and with his influence. When referring to “Disney’s inspirations,” I am referring to the inspiration of the group, which reflects the company’s ideas and values and those of their founder, Walt Disney.

³ “Miyazaki” is in reference to Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli, which, similar to Disney, produce films that stem from the work of a group of people. Hayao Miyazaki has a substantial influence on his films, but he is not the sole producer. When referring to “Miyazaki’s inspirations,” I am referring to his own words from interviews and speeches, and to his films, which reflect the Studio’s ideas and values and those of their co-founder, Hayao Miyazaki.

been inspired by “work on sylphs and other strange creatures by the sixteenth-century scholar Paracelsus, but from it, he created an extraordinary romance of divided loyalties, of love and death” (Blamires 123). He does not merely retell Paracelsus’s work; he takes a piece of it and embellishes it in the form of rebellion and the breaking of cultural standards of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Eleanor Ter Horst points out that “Fouqué’s critique, however, has a different focus: Romanticism’s questioning of the social hierarchy of nineteenth-century Germany... while addressing some issues, such as social rank and the changing structure of the family... were topical in the nineteenth century” (307). Fouqué challenges this hierarchy by having his character, Undine, break social norms, and receive rewards while also being punished when she becomes the “ideal” model of a woman in her time. She exhibits constant disobedience of her adoptive parents when she flirts with Hulbrand in front of them, runs away, and refuses to curb any of her magical abilities. She is rewarded with Hulbrand’s love, her parents’ forgiveness, and eventual marriage to Hulbrand.

The character of Hulbrand showcases Fouqué’s inspiration from German Romanticism. The “Fouqué, Friedrich” entry in the *Library of the World’s Best Literature, Ancient & Modern*, states that Fouqué “was called the Don Quixote of the Romantics, and his early romances of chivalry were devoured by the public as quickly as they appeared” (“Friedrich” 1). He is known for “catching the spirit of chivalry” (2), embodied through the character of Hulbrand, who rides into the forest at the request of the Lady Bertalda. Later, when Undine is lost to the storm, he ventures out to rescue her, as a noble knight should. When the waves bring them wine, he vows to find the person who lost the wine in order to repay them, as he believes a noble knight would do.

Autobiographical elements appear in both Fouqué's *Undine* and Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." Burton R. Pollin claims that Fouqué "became enamoured of the girl who was to be the prototype of the water-sprite Undine, named Elizabeth von Brautenbach, but he married a much plainer girl, Marianne von Schubaert, the daughter of his regimental commander" (60). This element of conflict may have been what attracted Andersen to remake the tale. For Fouqué's *Undine*, rebellion is one of his signature motivations, while Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" is a self-portrait that mimics Andersen's life events—such as the fact that he left home at the same age as the mermaid.

Much the same as the mermaid tale, fairy tales in general are known for being retellings, imagined as links in a chain, in which writers such as Fouqué and Andersen make up individual links that in turn constitute the entire continuum of the mermaid tale. Bengt Holbeck states Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" is "undoubtedly inspired by de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*, and behind that can be glimpsed the doctrine of elementary spirits which goes back to Paracelsus" (221). Barbara Fass writes that "The artist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could find in [Undine's] action a compelling symbol of his own quest and yet must shrink from the fate of Andersen's little mermaid, whose love for humans is unrequited... The question thus arises as to whether it is indeed the artist's obligation to win his soul by pressing his work into the service of humanity" (298). In the story of "The Little Mermaid," Andersen was not rebelling against women's image as the angel in the house or creating a chivalric knight, as Fouqué did. Instead, he shaped the mermaid tale to provide an outlet for his own life.

Andersen's originality lies in the autobiographical details that trickled into and shaped the little mermaid tale into his finished piece, which focuses on being an "other" or outcast from society. His ability to maintain the universal heart of the mermaid tale while weaving in universal themes such as alienation, contributed to his literary success. Andersen and his mermaid's struggles to fit into the world mirror each other, as Joyce Mesrobian suggests, "When his little mermaid walks so painfully among humans and remains ineffably alone, we can see right into Andersen's heart" (36). The trope of a misfit suffering "unrequited love" is echoed in many of Andersen's tales, such as "The Ugly Duckling," which features a swan egg mixed in with duck eggs. Similar to the mermaid, Andersen's swan suffers from a sense of "otherness" as he matures.

Unlike Andersen, the swan finds his home and fits into his society, but the mermaid dies alone and without love, much like the author. Andersen's mermaid replicates his love struggles: "Andersen pined for intimacy with unattainable" lovers (Lewis 684). Tess Lewis states that Andersen fell in love with a man, Edvard Collin, who was unattainable due to his station and sex (684). Zipes also notes in his biography that Andersen's "lifelong friendship with Edvard Collin is perhaps the best example of the kind of amorous relationship he had with men" (*Hans Christian Andersen* 12). Andersen produces an example of "suit[ing] the needs of ...authorship" (Flegar 364) by creating similarities between himself and his creation, the mermaid. Inevitably authors are reflected in their writing's details. It is also in these details—and their unique way of organizing their narratives and thoughts—that their originality emerges.

Disney's movies are no exception being a product of their time. Disney had the basic outline of *The Little Mermaid* in place during the early twentieth century. Work

began again in 1984, but the film *Splash* was already in the works, and they did not want to produce two mermaid films back to back. The 2006 platinum version of *The Little Mermaid* contains voice-over commentary by John Musker, Ron Clements, and Alan Menken that claims in 1980 the staff found the original story based on the Andersen feature and original visuals created by Kay Neilson in the 1930s. In the same 2006 platinum edition in the bonus material “Treasures Untold: The Making of Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*,” it states that the changes to Andersen’s tale in the 1930s version were the same changes seen in the 1989 version of *The Little Mermaid*, making the link to the turmoil in the aftermath of WW1 possibly influential in the creation of Disney’s releases. According to Robert Siegel, Walt Disney was unable to join the war but was an ambulance driver for the Red Cross. Siegel claims that “Walt came out of the war creating patriotic political cartoons for a local paper in Missouri,” which lead to Disney’s creation of Mickey Mouse. Disney, unable to join the war physically, joined the war via his influence. He has a past with mixing his political agenda into his animated works.

This timeline becomes essential when thinking of the Disney films released or worked on in this period. Sheila Jeffreys’s writing about spinsters, or women who didn’t marry, and their prevalence in the 1900s states that “the rate of marriage rose in every age group after the war” (89). “The ‘fuss’ about spinsters continued in the press and other publications through the 1920s and into the 1930s” (Jeffreys 89). Movies such as *Snow White*, released in 1939, and *The Little Mermaid*, worked on in the 1930s, along with movies such as *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty* released in the 1950s, reflect a particular domestic light on the women in their tales. With every tale ending in a happily ever after, which includes marriage, the message is clear that their endings can be happy because of

the marriage. Snow White and Cinderella are homemakers in their films and receive their happy endings of marriage. The other option, being a spinster, was not seen as a happy ending. The aftermath of both wars and the stance of women in society after the wars can be seen in these tales, and married women are the ones promoted. Another element is each princess's need for a male hero. According to Jen Bethmann, even in the popular Disney princess movies which champion female strengths, "the undercurrents of her story continue to portray the necessity of having a male figure help her achieve her dreams" (6).

However, their princess films, of which *The Little Mermaid* is one, typically involve teenage princesses in conflict with their parents. These parents can take the form of absent parents, a single father, or abusive step-parents. These tropes and the "happy endings" of Disney films signify that a single-parent household often results in a rebellion, leading to a crisis that is overcome with the aid of a man, and concluding in a marriage. A. Waller Hastings explains that this pattern "has been criticized on ideological grounds for reinforcing and/or contributing to dominant patriarchal and capitalist systems" (83). This being said, not all of Disney's films can be seen in this light as it negates movies such as *Mulan* (1998) and *Brave* (2012). Sue Short states that we need to acknowledge "that a film owned by the much derided Disney Corporation can create a heroine of equivalent - if not greater - feminist interest (Merida does not marry in the end, after all)⁴ that we are given good grounds for dispensing with a number of

⁴ In *Brave*, the princess Merida is brave, as the name of the movie suggests, and she wields a crossbow. At the beginning of the movie, princes are competing to win Merida's hand in marriage. She interrupts their competition by beating them all in archery.

preconceptions” (9). Regardless of the criticism, Walt Disney films have permeated America as a common household name and topic of discussion from everyone’s youth.

Because Disney’s pattern is to have their movies end happily, they had to divert from Fouqué and Andersen’s tragic endings. Hastings also discusses Disney’s themes, ideas, and patterns, which were termed “Disneyfication” by Richard Schickel and, since Walt Disney died, “his successors have followed and magnified the pattern he created for animated film” (Hastings 84). Hastings points out that “the typical ending of a Disney film denies evil’s reality” and provides a moral absolute that “good always emerges triumphant” (85). This theme shaped children’s films and literature and prevails into our current day, and Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* does not divert from a happy ending.

Miyazaki’s culture is lovingly embedded in his work resulting in the originality of *Ponyo* in the context of mermaid tales. The embedding of his culture starts with the inspiration for the title, *Ponyo*, which was shortened from the original title, *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*. Kim Edwards states that the original title “flag[s] its connections to a popular 1910 Japanese novel--Natsume Soseki’s *Mon* (or *The Gate*) [which] is the story of a couple, called Sôsuke and Oyone, who live in a house standing on a hill” (40). The male main character in *Mon* is Sôsuke, and he is a fairy tale writer (resembling Miyazaki). The book follows the couple in their struggles and celebrations in their relationship. This connection to Japanese literature ties the film back to its creator’s culture. Likewise, Cheng-Ing Wu’s article, “Hayao Miyazaki’s Mythic Poetics: Experiencing the Narrative Persuasions in *Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle*, and *Ponyo*” talks about Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* and how it “renovates the western story” and “tints it with oriental color” (Wu). Wu points out that “the semantic innovation” of *Ponyo* “is

threaded with the traditional etiology that once a *ningyo* lands on earth, the creature is bound to summon an overwhelming tsunami.” Proof of this ideology is shown in Miyazaki’s film when one of the seniors in the Senior Center urges little Sôsuke to put Ponyo back in the ocean before she causes a tsunami. The tsunami also references a famous piece of Japanese art, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, by Katsushika Hokusai. His works connection to his culture reaches a multitude of source types be it other works, art, fables, or political views.

A common thread in Miyazaki’s works is his strong female lead characters. Studies of Miyazaki, such as Maria Trisciuzzi’s “Hayao Miyazaki. The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness,” comment on Miyazaki’s signatures in his films. Trisciuzzi claims that a common thread in Miyazaki’s films are strong female protagonists, which is why “Miyazaki has been called Onna no Jidai, which means creator/initiator of the age of women” (490). She highlights his trope of powerful, independent women, in comparison to Disney as seen in a quote from Anthony Carew:

These characters serve as a wonderful tonic for the insipid heroines of the Disney canon: our first glimpse of San in Princess Mononoke [in Miyazaki’s animated film, *Princess Mononoke*] finds her sucking the blood out of a bullet wound in the neck of a giant wolf, her face smeared with blood, her eyes gleaming with defiance, rage, and wild power. Whereas Disney’s heavily marketed princesses have long despaired feminists, cultural critics and many parents, Miyazaki’s run of female leads are notable for how they function as dramatic protagonists, possessing their own agency – inquisitiveness, courage, rebellion, defiance. (Trisciuzzi 12)

As seen in many of Miyazaki's films, his female characters in *Ponyo* are powerful and take on traits that western cultures seem to view as masculine. Miyazaki's feminist leanings color his works differently in comparison to his predecessors such as Disney and Andersen.

While sharing similarities, the four versions also have many differences related to their place, time, or culture. Fouqué was "a thorough German at heart" ("Friedrich" 12). The *Britannica Academic* states that his writing "expressed heroic ideas of chivalry designed to arouse a sense of German tradition and national character" ("Fouqué"). In *Ponyo*, Miyazaki's "allegories speak to an international audience, unsentimentally reflect on historical conditions, and pose ecocritical dilemmas for contemporary audiences" (op de Beeck 267). Andersen, on the other hand, turned inward with his mermaid tale: "He had finally found the appropriate mode to address deep personal concerns and channel his feelings of rage that he apparently felt due to the various humiliations he had suffered from his alleged superiors" (Zipes, "Critical Reflections" 227). While Andersen turned inward, Walt Disney turned outward, addressing his nation. Walt Disney's works were created in a time when the nation was suffering disillusionment brought on by world wars. Steven Watts stated that Walt Disney's "works attempted magically to reanimate a modern society grown increasingly 'disenchanted'" (109). The four creators' cultures and societies are reflected in their versions of the mermaid tale.

Adaptations

Adaptation theory provides a lens for studying these changing fairy tales. It goes into the "long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing

stories” (Hutcheon 4). Linda Hutcheon, one of the leading voices in adaptation theory, says, “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative--a work that is second without being secondary” (Hutcheon 9). Calling Miyazaki’s work a derivative of Disney negates all the other details and originality that lies in *Ponyo*. Hutcheon goes on to state, “There is a difference between never wanting a story to end--the reason behind sequels and prequels...--and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways. With adaptations, we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change” (9). These two elements draw in the audience with its familiarity and keep the reader hooked with its differences. This duality also makes readers or viewers wonder what change will happen to this nostalgic tale.

Every time a fairy tale is recreated, altered, or retold, its changes reflect and comment on the current culture. Some creators use the platform to challenge their culture or to support it. For example, Fouqué challenges his culture with his strong protagonist, Undine. This support of his protagonist is seen through the rewards she receives after her improper behaviors. However, sometimes, the changes in a fairy tale reflect their time. For instance, Miyazaki’s film focuses strongly on the dangers and hazards of pollution, not only to the marine world but the human one as well. This adaptation makes the fairy tale culturally relevant since protecting the environment or the dangers of global warming have been flooding our society.

Hutcheon suggests writings are “multi laminated,” meaning they have multiple layers that are “openly connected to recognizable other works” (21). Miyazaki’s *Ponyo* is one such “multi laminated” work. Short states that “if the Disney Corporation once seemed to have a monopoly on such rewrites, this is no longer the case, with other major

studios keen to invest in the current vogue for refashioned fairy tales” (1-2). Miyazaki’s movie *Ponyo* has recognizable connections outside of the familiar mermaid tale to Norse mythology, with the mention of Brunhilde, but Miyazaki takes these connections and styles them into a platform upon which he can battle for social change: “Delving more deeply, however, [*Ponyo*] ends with promises of more universal reconciliation and renewal, and Sôsuke’s point about loving all the Ponys not only embraces the complexities and contradictions of people we love, but represents an appreciation of difference, diversity, evolution and personal growth” (Edwards 44). Miyazaki’s use of his inspirations, art, and social critique about the environment and feminism elevates his version of the mermaid tale to match his culture and time.

Short explains that not every refashioned fairy tale is explicitly stated as a retelling, and some have even disguised their connections to the fairy tales: “In some cases this ‘disguise’ may amount to situating ideas in a contemporary context, or adding a few narrative spins”; however, we can see these familiar plots “because we have grown accustomed to seeing fairy tale motifs redeployed in popular culture” (Short 2). Miyazaki’s blend of influences and twist of the narrative deems his retelling as “disguised.” In fact, when I first watched Miyazaki’s *Ponyo*, I did not notice its connection to the mermaid tale. Miyazaki’s use of a variety of sources as his inspiration effectively disguises his tale.

The adaptation arc of a fairy tale can be broken down by separating the differences or changes and leaving the pattern that is repeated in each version. This cyclical pattern, in comparison to the added details, can help us better understand how a fairy tale reflects and influences its societal time. The changes between the versions are

made for a variety of reasons, but the reasons I look at will include characteristics specific to the creators as well as those stemming from cultural differences of time and place. Some differences between the versions connect with the creator's existing body of work or culture, making these changes a signature for the author. Once these themes and tropes are identified as "additional" to the mermaid story, they can then be separated from the whole story. Focusing on the distinctions and highlighting the similarities of all four versions reveal the core of the mermaid story evident in all four examples; this core is comforting in that it is recognizable and universal as it shows the commonality in humanity regardless of culture, time, or authorship.

II. THE SKELETON OF THE MERMAID TALES

Vladimir Propp believed that, when studying fairy tales or tracing their origin, “one must first answer the question as to what the tale itself represents.” So, to answer that call, the mermaid tale must be stripped of its details to find the bare bones. To find out what the tale represents, Propp breaks the tales into ‘functions’ which, when aligned, form the tales’ structure, e.g., (a) initial situation, (A) villainy, (B) mediation (5). Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson, and Hans-Jörg Uther created the Aarne-Thompson Uther Tale Type Index which classifies fairy tales into categories, e.g., animal tales, tales of magic, and religious tales (*Multilingual*). However, looking closely at one specific tale that has already been classified into its tale type requires narrower subcategories.

For instance, the mermaid tale centers around a female protagonist who is not human and a male protagonist who is a normal human. The female protagonists are introduced via nature and they long to be human; their reasons vary, as some versions emphasize gaining a soul. This commonality reflects the human desire to be loved and to belong, which seems to persist throughout our history. A rebellion or power struggle occurs between the otherworldly female protagonist and her family in which the protagonist yearns for a male human. The male human is accompanied by a female human who serves as a rival and foil for the otherworldly female protagonist. In the end, the otherworldly female’s desire is achieved. However, all four versions differ in the order of introduction to the characters and, besides the main otherworldly female and human male protagonists, the versions diverge with the other main or side characters.

All four versions start their stories similarly with descriptions and portrayals of the environment, which focus on nature and its beauty. Fouqué uses the action and

language of emotions to characterize the natural landscape, such as “love,” “impulse,” and “embrace.” *Undine*’s first paragraph states:

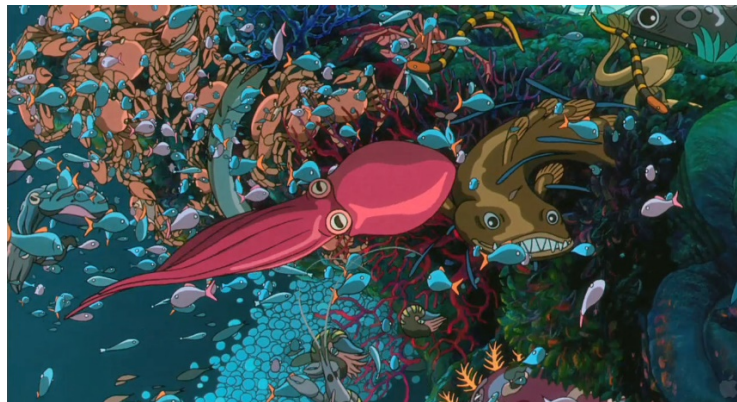
The green turf on which he had built his cottage ran far out into a great lake; and this slip of verdure appeared to stretch into it as much through love of its clear waters as the lake, moved by a like impulse, strove to fold the meadow with its waving grass and flowers, and the cooling shade of the trees, in its embrace of love. (5)

Likewise, “The Little Mermaid” starts with a description of the ocean as similar to what we see on land: “The most marvelous trees and flowers grow down there, with such pliant stalks and leaves... All sorts of fish, large and small, dart among the branches, just as birds flit through the trees up here” (41). His version also ends with nature as the mermaid turns into a daughter of air. His idea that the daughters of air have a job to smile at a good child and cry for a bad child shows how connected he thinks humans are to nature.

Disney’s film begins with seagulls flying in the sky and dolphins swimming in the ocean. Its beginning credits roll as the viewer follows a fish, who escapes a fishing net, swimming along the coral reefs and all their beauty. According to John Wills, Disney “helped foster a pro-nature philosophy and a welcome environmental sensibility among its viewers... Disney has consistently promoted a nature-friendly gaze” (113-114). As seen in the introduction of *The Little Mermaid*, the scene focuses on a fish’s journey under the water through coral reefs and marine life. Underwater marine life is also brought to life with side characters such as Flounder, the fish, and Sebastian, the crab. Wills states that “movies have reshaped ‘nature’ into a decidedly Disney product:

friendly, anthropomorphic, entertaining, harmless, innocent, fantastical, childish, reductive, and significantly under our (human) control” (114). In *The Little Mermaid*, there is a musical number, “Le Poisson,” in which we watch Sebastian run from a chef who is making stuffed crabs in the kitchen (Disney 00:52:36-00:54:34). This scene, while offering comedic relief, shows the chef as a threat to Sebastian. The viewer is placed on Sebastian’s side, or nature’s side, against a human character who is performing an everyday mundane task. The scene establishes the nonchalant way humans regard nature and their overall power to potentially harm it.

Resembling Fouqué’s Romantic focus on nature, Miyazaki’s films, including *Ponyo*, reflect his views on nature: “Miyazaki is well aware of his cultural heritage in natural depiction and description. He expresses a deep appreciation for the sweeping landscapes and detailed scenes of village life found in medieval Japanese scrolls, folding screens, and ukiyo-e–style woodblock prints” (Gossin 212). *Ponyo*’s credits roll as artful pictures of the waves carrying ships and fish sway on the screen. The water and fish are intermingled with images of houses on land bringing together the two worlds. This focus on nature and the background is shown through Miyazaki’s highly detailed surroundings around his main characters (see fig. 1).



(Figure 1: A Scrolling Image of Life in the Ocean)

Trisciuzzi quotes Miyazaki's director's notes where he writes:

A village by the sea and a cliff. A small number of characters. The ocean as a living presence. A world in which magic and alchemy are part of everyday life. In addition, the deep sea interacts with the waves on the surface, just like our subconscious. Through the distortion of space and outlines, the sea abandons its usual role as just a landscape and becomes one of the main characters of the story. A boy and a girl, love and responsibility, ocean and life: these are the situations portrayed and simplified in *Ponyo*. This way, I wanted to offer my answer to the torments and uncertainties of our times. (Trisciuzzi 498)

Miyazaki's notes show his focus on nature with his simple sentence: "the ocean as a living presence." Nature's role within *Ponyo* and Miyazaki's culture is intentional as seen by his statement that *Ponyo* is his "answer to the torments and uncertainties of our times." In all the tales, nature plays a similarly significant role. This focus of the versions on nature is tied to the otherworldly female protagonist as she is not human and is viewed as an extension of nature.

The tales center on a female protagonist who is a part of nature. She can be interchangeable with nature, so either there is an awe of the beauty of nature, reverence for the power of nature, or disgust with humans' abuse of nature. In any case, the otherworldliness of the female protagonist is the main element. Her link to nature makes her a symbol of man's power over nature or nature's power over man. The essence of the mermaid tale and its focus on the otherworldly protagonist, who embodies both nature and humanity, is Romantic. The power struggle that plays out during the crisis reflects the power or lack thereof of the otherworldly female protagonist in relation to humanity.

In *Undine*, we see Fouqué playing with the thin line between human beings and elemental spirits. Fouqué was writing “at a time when the boundaries between living and nonliving beings were becoming increasingly blurred” (Steigerwald 42), and “revolution took place revaluing the contributions of art and literature to our apprehension of both the human and the natural world” (Steigerwald 210). He was influenced by Romantic writers such as August Wilhelm Schlegel, who was a part of the Jena Romantics or early proponents of Romanticism, who were very active in the 1800s (Steigerwald 210). In this context, Fouqué’s reverence for nature throughout *Undine* is deliberate. Ter Horst talks about this connection explaining that “Undine herself, who alludes to both scientific and mythological accounts of the origins of life: part fish, part human, she can be seen as a link in the evolutionary chain connecting sea creature to human being” (302). He shows reverence for Undine when her elemental side is brought up while also depicting Huldbrand and Bertalda as scared of her at times. This dichotomy reflects the duality of the power of nature, likened to the tempest. One can witness the devastation of a tempest while also standing in awe of the storm’s power. This focus on nature can be attributed to Fouqué’s worldview as a German Romantic.

At first, Undine is shown taking power over Huldbrand and to an extent, her adoptive parents. However, a shift happens after Undine obtains her soul, and suddenly her actions result in punishment. The first is the emotional pain she suffers in the acquisition of her soul:

They were none of them able to understand the intenseness of her feelings; and, with mingled emotions of fear and anxiety, they gazed on her in silence. Then, wiping away her tears, and looking earnestly at the priest, she at last said: “There

must be something lovely, but at the same time something most awful, about a soul. In the name of God, holy man, were it not better that we never shared a gift so mysterious?" Again she paused, and restrained her tears, as if waiting for an answer... "Heavily must the soul weigh down its possessor," she pursued, when no one returned her any answer-- "very heavily! For already its approaching image overshadows me with anguish and mourning. And, alas, I have till now been so merry and light-hearted!" and she burst into another flood of tears, and covered her face with her veil. (Fouqué 41)

Before this moment, Undine controls her emotional outbursts, which results in a desirable outcome. In this scene, Undine responds as though she were unaware of the sadness and pain she would obtain when she receives a soul. She has lost her power and is in an unfamiliar emotional place. As ter Hurst explains, "After Undine and Huldbrand have consummated their marriage, however, there is a marked change in her attitude, and she is described as combining the ideal characteristics of the nineteenth-century wife" (306). Characteristically, she becomes the ideal version of what a woman should be during her era. Fouqué describes her as, "a young matron, and a bashful, tender, delicate bride" (17). With her in this "ideal" mold, one would expect her to be triumphantly reinforcing these preferred traits.

However, this mold shows Undine as a meek figure which is a stark contrast to the seductress who woos a Knight in the middle of a tsunami of her making. Undine, as the wild elemental woman, has been defeated, silenced, and abused. She is powerless, and we see her suffering throughout her marriage with Huldbrand as he turns away from her and to the human Bertalda. He marries Bertalda, resulting in his death by Undine's

hands and Undine's symbolic death as she encircles Huldbrand's grave in the form of a stream:

When a woman takes on the role conventionally assigned to a man, if only in her imagination, she does not create a radically different structure, but she does present an alternative to the chain of literary and cultural transmission that posits women as objects of male literary creation and desire. Bachmann, like Fouqué, associates this disruption with death, but ultimately hints at the possibility of a rebirth or reawakening into a changed social and literary order. (ter Horst 321)

A typical German woman in Fouqué's time, or the angel in the house, does not have power. As shown in his story of *Undine*, while Undine has power at times, and at times overpowers males, including Huldbrand and her uncle, she is still under the control of the men. Huldbrand ultimately has the power, as Undine is powerless in stopping his choices and actions. All she can do is watch and then begrudgingly complete the warning of her uncle by killing Huldbrand once he remarries.

In Andersen's tale, while the mermaid has a chance to earn her soul, she is not able to win the love of the prince and marry him. She almost dies in her pursuit of the prince's love. In Denmark, in 1837, "Andersen's productive work takes place within a male social order, and Andersen never tired of brutally punishing female figures for disrespecting its laws" (Zipes, "Critical Reflections" 230). Zipes clarifies this point by saying, "to overreach and to disrupt the Lord's design can result in a disaster, as it nearly does in 'The Little Mermaid.' What saves her is a pious act that leads her to deny her own nature and feelings and to accept her humble and minor position within a mystic theological framework based on Andersen's reading of Christianity" ("Critical

Reflections” 230). This punishment of the mermaid is not just an Andersen theme. According to Sven Rossel, Danish children’s literature showed that “if you do not behave, you will be punished, say these stories, and in many of them the least disobedience stands to get a kind of death penalty, with disease” (610). The mermaid is punished as soon as she transforms with the immediate pain during transformation and continued pain in her feet after that. She also suffers emotionally watching the prince fall in love with and marry someone else. This crushing of the mermaid shows the superiority of humans over nature. Humans have souls that make them superior. The mermaid is unable to become like them by joining with a human, and she is severely punished for even trying.

With Disney’s version, there is a duality in Ariel’s character of bravery with a touch of damsel in distress. When we first meet Ariel, she is with Flounder, who is scared to venture with her through the shipwrecks. Ariel responds to his worries with the line, “Flounder, don’t be such a guppy” (Disney 00:06:57-00:06:58). Ariel’s bravery is powerfully portrayed because it is juxtaposed with Flounder’s cowardice. In the 1980s, in articles geared toward women, individual women were highlighted for their homemaking. On the other hand, they were also noticed for a “successful combination of home and career” and “the difficulties that women usually faced in pursuing both” were ignored and unstated (Meyerowitz 1460). Ariel is courageous; however, she needs Prince Eric to defeat Ursula. This slight duality is shown in the 1989 articles as well: “While feminine stereotypes sometimes provided convenient foils that enhanced by contrast a women’s atypical public accomplishment, they also served as conservative reminders that all women, even publicly successful women, were to maintain traditional gender

distinctions” (Meyerowitz 1460). Words emphasized when describing a successful woman were “pretty, motherly, shapely, happily married, petite, charming, or soft-voiced” (Meyerowitz 1460). Resembling the duality shown in the articles of the time, Ariel is first shown as courageous when she is going through a shipwreck with Flounder, but she also sticks to her gender role by needing to be rescued during the climax of the film.

Although Ariel also saves Prince Eric during his shipwreck, this action is not depicted as powerful. Ariel’s actions cannot be acknowledged in the film because Prince Eric’s savior stays a mystery. Unable to fulfill her wish of joining Prince Eric, Ariel enlists the help of Ursula. Ursula’s magic gives her immense power; however, it is a tainted power. Her overtly sexualized look of the bright red lipstick, over-advertised cleavage, and bawdy language when she suggests Ariel seduce the prince only with her “body-language” while gyrating her hips paint her power as a tainted and evil one (Disney 00:40:05-00:45:09). Ursula’s character is known for being inspired by the drag queen Divine. According to Allison Footit: “Ursula represented an entirely unique reinterpretation of sexuality, whose performance oscillated freely between masculine and feminine, shattering traditional representations of gender” (20).

In the end, the viewer is left with the message that humanity triumphs over nature, as it is Prince Eric who restores power. When Ursula takes plans into her own hands and interferes with Ariel and Prince Eric’s kiss, Ariel shows a sense of power. After hearing from Scuttle what Ursula is up to, Ariel’s facial expression turns from one of despair to determination, and she jumps off the pier towards the boat (Disney 01:07:42). However, her power is quickly diminished because she needs help from her friends to disrupt the

wedding. Then, Triton comes to Ariel's rescue and switches places with Ariel in her contract. Ariel attempts to seize power when she jumps at Ursula, but she is not successful and quickly becomes a victim again. Finally, it is Prince Eric who truly defeats Ursula, plunging a ship's broken mast straight into her (Disney 01:14:50). Even though it seemed as if Ariel would do something, judging by the look of determination she had before pursuing the ship, it turns out that she does not do much at all. In the final struggle, she is powerless and in need of rescue, far from the courageous mermaid who was unafraid of shark-infested waters at the beginning of the film. When Ursula commands the ocean and nature, which seem unstoppable, the human, Prince Eric, overpowers and subdues them.

In contrast to the mermaids and more in line with Undine, Ponyo has control over the elements and is more interchangeable with nature. Before Ponyo starts the tsunami, we hear her father call her "Brunhilde." Andrew Osmond comments on this by saying that- "the film borrows cheekily yet majestically from Norse myth. Ponyo's given name is Brunhilde, her mother is a red-haired giantess, and the score spoofs 'The Ride of the Valkyries' during Ponyo's plucky wavetop dash" (Osmond 75). In Norse mythology, Brunhilde is a powerful Valkyrie or in other words—a supernatural, woman warrior. Edwards describes how Brunhilde "is made mortal and falls in love with a human, like Ponyo does with Sôsuke, but her rescue-romance...ends in betrayal, sacrifice and death" and how Ponyo "rejects the tragi-heroic name her father calls her" in favor of Ponyo (Edwards 41). The young protagonists return from their adventures and can remain together, thereby diverging from Andersen's narrative by having a happy ending. Ponyo's character is as unstoppable as nature. Her actions are compared to the tsunami.

While no one can do anything about the tsunami but ride out the storm, they are also powerless to stop Ponyo. Like the storm, she creates the action while the other characters can only react. The otherworldly protagonists are a symbol of nature; therefore, their ability or inability to join with humans reflects the broader idea of humans and nature coexisting.

As the otherworldly female protagonist represents nature, the human male she wants to join is faced with a choice, the foreign nature (the otherworldly female) or familiar humanity (the human female). All four tales share the plot of having their female nonhuman join a male human. This commonality reflects the human desire to be loved and to belong, which seems to persist throughout our history. However, all four versions also have a female, portrayed as a mortal human, who competes with the otherworldly female protagonist as a rival for the human male's affection and attention, creating a love triangle. Ter Horst states that these love triangles

Destabilize conventional gender roles through the introduction of triangular structures involving two women and a man, a configuration that is taken up in Freud and Lacan and that receives additional emphasis in the work of feminist psychoanalytic theorists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Although all triangular configurations allow for the possibility of shifting identifications and desires, the structure involving two women and a man is further removed from the patriarchal, biblical chain of father-son transmission evoked by the narrator of "Alles." Fouqué's *Undine*, which appears to depict two women as rivals for the love of a man, also shows the women's love for each other, which complicates but does not diminish their rivalry (ter Horst, 303-304).

This relationship shows a deviation from the cultural norm of a singular husband and wife, and it emphasizes the otherworldly females' otherworldliness. Not only is she nonhuman, which has enough obstacles of its own, but she also has to compete with a female who matches the male. The human female serves as a foil for the otherworldly female protagonist who, when juxtaposed, poses a threat that creates or leads to the climax in the mermaid tale.

The rival female's role varies in the four tales. Fouqué's Bertalda becomes one of the main characters right alongside Undine and Huldbrand. Undine is switched at birth with Bertalda, and she feels a strong connection to her when they meet. However, as Undine's otherness pushes away Huldbrand, it pushes him straight into the arms of Bertalda:

Poor Undine was greatly troubled; and the other two were very far from being happy. Bertalda in particular, whenever she was in the slightest degree opposed in her wishes, attributed the cause to the jealousy and oppression of the injured wife. She was, therefore, daily in the habit of showing a haughty and imperious demeanor, to which Undine yielded with a sad submission; and which was generally encouraged strongly by the now blinded Huldbrand. (Fouqué 69)

Huldbrand switches back and forth between his favoring of Undine or Bertalda.

Andersen's version has the prince fall in love with a neighboring princess. He feels love towards the mermaid, but it is only the love one feels for a pet. Disney's version is quite similar, although an evil Ursula disguised as a female human replaces the innocent princess in Andersen's story. Miyazaki has two short scenes that involve a

young girl, named Kumiko. She strikes up a rivalry with Ponyo when she first meets her. She sees the way that Sôsuke lovingly looks at the fish and claims that she thinks Ponyo is ugly, which prompts Ponyo to spit a stream of water on the little girl (see fig. 2).



(Figure 2: Competition Between Ponyo and Kumiko)

This small scene is instrumental in keeping the love triangle in the mermaid story. Interestingly, Miyazaki keeps the visible distinction of the otherworldly female's red hair that Disney used for Ariel and keeps the rival female's hair as brown, which is what Ursula's human form possessed. Also, Sôsuke has black hair—the same as Prince Eric's hair (see fig. 3). These details help to emphasize the sameness of the human male and human female. The stark contrast between the brown hair of the human female and the red hair of the nonhuman female further accentuates the otherworldly female as 'an other.'



(Figure 3: Comparing the Pairs)

Ponyo adds another dimension to the love triangle. If we label a love triangle using an inclusive definition of love, one that can include a motherly affection, then Sôsuke's mother, Lisa, could be the third in the love triangle in the Miyazaki film. The

human male's mother's presence in the story is new in comparison to the other three versions; the mother of the prince did not have a role before. Lisa's role more resembles that of Bertalda in Fouqué's story in that both the otherworldly female and the human male, Sôsuke and Ponyo, love her, and she loves them in return. Paralleling Bertalda, she loves Sôsuke more than Ponyo, but unlike Bertalda, there is not a romantic rivalry (see fig. 4).



(Figure 4: Lisa in the Love Triangle)

All four versions vary the role of the otherworldly female's father. The father serves as the authority figure in the household who upholds the rules of society. As the mermaid tale deals with rebellion of a female in a patriarchal system, the father character is pivotal. The father figure is an adoptive father, the fisherman, in Fouqué's version and almost non-existent in Andersen's version. Studying the portrayal of fathers in children's books in the UK, Matthew Adams, Carl Walker, and Paul O'Connell conclude "that fathers are under-represented in children's books and when present, are less likely than mothers to be featured expressing affection towards, or caring for, children" (259). Undine's adoptive father does show emotion to Undine, but it is unrequited. When she runs off into the storm, and he pursues her, "the old fisherman wept bitterly at her song, but his emotion seemed to awaken little or no sympathy in her" (Fouqué 20). She rebels against him until she obtains her soul. Andersen's version mentions the mermaid's father,

but he is not an active participant in the story, thus bolstering Adams' assessment of absent fathers. Instead, the mermaid's grandmother assumes the role of guardian.

In contrast, in Disney's and Miyazaki's versions, the father plays a central role in the story. At first, the father's presence may seem a progressive step in children's literature, but the presence of the fathers is presented as a conflict, problem, or sign of a broken home. In Disney's version, King Triton explains that his wife, and the mother of Ariel, has died. This revelation depicts a tragedy in their lives, and the result of this tragedy is a broken home and a single-parent household. Setting up the father as the primary caretaker and an absent mother, Disney presents the viewers with a problem. Adams et al. state that they predicted "that fathers would be less involved in 'nurturing' and 'functional' touching than mothers" and "that fathers would be less likely to express any emotion than mothers" (262). As a counter to this claim, King Triton is depicted daydreaming and giddy about the thought of Ariel being in love, displaying his emotional side (see fig. 5).



(Figure 5: King Triton Showing Emotional Side)

He is also shown touching his daughter when she puts a flower in his hair, when they hug after her wedding, and when he lovingly holds her face as he says goodbye. These actions show an emotional and sensitive side to King Triton, that is, according to Adams et al., not usually found in children's literature (see fig. 6).



(Figure 6: King Triton Lovingly Embracing his Daughter)

Ponyo's father, however, fits in with Adams et al.'s assessment as they go on to state that when fathers are a part of the story, they are "characterised as indolent and ineffectual parents" (261). This portrayal is what we see in Fujimoto, Ponyo's father. He is introduced to the audience as a slight enemy. While we do recognize his actions as protective, he lacks the emotional bond King Triton and Ariel have with one another. He, essentially, keeps his daughters in a bubble in his ship. When Ponyo escapes, he wants to protect her, but he goes about it by stifling her and refusing to listen to her wishes. The first touch we see between them is a negative interaction with Fujimoto trying to force his daughter back into her goldfish form (see fig. 7). This barbaric approach to containing the power of his daughter is unsuccessful.



(Figure 7: Fujimoto Trying to Force Ponyo Back into a Fish)

Fujimoto admits, "I don't have the power to hold her for very long. I need to ask for her mother's help now" (Miyazaki 00:33:46). He is unable to contain Ponyo and reaches out to her mother.

Anytime Ponyo and her father are shown together, Ponyo is always running away from and trying to escape him. For example, at the end, when Fujimoto is trying to capture Ponyo and Sôsuke to bring them into the underwater bubble where their mothers await, Ponyo wakes up and spits water in her father's face, causing Sôsuke to run away from Ponyo's father (Miyazaki 01:33:55). Fujimoto shouts at them, "Brunhilde! Respect your father!" (Miyazaki 01:32:58).

While Fujimoto does not have the same emotional relationship with Ponyo that King Triton and Ariel have, Fujimoto's actions are a result of his love and attempts to protect her. Fujimoto does tell Sôsuke and Ponyo at the end, "Try to remember me kindly" (Miyazaki 01:39:03). It seems as though Disney's portrayal of a father who is stern and protective, while sensitive and emotional, is more progressive than Fouqué, Andersen, and Miyazaki's portrayals. As the father figure represents society, the mermaid's rebellion from him parallels her break from her original life. In order to become a human and join the human male, she must leave her original culture, life, and family. Rebellion from her father is the first step. This rebellion begins a power struggle that transcends father versus daughter to a larger societal view of man versus woman.

The mothers in the tales represent the societal view of women. While the father is the authoritarian, the mother is the nurturer. According to Einat Palkovich, "Mothers appear in the beginnings of tales to see the hero off, they are usually left behind (presumably to preside over the hero's home in his absence), and they sometimes reappear at the end of the adventures to welcome the triumphant hero back" (Palkovich 181). In other words, the mothers "haunt the margins" of the story (Palkovich 181). We never hear about Undine's mother in Fouqué's narrative, but Undine does have an

adoptive mother who scolds her for not being modest when questioning the knight; “The old woman was so prompt in her reproof as to allow [Hulbrand] no time to answer. She commanded the maiden to rise, show better manners, and go to her work” (Fouqué 10). When Undine vanishes into the storm, and her adoptive father and Huldbrand pursue her, her adoptive mother is asleep and not a part of the action.

The struggle here between the adoptive mother and Undine represents the struggle between what constitutes the ideal woman. On the one hand, Huldbrand champions Undine’s wildness by his attraction and submission to it; on the other hand, her adoptive mother is trying to enforce the angel in the house ideal of a woman. Hans Schoenmakers states that around 1650-1800, “Philosophers gave this new view of life a voice and presented a reconstruction of the history of mankind along the perspective of progress based on increased rationalism and control over nature” (9). This control over nature can be seen as control over Undine as well. Lara Andersen and Heather Benbow talk about Christoph Meiner’s book, *History of the Female Sex*, and state that “The benchmark for female virtue throughout the [book] is--not surprisingly--the dominant German eighteenth-century ideal of female domesticity encompassing sexual modesty and loving dedication to husband and children” (438). This ideal woman is portrayed in Undine’s adoptive mother, and then Undine herself once she obtains a soul.

Undine’s adoptive mother is, more or less, left out of the scenes. She has a small role in the story when the priest shows up, which is to scold Undine: “The mistress of the family was directing an angry glance at Undine, because, even in the presence of the priest, she leant so fondly on the knight; and it seemed as if she was on the point of breaking out in harsh reproof” (Fouqué 37). Undine’s adoptive mother is once again

focused on after Undine is married and has received a soul; although, it is to show Undine's transformation into a well-behaved wife: "The moment [Undine] saw the good old mother busy in getting breakfast, [she] went to the hearth, applied herself to cooking the food and putting it on the table, and would not suffer her [mother] to take the least share in the work" (Fouqué 44). Undine shortly leaves her parent's home, and the story continues in Huldbrand's residence. Undine's adoptive mother resides on the sidelines of the action serving as a constant reminder of what Undine is not, an obedient human with a soul. The juxtaposition of the two women helps to separate Undine from the norm of women in her time, thus making her a rebellious woman.

The mother of the mermaid is absent in Andersen's version, and in her place is a grandmother (41). The grandmother seems to be the caretaker of the mermaids and is shown telling them stories about the world above. Palkovich notices a trend when assessing portrayals of mothers within books for children of the mother facilitating a reading environment in which "she is often the one holding the child while reading aloud and interacting with the child through questions, explanations, and shared attention" (Palkovich 180). This trend occurs in Andersen's version with the grandmother in the form of oral storytelling.

The grandmother is similar to the adoptive mother in *Undine*. The grandmother models the norm for the mermaid when the little mermaid complains of the pain from the oysters on her tail: "And the old queen let eight big oysters fasten themselves to the princess's tail, as a sign of her high rank. 'But that hurts!' said the little mermaid. 'You must put up with a good deal to keep up appearances,' her grandmother said" (Andersen 44). This confirmation from the grandmother that pain equals beauty is foreshadowing

the mermaid's acceptance of the pain in her feet from turning human. The relationship between the father and the mother of the otherworldly female is missing. The father of the mermaid is absent in Andersen's version, and the grandmother is the only caretaker role shown.

In Disney's version, Ariel only has her father, and Ursula would be the closest thing to a mother figure. Ursula abuses this relationship and offers Ariel help in the love department, resulting in the loss of Ariel's voice. Sharp says Disney's *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* "offer hope" in a time when single-parent households were becoming a norm. As the *Little Mermaid* was storyboarded at a time when nuclear families were being split, Sharp says, "Disney's resolution for these films was the formation of a nuclear family, and the American public eagerly embraced the tales" (4). While Ariel, at times, seems to possess power or bravery, it is shown as an illusion with her helplessness prevailing. The only mother figure she knows, the sea witch, is perverted in her power and is struck down. We see a diminishing of power for women: an absent mother, an evil sea witch, and a powerless otherworldly female protagonist.

Ponyo's mother is absent until midway through the film in Miyazaki's film. However, Ponyo's mother is a goddess and extremely powerful. She is the one who resolves the imbalance of power in the world that was causing the story's conflict. That being said, she is not shown in the domestic sphere, and Fujimoto, the father, is the one who keeps and cares for their children. Miyazaki's adaptation can be read, through a feminist lens, as the opposite of Disney's. In Deborah Ross's article, she points to the fact that Andersen and Miyazaki's tales involve strong women—the wise grandmother in Andersen's and "the abundance of maternal figures whose collective magic ultimately

neutralizes the paternal sorcery” in Miyazaki’s films. This is the opposite of Disney as, “On the surface we are invited to enjoy a familiar happy ending – but without the need for Ariel to be rescued by her prince or for Andersen’s mermaid to sacrifice herself. Ponyo and Sôsuke love each other, childhood and innocence have triumphed, and the natural balance has been restored” (Edwards 44). Ross notes that all the guiding adults are women—Sôsuke’s mother, his preschool teacher, the old ladies at the old folk’s home, and Ponyo’s mother. The fathers are present, but they prove to be misguided—similar to when Ponyo’s father takes her growing form and squeezes her in his hands, trying to contain her power and to mold her back into her goldfish form or when Sôsuke’s father immediately takes another run on the ship leaving his family alone again. In this respect, Miyazaki’s version contrasts with its predecessor as Ariel does not have power and instead is saved through the combined efforts of her father, King Triton, and her lover, Prince Eric.

The power of the mother, Granmamere, monumentally overshadows that of the father, Fujimoto. A prime example of female empowerment is localized in Ponyo’s mother as “the character of the Goddess of Mercy... [which] is associated with compassion, beauty, seafarers, fecundity and listening, and has been likened to the Virgin Mary” (Edwards 41). The person who has an overall say and who is continuously harkened back to as the one to fix the situation that Ponyo is in is her mother. One of the first things the viewer notices about Granmamere is the sheer difference in size between her and Ponyo’s father, Fujimoto, as shown in fig. 8.



(Figure 8: Granmamere's Extremely Large Size Compared to Fujimoto)

The next thing the viewer notices is Granmamere's power, which is shown when she calms the waves and saves all the ships after the tsunami. Also, as she floats under the ships in all her shining glory into the sunset, her underwater shadow ends in the tail of a mermaid—a nod to the original mermaid tale. The norm of the four tales includes an initial family structure that deviates from the traditional family of a biological mother and father raising their children together, to one of a single-parent or adoptive parents' household. However, this family structure results in a completed nuclear family with the joining of the otherworldly female and human male at the conclusion. Moreover, in all four versions, magic is shown as the power of transformation.

The conclusions are brought about with the aid of the supernatural. It brings the fairy tale element of magic and a secret world that a mere human does not experience. This magic is displayed as power over the weather and water, as shown in Fouqué, Disney, and Miyazaki. Alternatively, the magic is displayed as power residing in the voice, as portrayed in Disney and Andersen. Regardless of whether the magic comes from someone else or the ladies themselves, the otherworldly female protagonists have a possible consequence to the supernatural aid—their death.

In Fouqué's story, Undine's family and Undine herself are her supernatural aids. With the supernatural aid of her family, Undine is switched at birth with a fisherman's

child. This switch enables Undine to be raised as a human child. When a human male knight braves the forest, Undine's supernatural family comes to her aid once more, directing the path of the knight: "We shaped our course according to the movements of the white man... And thus, at length, we came out here, at the edge of the wood, where I saw the fresh turf, the waters of the lake, and your little cottage, and where the tall white man disappeared" (Fouqué 27). The "tall white man" Huldbrand spoke of is Undine's uncle, who has been looking out for her and is responsible for helping her obtain a soul. Thanks to the supernatural waters, Undine is brought a husband who is then trapped by a flood with her until the two fall in love, and then a priest washes ashore to marry them. Once the two set off on their own, the uncle then sees the threat of the rival human female, Bertalda, and seeks to protect Undine from it, resulting in the crisis of Undine being othered, shunned. The role of Undine's supernatural aid pushes the characters to this crisis. The human characters, Huldbrand and Bertalda, are unable to accept the constant reminders of Undine's otherness. Eventually, it pushes them over the edge resulting in Undine's removal from them and ultimately everyone's death.

In Andersen's version, his mermaid is also othered and shunned because of her supernatural aid, leaving her without a voice. Andersen's mermaid has to pay for her supernatural aid with her voice. If she fails to win the love of the prince, which she does fail to do, she will also pay with her life. The sea witch warns the mermaid,

'Your tail will divide and shrink until it becomes what the people on Earth call a pair of shapely legs. But it will hurt; it will feel as if a sharp sword slashed through you... every step you take will feel as if you were treading upon knife blades so sharp that blood must flow. I am willing to help you, but are you willing

to suffer all this?’ ‘Yes,’ the little mermaid said in a trembling voice’ (Andersen 49)

The pain is not the only price. The sea witch explains that the mermaid will never be able to become a mermaid again. Moreover, if she is unable to win the love of the prince, her heart will break, and she will turn into sea foam. The mermaid also has to pay the price of her voice. The supernatural aid ends up creating the crisis in which the mermaid cannot speak and is unable to win the affection of the prince. Her inability to speak hinders her from achieving true love with the prince, and eventually, she turns into sea foam.

Although the sea witch in Andersen’s version is not necessarily evil, her aid does bring about the crisis and death of the mermaid. However, it is not out of an evil trick, as the sea witch warns the mermaid of the side effects, consequences, and timeline of her magical help. Furthermore, she gives the mermaid another avenue to escape the consequences of her original spell. This second chance is shown when the sisters rise from the water, having traded their hair for a dagger: “‘We have given our hair to the witch,’ they said, ‘so that she would send you help, and save you from death tonight. Here it is. See the sharp blade!’” (Andersen 54). This dagger can be used to kill the prince, thus trading his life for the mermaid’s life.

While Disney’s version is remarkably similar to Andersen’s, the details of the supernatural aid vary. Although Ariel also receives the supernatural aid of a sea witch, Disney’s sea witch, Ursula, is not as transparent with the dangers of her aid. She tells Ariel that she helps unfortunate merfolk with spells and that sometimes they cannot pay the price, so she has to “rake ‘em across the coals,” but she never specifies what that means. Ursula tells Ariel about a spell that will turn her human for three days. For the

spell to be permanent, Ariel must make the prince fall in love with her and give her true love's kiss or, she will turn back into a mermaid and belong to the sea witch. Linking to Fouqué and Andersen's focus on souls, Ursula will be taking Ariel's soul if she fails to get the prince to kiss her. As Ursula explains in her song "Poor Unfortunate Souls," the withered creatures at the bottom of her cave are the souls of the merfolk who "couldn't pay the price" (Disney 00:40:05-00:45:09). Unlike in Andersen's version, Ariel comes close to receiving a kiss from Prince Eric, and her chances of fulfilling the requirements to stay human in the allotted time are high. Therefore, the sea witch does not need to offer Ariel another option, as it was in Andersen's version. However, Ursula does react, but in a negative way. She acts to ensure that Ariel cannot fulfill the requirements, and this action fully transforms Ursula into a villain (Disney 01:02:50). Ariel also must pay the price of her voice for the spell. Without her voice and with the meddling of the sea witch, Ariel is unable to obtain Prince Eric's kiss before the third day's sunset leading to the story's crisis.

While Andersen and Disney's sea witches are similar, Miyazaki's magical assistance shows more similarity to Fouqué's version, and that is with Ponyo's family and Ponyo herself being magical. In *Ponyo*, there is not a sea witch, unless you count Ponyo's father who is the caretaker of the ocean. Her father was once a human but is now something "othered" who has become the caretaker of the sea. Her mother is the goddess of the ocean. Therefore, Ponyo does not require the help of a sea witch in that she already has power. This power is shown when Ponyo is back with her father and entirely focused on becoming a human, matching Sôsuke. She says, "I want hands! I don't want these flippers anymore. I want feet, like Sôsuke!" (Miyazaki 00:31:45). She uses her

power to transform herself to match Sôsuke. Her appendages look more similar to chicken feet, but she has left her goldfish form behind (Miyazaki 00:32:12). Her power is then increased by the concentrated elixir she comes into contact with while she is in the well. So, she is aided magically but by a non-living entity. Gaining more power from inside the Pangea door with the potent elixir well, Ponyo turns herself fully into a human, and creates a tsunami, which upsets the balance of nature and pulls the moon closer to Earth, causing a flood (Miyazaki 00:38:50). Her sisters share in the power, and they transform into fish and water, which helps Ponyo get to Sôsuke (Miyazaki 00:39:30-00:39:46).

Ponyo's parents talk about Ponyo's power. Her mother notices the change and says, "Look at my ocean. Something has changed. It's like my ancient Devonian Sea, full of magic and power" (Miyazaki 01:07:22-01:07:31). Fujimoto, Ponyo's father, explains that Ponyo has opened a hole in the fabric of reality. Ponyo's mother suggests that they test the two children's love for each other. Harkening back to the consequences from the other versions, Fujimoto says, "But, if [Sôsuke's] love isn't real, then Ponyo will turn into sea foam" (Miyazaki 01:09:08). This accident shifts the balance of nature and enables Ponyo to transform into a real human. However, this imbalance of nature creates a crisis of tsunamis, flooding, and the moon being pulled into the Earth. In this aspect, Ponyo and Undine share in their possession of magical power. While they do receive supernatural aid, it is an aid that is linked to their families and, by proxy, to them, while the little mermaids in Andersen and Disney's versions have no power, aside from being mermaids. They must depend on supernatural aid in the form of witchcraft.

The supernatural aid in all four versions leads to the eventual crisis at the end of the tales. To end in a traditional nuclear family, the non-traditional family of the otherworldly female must have supernatural aid in order to go through a conflict resolution that results in the formation of a nuclear family; albeit, the nuclear family is not always the otherworld female and the human male.

In Fouqué's story, Undine wants a soul and Huldbrand. She woos the knight and marries him, which results in her receiving a soul. When Undine and Huldbrand marry, they create a budding nuclear family. However, Bertalda shortly disrupts this formation. Undine's supernatural aid, her uncle, notices the threat of Bertalda to the nuclear family and begins to play tricks on her. This tension results in Undine's forceful removal from the nuclear family and back to her underwater realm. Huldbrand, believing Undine to have perished, marries Bertalda, which disrupts the nuclear family into something unnatural. To remedy this unnatural state, a curse is initiated which has Undine hugging Huldbrand to death, ending his unnatural union with Bertalda. After Huldbrand's burial, Undine vanishes and is replaced by a little spring that surrounds his grave and once again forms the original nuclear family with Undine, albeit, in death.

Andersen's version also ends with the mermaid's death. However, she is greeted by the daughters of the air who tell her about themselves and how the mermaid's actions are similar to what they do:

You, poor little mermaid, have tried with your whole heart to do this too. Your suffering and your loyalty have raised you up into the realm of airy spirits, and now in the course of three hundred years, you may earn by your good deeds a soul that will never die. (Andersen 54)

There is a creation of a nuclear family with the prince and his princess, just not with the mermaid. The nuclear family is threatened by the mermaid when her sisters give her the dagger to kill the prince to save herself. Instead of disrupting the nuclear family, and the prince's happiness, the mermaid throws the dagger into the ocean and sacrifices herself. Her sacrifice is rewarded with a chance to gain what she truly desires, which is an everlasting soul, and the nuclear family is left intact. Disney's and Miyazaki's versions differ in that they have the prince choose the otherworldly female, and the nuclear family is comprised of the two.

Disney repeats the pattern of Andersen with the prince vowing to marry someone else whom he thinks is the one who saved him on the beach. Still, in Disney's story, the prince is under an evil spell that makes him choose the human, which is Ursula in disguise. Therefore, there is not a true deviation from the otherworldly creature, Ariel. Once the spell is broken, Prince Eric immediately comes to Ariel's defense. Once the climax has concluded and Ursula is defeated, the story ends with the creation of the nuclear family with Ariel turning into a human, matching Prince Eric. Similarly, in Miyazaki's tale, Ponyo and Sôsuke end up together. Kumiko, the normal human, does not pose much of a threat to Ponyo dealing with Sôsuke's affection. The threat is mostly Ponyo's father, who tries to keep them apart. Luckily, Sôsuke passes the test and is united with Ponyo, who transforms into a human.

While the endings differ in who makes up the nuclear family, they do not differ in the creation of a nuclear family. All versions have gratification of some kind for the otherworldly female protagonist. While she may seem unhappy in Fouqué's version, she marries Huldbrand and receives a soul. In the end, she stays with Huldbrand as a stream

at his grave, united. In Andersen's tale, the mermaid is in love with humans, but she does not pursue the prince until she finds out about their everlasting souls. While she does not get with the prince, she does love him and is loved by him. She also receives a chance to earn the everlasting soul she desperately wants. In both Disney's and Miyazaki's versions, the otherworldly female protagonist joins the human male in humanity, which is their overall goal.

The skeleton of the four versions of the mermaid tale shares a similar structure, that includes an introduction to nature in connection with the otherworldly female protagonist. There is an interaction with the non-traditional family of the otherworldly female protagonist that results in her turning from them and to the human male protagonist. In order to obtain or be with the human male, the otherworldly female must turn to supernatural aid, which leads to the crisis in the story. The otherworldly female competes with the rival human female for the human male's affection. In the end, the otherworldly female is satiated by obtaining a soul or by uniting with the human male. The repetition of this pattern reflects the commonalities in humanity. Even if the structure of the mermaid tale gets repeated because it fits into society in some way, it does not mean that the structure fits in each culture the same way. After stripping the mermaid tale to find the bare bones, the differing details stand out and are unique to the creator's influences, culture, and time.

III. THEMES: OTHERING AND REBELLION

Revealing the skeleton shows how the tales are related, and thus that they can be compared. However, knowing the skeleton of the story is not enough. Propp states that categorizing fairy tales by themes leads to chaos (7). As works can contain many themes, and individuals may believe that one theme prevails over another, the result is “an overlapping classification” (Propp 7). Propp argues that a tale may have multiple themes (alienation, rebellion, and true love for example) and finding the dominant theme in a work may prove difficult as each reader may classify a different theme as the central theme. Therefore, trying to categorize them by themes will result in a fairy tale being placed in multiple classifications. However, examining themes that persist throughout an already classified type of work is possible. The study of themes in this thesis is not to classify the mermaid tales; it is to understand what themes the structure of the mermaid tale produces.

One of the reasons we adapt stories and retell them is their universal quality. As Yolen states, “Our stories reflect the human condition, and none more so than the folk tales that have been an inheritance from our great-great-ever-so-many-great-grandparents back to the beginning of time” (238). The skeleton of the mermaid tale that we keep retelling lends itself to specific themes. All of these works depict a struggle to fit in and overcome the mermaid’s “otherness,” which consists of unrequited love and the need to overcome the “otherness.” Another theme is rebellion, as shown through the otherworldly female protagonists’ expression of sexuality and their rebellion against their parents.

Othering

As the mermaid tale focuses on a non-human protagonist wanting to become a human, it inherently sets up a theme of alienation. This separation is especially true for Undine because, even once she turns human, there are still moments throughout the story when Undine is feared and treated differently. For instance, after she gets married and is among the humans, Undine's virtuous soul shines, and she becomes friends with the adopted Duchess, Bertalda. Unfortunately, this friendship soon sours because Undine is an outsider. Undine wants to surprise Bertalda with news of her heritage, thinking—erroneously—that the human female will be happy with the news. However, “the reverse is true: Bertalda is horrified at the humble origins of her birth parents” (ter Horst 307). Undine suffers the pain of emotions and the effects of her ignorance when it comes to humans even though she has been raised as a human: “Undine remains an outsider to human society and its conventions, particularly those involving social rank and marital arrangements” (ter Horst 306). Because of her ignorance of humans' social structure, she has injured her friend instead of bringing joy.

She had the best intentions, as she must now with a soul, but because of her otherness, she suffers: “Undine, pale as death, looked from Bertalda to the parents, from the parents to Bertalda, and could not recover the rude shock she had sustained, at being plunged from all her happy dreams into a state of fear and misery, such as she had never known before” (Fouqué 24). Undine's physical and emotional reaction shows the depth of her pain about not fitting in. In response, Bertalda cries, “She is a sorceress, a witch who has dealings with evil spirits! She has acknowledged it” (Fouqué 24). Bertalda becomes an enemy, and in revenge for Undine's claim that Bertalda is nothing but a

fisherman's daughter, she claims that Undine is a sorceress. Both statements reveal to the world dangerous truths about the two women. They have injured each other. Now Bertalda “gazed upon Undine with reverence; but could not help feeling a chill thrown over her affection for her; and that evening at supper time, she wondered at the Knight's fond love and familiarity toward a being, whom she now looked upon as rather a spirit than a human creature” (Fouqué 26). As evidenced by Bertalda’s musings, even though Undine receives a soul and acts the way women should, she is denied the status of *human*. Those who supposedly love her reject her. This cold treatment of the female protagonist as an outsider is a central theme in all versions.

In Fouqué’s version, Bertalda is not the only one to turn from Undine; Huldbrand ends up rejecting her as well: “Huldbrand's heart began to be estranged from Undine, and drawn toward Bertalda; while she cared not to disguise from him her ardent love; and how between them the poor injured wife came to be rather feared than pitied--and when he showed her kindness, a cold shiver would often creep over him and send him back to the child of earth, Bertalda” (Fouqué 26). This scene harkens back to the first story Huldbrand tells soulless Undine about when he met Bertalda and how he grew to love her less and less. This admission foreshadows his feelings about Undine after their marriage. What he loves about Undine, which he previously stated, was her anger fits and her passions, is lost when they marry. Once she obtains a soul, she completely changes. She became ordinary and boring, and she obeys Huldbrand “with cheerful submission” (Fouqué 19). As further proof of Huldbrand’s rejection of Undine’s submissive side, his love briefly rekindles when Undine breaks with the standards for the ideal woman and uses her powers to save them from her uncle in the Black Valley (Fouqué 32). However,

this break is not enough for the couple to receive a happy ending. When Undine sinks into the water and vanishes, Huldbrand marries Bertalda, an act that forces Undine to kill him.

As Undine is the protagonist, the treatment of her as the other can be viewed in a positive light. While Undine is shunned and made to feel as if she could never fit in with the humans in the story, the reader sympathizes with her. Instead of thinking the same negative thoughts of Undine, readers are drawn to her side and view Huldbrand and Bertalda as the “bad guys.” Huldbrand’s inability to see past Undine’s otherness is shown as a weakness that results in his death. Undine’s character is shown as powerful and, although she turns meek once she gets her soul, she can still surpass her uncle in power and save Huldbrand and Bertalda in the woods. This display shows that Undine never lost her power when she gained a soul. Instead of leaving the story feeling as though Undine is not worthy of Huldbrand, it seems that he is not worthy of her. This tendency for readers to view Undine as worthy is evidence of the story’s universality, as it depicts the universal human fear of being cast out of society. The unwarranted alienation of Undine because of her birthright, which she cannot control, urges the reader to feel a sympathetic connection with her.

Similar to Undine, the little mermaid of Andersen’s tale is an alienated figure. Once on land, the mermaid is taken in by the prince and treated hospitably yet as the other, because she is mute. Although she is brought into the prince’s household, she is not placed in a typical role of a family member, but an othering role: “she charmed everyone, and especially the prince, who called her his dear little foundling” (Andersen 51). She is also given the privilege of sleeping outside his door on a velvet pillow, resembling a

dog. The denial of a room, or even a bed, for her is evidence of her outsider status. This treatment is emphasized when the prince marries the princess, and they both want to keep the mute mermaid with them, much as one would a beloved animal. The princess does not see the otherworldly protagonist as a mating rival. In this way, Andersen's version starts the trend of treating the outsider with kindness while finding humor in their missteps about culture or manners.

Andersen's mermaid, similar to Fouqué's, does not receive a happy ending with her male protagonist. She believes the prince will recognize her and love her without her voice: "day after day, she became more dear to the prince, who loved her as one would love a good little child, but he never thought of making her his queen" (Andersen 51). She despairs as she watches her prince fall in love with and marry another. Andersen's ending is not as stinging as Fouqué's in that the mermaid is able to sacrifice herself instead of killing the prince, as Undine does.

Disney takes up Andersen's trend with the kind treatment of Ariel on land while continuing the outsider theme. Ariel receives misinformation about the human world that she loves so well, from a seagull, Scuttle, comically accentuating her otherness. The audience understands the misuse of the human items by Scuttle, but Ariel is not able to pick up on these visual clues of Scuttle's ignorance, being ignorant of the items herself. This misunderstanding leads to Ariel using a fork, which she calls a "dinglehopper," as a hair straightening item during dinner with Prince Eric and his butler. She brushes her hair with a fork and blows the pipe as an instrument, which is how Scuttle told her to use these items. The butler stares at her judgmentally, while Prince Eric laughs, finding it endearing. She quickly realizes that Scuttle was wrong about how to use a dinglehopper.

Prince Eric and the Butler think her peculiarities are from whatever accident happened to her that made her mute and left her on the beach wrapped in a sail. In Disney's version, unlike *Undine* but similar to the little mermaid in Andersen's version, Ariel is othered by her disability (no voice) and her odd behavior, not her supernatural status.

However, Prince Eric turns away from Ariel while under a spell. This twist allows the theme of unrequited love and rejection to continue from the two earlier versions, yet still maintaining Disney's pattern of true love conquering all and the couple living happily ever after. In Disney's stories, love is straightforward. The main female and the main male love each other, and there is not another viable option⁵. In Andersen's version, there is a princess who is lovely and sweet, and the prince loves her truly, while also loving the mermaid. In Fouqué's version, Huldbrand goes back and forth and often loves both Undine and Bertalda. The idea that someone could love more than one person is not an idea portrayed in Disney's movies.

If a character loves someone else, as in Prince Eric's case, then it is because a villain is at work, tricking the noble-hearted person. After the lagoon scene, Prince Eric is shown facing the water, playing the song Ariel originally sang for him on the beach with his flute. This scene shows his longing for his female savior, but also shows his conflicting feelings for Ariel (Disney 01:03:21). Prince Eric chooses Ariel and decides to

⁵ Classic examples: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010), and *Frozen* (2013). However, their last three princess movies have responded to culture and rising feminists by either leaving out love interests, such as *Brave* (2012) and *Moana* (2016) or by attempting to focus on sisterly love, as in *Frozen*. Albeit, a simple omission of a love story or focusing on a sister bond does not change their idea that love is straightforward. For example, when Anna in *Frozen* falls in love with Prince Hans, she must leave to save her sister. Along the way, she starts to fall in love with Kristoff, which seems as though Disney is showing that love is not as straightforward. However, in the end, Prince Hans is shown as a manipulative villain, whose love is false. Since he is a villain, he was never a viable love interest, fitting the schema of one-true-love.

give up on the ocean girl, as shown by his action of throwing the flute, or symbol of the female savior's song, into the ocean and walking towards Ariel's window in his castle (Disney 01:03:43). However, the song he remembers begins to float to him from the beach, causing him to stop his forward motion (Disney 01:03:52). When Prince Eric is squinting to see the figure on the beach she is greyed out, and all he sees is the bright and shining seashell around her neck that contains Ariel's voice. This scene is a little way of showing viewers that Prince Eric is not attracted to this woman because of her face or figure, but her voice, which is technically Ariel's voice. Also, Prince Eric's eyes change, which is the classical visual representation of a magical hold on someone. The audience knows something is wrong with the female figure on the beach, and they recognize Ariel's voice in the locket that the sea witch, Ursula, possesses.

This trickery is essential for a Disney movie in which there is love at first sight or, in this case, song. Disney's *The Little Mermaid* is missing that duality of love found in Andersen's and Fouqué's version, which shows that love can be complicated and shared. It is more realistic to show that someone can have feelings for multiple people or that people's feelings can change. However, this is not true in the majority of Disney's film, where the main characters find their one true love. The feelings of Ariel in the scene (Disney 01:05:30) in which she overhears Prince Eric telling Grimsby that he wants to marry Vanessa (Ursula in disguise) as soon as possible is an exact link to Andersen's version. In Andersen's tale, "that same evening" that the prince met the princess, "heralds rode through the streets to announce [their] wedding" (53). Unlike the feelings of Andersen's mermaid, Ariel's sense of rejection is short-lived, and viewers never really share her despair because they know Prince Eric is under a curse. Moreover, if the viewer

is unsure who Vanessa is, the classic villain laugh (Disney 01:05:42) after Vanessa sees Ariel running away crying, gives it away. Fortunately, since it is a curse, Prince Eric and Ariel overcome it and end up together happily ever after.

Miyazaki turns away from the rejection of the otherworldly female protagonist, as Ponyo's otherness is accepted immediately. Diverting from Andersen and Disney, Miyazaki takes an approach that is similar to Fouqué in that Ponyo's supernatural status is noticed at the beginning. Sôsuke starts out treating Ponyo as an animal and the goldfish that she is by calling her an "it" when she floats in the bucket. He asked, "Is it already dead?" (Miyazaki 00:11:19). Sôsuke's mother, Lisa, is the first to give Ponyo a human pronoun when she says, "Huh! She sure is pretty" (Miyazaki 00:13:01) after Sôsuke shows his mother the goldfish he found. The difference that Miyazaki brings in is that Sôsuke quickly realizes that Ponyo is not an ordinary goldfish when he notices that his cut, the one Ponyo licked, has healed. Anytime Ponyo does something extraordinary, Sôsuke responds with utter delight and awe. When the generator does not start, and Ponyo uses her powers to start it, Sôsuke says, "Ponyo, you're amazing!" (Miyazaki 00:56:01-00:56:45).

Instead of shunning her, Sôsuke resolves to protect her. He says, "Mom, I think I'll call her Ponyo. She came to me. She might be magic. I saved her. She's my responsibility now" (Miyazaki 00:13:28-00:13:38), and then he proceeds to feed Ponyo. It does not matter to Sôsuke that she is magical, as shown by him putting her in a pail after he finds her, he already believes that it is his responsibility to protect her since he saved her. Throughout the film, he continues to declare that he will do his best to protect her. When he sets her outside his school, he covers her pail with a large leaf in case cats

are around (Miyazaki 00:16:33-00:06:58). When Toki, a senior center resident, insists that Sôsuke put Ponyo back in the ocean where she belongs, he states again, “Don’t worry, Ponyo. No matter what, I will protect you. I promise” (Miyazaki 00:22:10-00:22:16).

The other versions’ rejections of the protagonists come near the end of the stories and involve the human female from the love triangle. However, near the end of *Ponyo*, the children are placed in a test of their devotion to each other by Ponyo’s parents. During the test, as the two children pass the townspeople who are collected on rescue boats, Kumiko shouts at Sôsuke, “Sôsuke, can I ride with you?” (Miyazaki 01:20:13). He answers her the same way he did at school, that he was busy and had a job to do. Sôsuke flat out rejects the human female in favor of the otherworldly female protagonist.

Ponyo is accepted by many people, unlike her counterparts. When Sôsuke’s mother, Lisa, notices something strange about Ponyo, she either ignores it or accepts it. Sôsuke happily exclaims, “Mom! Ponyo came back, and she’s a little girl now!” (Miyazaki 00:50:34-00:50:38). However, since there is a storm raging all around them, Sôsuke’s mother has no time to react to the claim and instead grabs the two children and brings them into the house and says, “All right. Sôsuke, Ponyo, life is mysterious and amazing. But we have work to do now. And I need both of you to stay calm. Me, too” (Miyazaki 00:51:10-00:51:21), and she proceeds to take care of Ponyo as a lost little girl. Her simple explanation that “life is mysterious and amazing” shows she has accepted that the little girl is Ponyo, but her actions of getting the children dry and making them tea and food, show that she will treat her like any other child. However, the fact that she never mentions trying to find Ponyo’s human parents or the fact that she does not

disregard any of the child's claims shows she is open to the mystery of Ponyo as magical. Therefore, Miyazaki's Ponyo seems closely related to Fouqué's water spirit, because many of the main characters quickly realize Ponyo is otherworldly, yet still accept her. However, unlike Undine, Ponyo is not rejected by the human male. Ponyo's mother asks Sôsuke, "Could you love her if she moved between two worlds?" Sôsuke responds: "Mm-hm. I love all the Ponys. It's a big responsibility, but I really love her."

In some versions, this portrayal of the mermaid as the other or outsider creates a barrier between the male protagonist and the otherworldly female protagonist that they must overcome in order to be together. This barrier proves disastrous and results in the prince rejecting the otherworldly female protagonist, as shown in Fouqué and Andersen's versions. In others, the barrier creates an interest and a fondness that brings the two protagonists together, as shown in the Disney and Miyazaki versions. Although the endings seem similar in Fouqué and Andersen's versions in that the otherworldly female protagonists are rejected, the differing treatments of the protagonists leave two separate interpretations. The same is true for Disney and Miyazaki's versions.

The variations of the acceptance of the four mermaids as the other depend on their descriptions and actions. Why is it that with *Undine*'s ending, it feels as though Huldbrand is unworthy of Undine, while in "The Little Mermaid," it feels as though the mermaid is unworthy of the prince? It has to do with the treatment of the two protagonists throughout the story, not just the ending. While Huldbrand and Bertalda ultimately reject Undine, the sympathy of the reader is with Undine. She is powerful, yet she is meek. She is everything a wife should be when she gains her soul, and everything a lover should be before she gets her soul. Undine does everything in her power to save Huldbrand and

comfort Bertalda. In the end, she is still loyal to her love for Huldbrand and joins him in his eternal rest. These actions gain the reader's sympathy. With Andersen's version, the mermaid is silenced. She accepts the love of the prince even if it means being treated as a lesser without power. When the prince marries the princess, she does not fight and resigns herself to death. She then turns from the prince to find another way to gain a soul. These actions make the character hard to like. She is meek, powerless, and, in the end, fickle. While her fate is similar to Undine's, the reader is left feeling as though everything happened as it was meant to, reflecting Andersen's negative views of love. Ariel, on the other hand, is accepted. Her character mimics Andersen's mermaid, but Ariel fights for her prince. She does not resign herself to turn into seafoam. Although in the grand scheme of things, Ariel is powerless, she is still courageous. Ponyo represents the best of Undine and Ariel; she has the power of Undine and the courage of Ariel, making her a strong and likable figure. The important authorial choice is not in the simple rejection or acceptance of the otherworldly female. It rests in society's treatment and the narrative's portrayal of the otherworldly female and her actions.

Rebellion

Along with the theme of "otherness" and unrequited love, the skeleton structure of the otherworldly female protagonist being under the authority of parents/guardians lends itself to rebellion. According to Idette Noomé, who examines the female's bildungsroman compared to a man's, "Many male protagonists develop a self apart from society; female protagonists tend to develop a self in a socially related role – as wife, mother, sister or friend" (145). Instead of the woman figuring out who she is as an

individual, her maturation is more the woman figuring out how to become one with someone else. For a woman, a typical bildungsroman usually involves sexual awakening or transition from being an individual to having a partner. This first love is present in all four versions and is met with resistance from the families of the otherworldly female. As part of their rebellious budding sexuality, otherworldly females must rebel against their family or their roots. This break from their family is necessary for them to create a nuclear family of their own.

Undine rebels against her adoptive parents as she ignores the wishes of her father when she wants the Knight to tell her his stories. Her father says that now is not the time for the Knight's stories, but Undine stamps "angrily with her pretty feet" and throws a fit. Her adoptive father "scolded Undine smartly for her disobedience and unmannerly conduct to the stranger," which results in her leaving the cottage (Fouqué 3). These rebellious behaviors are rewarded instead of punished. They draw Huldbrand to Undine instead of turning him away because he "took delight in her pretty fits of anger" (Fouqué 11). Right away, Undine breaks stereotypes by refusing to obey the patriarchy, her adoptive father, and she gets a positive reaction, the interest of Huldbrand.

Undine breaks the conventional standard when she does not "shrink away in a fit of bashfulness" as the Knight stares at her beauty on their first encounter. Instead, she stares right back at him and even "[comes] up to him familiarly" and calls him "thou kind, thou beautiful guest" and "handsome friend" which embarrasses her adoptive mother who "desired her to get up instantly, like a modest girl, and to set about to work" (Fouqué 3). However, Undine does not comply. In this scene, Undine adheres to a "certain romantic-era ideal of femininity that is more closely allied with "natural"

instincts, and that defies “civilization” and social conventions” by revealing her desire for Huldbrand bluntly careless of his social standing (ter Horst 306). Again, at the beginning of the Knight’s tale, Undine shows sexually overt behavior when she bites Huldbrand’s finger for talking about the beautiful Bertalda. When he starts the story again after she bites him, he says, “on the second day [Bertalda] charmed me far less than the first, and on the third, less still” (Fouqué 9). With the Knight admitting that he did not like Bertalda any longer, it seems that Undine gets rewarded again for her breaking of societal standards with her impolite biting.

Another deviation comes when her father finds Huldbrand and Undine together in the storm. The father is upset at them being alone together and insists that the knight bring his daughter back; the maiden refuses, and instead she “continued to caress her lover” until the knight feels sorry for the old man who is “weep[ing] bitterly” (Fouqué 8). Once she reunites with the father, she is rewarded instead of punished because “all reproaches were forgotten,” and the old couple rejoices and “welcome their recovered child most warmly” (Fouqué 8). She insists that the knight tells his tale, and this time her parents give in “cheerfully.” This instant forgiveness reinforces her sexually rebellious behavior in that there is no punishment.

Compared to the raunchy tempest scene when Undine is wooing Huldbrand, Andersen’s version has the sexual behavior of the otherworldly protagonist toned down, because in his version the mermaid never has sexual contact with the prince. That being said, the mermaid is told that in order to obtain a soul and keep her human form, she must sleep with the prince. This seed-to-soul aspect of the story lines up with sexual rebellion

in that the mermaid would need to deviate from her species, other mermen, and copulate with a human.

Andersen also uses the little mermaid's character to comment on the value of beauty over voice to attract a mate, by showing that you need both. And, as Seth Lerer states in his study of Andersen, many of Andersen's "tales reflect a fascination with linguistic performance—with the ways in which a member of society comes to be measured by his or her mastery of speech and sound" (217), or in the case of the little mermaid, the lack of linguistic performance. The journey to the shore costs the little mermaid her voice. As stated earlier, she has "the sweetest voice of anyone down here at the bottom of the sea" (Andersen 50), and her voice is the price of the potion that gives her legs, a key element in her ascension. So, as portrayed in the story, a beautiful voice is a potent tool, and she has lost it. A tool she does get to keep is her looks; however, she is unable to obtain love without her voice. In this respect, the mermaid serves as a foil of Andersen and as a critique that one without the other is not enough. Emphasis is placed on her beauty, and she indeed finds a type of love with the prince. However, without her voice, the mermaid is unable to bring their love into a sexual one making her rebellion to join the humans unsuccessful.

Ariel's rebellion starts when she swims to the surface and sees Prince Eric dancing on the ship. Her budding sexuality is displayed through the Disney trope of "love at first sight." Translated into a schoolgirl crush, a lovestruck Ariel dreamily brushes her hair and hums songs. Her sisters and father notice the change in her, and one of her sisters accurately guesses that Ariel is acting this way because she is in love. She is then shown plucking petals from a flower saying, "He loves me... He loves me not... He loves

me... He loves me not..." a classic schoolgirl game of finding out if a crush loves them back (Disney 00:28:55-00:29:00). However, this view is surface level. A reading by Lauren and Alan Dundes points out the sexual innuendos similar to the naming of Ursula or the meanings behind King Triton's trident. Some of their connections, such as Ariel brushing her hair with the phallic termed fork, "dingle-hopper," after newly acquiring a potentially sexually-ready lower half, feels far-fetched to me (Dundes 122). Regardless, as Ariel is experiencing her first teenage crush that ends in marriage, the sexual tension, including the popular song "Kiss the Girl," exists in Disney's movie (Disney 00:59:42-01:02:21). Once her father is aware of Ariel's love for the human Prince Eric, he goes into a rage. His reaction causes Ariel's rebellion from society and her father, as shown by her contract with Ursula. This contract has Ariel committing an ultimate act of rebellion, leaving her family and the entire underwater kingdom forever.

Miyazaki takes this story and alters it a bit, in that his otherworldly female protagonist is a child of about five years of age. Tom Gatti explains that "Miyazaki's girls are sometimes pretty but also often awkward, brave, and stubborn" (Gatti 53). As a child, Ponyo's beauty or appearance is not commented on or a focus. The act of revisioning this tale to fit the leading protagonists as five-year-olds is a considerable deviation from the original tales. Everything they do seems innocent and sincere, similar to when Sôsuke promises to love "all the Ponyos" when asked about his feelings towards her shifting form. There is a kiss, but it is a peck and is overshadowed by the magical acrobatics that make the kiss possible, as shown in fig. 9.



(Figure 9: Ponyo's Gravity-Defying Jump (Edwards 44))

The main point in the kiss is to show the power and magic of Ponyo, who “initiates the kiss that makes her human,” and her “gravity-defying” jump in the air shows the viewer that Ponyo will “become human but stay magical after all ...” (Edwards 44). Ponyo stays powerful throughout the entire film, resembling her mother. Although sexual desire is absent from Miyazaki’s version, Ponyo still rebels from her father as she escapes his ship at the beginning of the movie. The lack of sexual desire puts a new spin on the otherworldly female protagonist’s rebellion, suggesting that her rebellion to form an identity separate from her father does not have to be sexual. Her rebellion does not entirely escape sexual overtones as the human protagonist is the opposite sex, and they kiss at the end to fully transform her into a human.

The versions differ with their treatment of rebellion and sexual desire. Fraser’s article on “Metamorphosis” focuses on the metamorphosis of the mermaids into a human and the sexualization of that metamorphosis. Fouqué’s version follows Undine through her adolescent, into marriage and continues to death. This expansive view detracts from the short period of her sexual awakening back in her adoptive parents’ house. Andersen’s mermaid, who spots the prince when she turns fifteen, is engulfed in her sexual

awakening. Likewise, Disney's Ariel is a teenager and creates sexual attention with her seashell bra and her quest to marry the prince. While Fouqué, Andersen, and Disney's versions contain sexual desire, Fraser points out that Miyazaki's choice of making the protagonists five-year-old children "eliminates the themes of yearning and painful adolescent sexuality." According to Lucy Fraser, "the Western mermaid story joined Japanese pre-modern mermaid traditions inherited from China, including animal-like *ningyo* with fish bodies with human heads" (248). Fraser goes on to explain how studies of *shojos* and mermaids coalesce. She states the *shojo* "is a liminal figure who refuses maturity and removes her body from any symbolisms of fertility" (Fraser 251), which is what we see with Miyazaki's Ponyo. The view of the female protagonist as a preschooler does not negate a rebellion from her family. Ponyo rebels from her father before she sees Sôsuke, due to Fujimoto's overbearing parenting style. In the other three versions, the reaction of the otherworldly female's family to the female's inevitable sexual awakening sparks her rebellion against them.

The two themes of otherness and rebellion come from the structure of the mermaid tale. As an otherworldly creature, the protagonist faces the struggle to fit into a new species and culture. To deviate from a species and join another, some form of rebellion must take place. Moreover, some of the rebellion must be from the original family to leave it and create a nuclear family with the human male.

IV. CONCLUSION

Examining these four authors' culture, themes, as well as the underlying structure of the mermaid tale, helps explain the nuances of the various adaptations. As Maïke Oergel states, "One may attempt to strip humanity to its core, but at the same time, humanity can only be presented as within its specific historical situation" (226). Inquiring into the historical and cultural background of the authors should shed light on the author's choices in their versions.

Fouqué was a German Romantic, and Undine's pivotal character represents the struggle between nature and humanity. His depiction of her role prompts the question: can nature and humanity be one? A look into Andersen's life shows how he took his pain and suffering at the hands of his society and was able to transform it into a more personal story of a tortured mermaid. The structure of the tale, with a mermaid who struggles to fit in with her kind and that of the humans, makes a natural mirror for Andersen's class and gender struggles. Disney Studios first storyboarded *The Little Mermaid* between the two World Wars as the role of women was shifting. With soldiers not coming back from the wars, nuclear families existed as an ideal but not the majority. Miyazaki, on the other hand, is attuned to his culture's heritage and its value of nature. His movies, especially *Ponyo*, have the relationship between humans and nature at the center: "Within the course of his own lifetime, rapid modernization in Japan has pushed nature to the limit" (Gossin 212). As climate change and rapid deforestation fill our news, Miyazaki's concern and ecophilosophy seep into his works organically reflecting current worries. The time and cultures of the creators influence the variations in the tales. Therefore, the culture of the creators comes into play within their works.

After examining two themes that result from the skeleton of the mermaid tale, I find that the answer to the overall question of wherein lies the power of these female's bildungsromans is essential. Intentionally or not, we are teaching our younger generation this power structure. Interestingly, Ruth Bottigheimer talks about the consequences of studying or focusing on the authors and versions of a fairy tale in her book, *Fairy Tales: A New History*. Focusing on the author and their specific version of a work lends itself to the study of the author's life, culture, political views, and society. Bottigheimer points out that "over time some tales have changed in their style, content, and structure, an observation at odds with the assumption that fairy tales have remained stable and invariant over the long term" (109). She relates these changes to the "marketability" of fairy tales.

Connections between the author's changing culture or beliefs are mirrored in their renditions of the fairy tale. While I agree with Bottigheimer that fairy tales do change over time, I argue that they also remain fundamentally stable over the long term. As I have also shown, the core of the fairy tale is maintained in the four mermaid versions. Zipes talks of great storytellers and says, "they don't worship the past and tradition, but demand that the past and tradition justify themselves in the present. In turn, they ask that their remolding of the past and tradition be questioned" (*Why Fairytales Stick* 241). The adaptation of fairy tales is a delicate balance of preserving the essence of the tale while relating it to the present.

It is no wonder the mermaid tale is a reflection of the creator's culture. Children's stories, such as the mermaid tale, are among the first teaching tools that shape the young minds of children to build a future with the creator's values. According to Zipes, "For

sure, entertainment and instruction were always part of their function, but they were designed to communicate ideas about natural instincts, social relations, normative behavior, character types, sexual roles, and power politics” (99). The mermaid tale is not an exception, which is how it reflects the cultural norms of its time. Stella Lees and June Senyard state that society “reflects those values which it interprets as central to its continuity” in fairy tales for children. They are seen “as a part of the text of history,” making them “a significant part of the discourse of how society is molded” (174). Whether it is the treatment and ideas around nature or the treatment and ideas around women, it matters. Matthew Adams et al. talk about the weight of these ideas: “media representations of male and female characters may well ‘have serious effects on these children’s gender role development and self-image’” (261).

Zippe also talks about both the influence of Fouqué’s social norm questioning and Andersen’s child-like tone. Fouqué’s *Undine*, as shown by the focus on Undine after her marriage far into adulthood, was not written with just a child audience in mind. It is also important to note that the term “fairy tale” as a genre is relatively new, developing in the late seventeenth century: “German Romantics had long since experimented with the fairy tale and had brought about major innovations that had transformed the genre so that it became philosophically more profound, encompassed children and adults as potential readers, developed a variety of narrative voices, questioned social norms and customs, and experimented with language (“Critical Reflections” 226). We see this with Undine’s shifting character traits. In the beginning, she is powerful, headstrong, and mischievous. However, she soon shifts to dutiful, meek, and subdued, and her other personality is championed. Zippe goes on to state, “Andersen was among the first writers in Denmark

to realize what the German Romantics had accomplished and sought to continue their ‘revolutionary’ approach to the fairy tale by endowing it with a new childlike tone that was close to the oral telling of tales” (“Critical Reflections” 226). Andersen’s focus on children brought the mermaid tale securely into children’s literature.

The influence of Disney and the traditional values that Disney champions are controversial topics of discussion. According to Wills, “for almost a century, Disney has played a formative role in American culture... The company has promoted a range of fundamental notions and ideals through its movies: universal love, good conquering evil, and simple happy endings” (104). American society recognizes the influence Disney can have on the younger generation watching it. Wills goes on to say that Disney “has also pushed a range of cultural and social values: A protestant-style work ethic, absolute morality, and traditional family roles” (104-105). The influence of Disney on the younger generations is what has resulted in a public outcry over the way Disney portrays women as damsels in distress. Ariel does not escape this as she is a damsel in distress at the end, who Prince Eric comes to rescue.

Miyazaki's works feature children as protagonists. According to Trisciuzzi, Miyazaki does this because “their innocence is in contrast with the violence of the adult world, therefore they often have the power to bring people together and bring them closer to nature” (486). Trisciuzzi claims that Miyazaki himself talks about *Ponyo* as “a reversed bildungsroman that children should read and parents should listen to” (497). Miyazaki’s portrayal of Ponyo as a powerful figure seems to be in direct opposition to Disney’s Ariel, who has no power of her own. With the creators’ connections to their

varied culture and time, the powerful characters change throughout the versions, mimicking their culture's views.

As societies evolve, so does the influence of literature, films, and popular culture on children. Children's books, fairy tales, television series, and movies are tools used in teaching the morals of a society's current time to their children. Zipes states, "Fairy tales have always been 'truthful' metaphorical communications and reflections of personal and public experiences, the customs of their times, and the civilizing process" (42). The creators express their different cultures very well; yet, at the same time, they share significant similarities, which speaks to the strength in the core of the tale. The core of the mermaid story and the themes that the core lends itself to make the mermaid tale a perfect medium for talking about otherness, power, and relationships.

The core of the story in all four examples is recognizable and universal, reflecting our shared values: "*as adaptation*, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation" (Hutcheon 173). Taking a cue from Propp's functions and searching for a way to distinguish aspects of a tale, I've broken down the mermaid tale into a skeleton accompanied by the connected themes. The otherworldly female protagonist being a part of nature lends itself to the discussion of nature. For the otherworldly female to join the human male, she must abandon her "otherworldliness," which includes her species, family, culture, and society. This heteronormative pattern lends itself to a female bildungsroman and societies' desired fate for any daughter-- leaving her birth home to join a male and create a nuclear family of her own⁶. The pattern is used in the mermaid

⁶ The constant use of this heteronormative pattern suggests that it is the only pattern, much like Disney's one-true-love, and that variations do not exist. However, this idea is changing to include other sexual preferences, but it is a slow change as the heteronormative pattern still makes up the bulk of mainstream stories.

tales as the male human is accompanied by a female human that serves as a rival and foil for the otherworldly female protagonist. In the end, the otherworldly female triumphs in her own way, be that soul or mate acquired.

This core remains consistent. The diverging aspects, such as the role of the father and mother or the shift in power, can be related to an ever-changing culture. Zipes links this phenomenon to memetics: “A meme must be capable of being copied in a faithful way; it must be able to survive a long time so that many copies will be disseminated” (“Why Fairytales Stick” 5). This faithful coping relates to the core of the mermaid tale. Without the love triangle, completed by a human female, the otherworldly female protagonist runs the risk of losing her uniqueness, for it is by comparison that she so starkly stands out. Without the rebellion from the otherworldly female protagonist’s family and society, her role in human society is not possible.

However, a meme “must be able to survive a long time,” thus the alterations to the details surrounding the core. The alterations match up with the author’s shifting society and culture’s trends and beliefs. Resembling a meme, a fairy tale “will also not become part of a cultural tradition or canon unless it is vital to the survival of a community and the preservation of its values and beliefs” (Zipes, “Why Fairytales Stick” (11). Therefore, the fairy tale must be a reflection. The structure of the fairy tale and its preservation of a culture’s values and beliefs make it an ideal tool of instruction for children. Its cyclical nature makes it recognizable and comforting. So, the fairy tale becomes a part of our cultural tradition and an easy and effective way of teaching morals and values to the younger generation.

This is only the examination of one fairy tale adaptation arc in four versions. Expanding this study to more versions or more cultures could further narrow down the core of the mermaid tale or further accentuate specific values of a culture. Studies of other adaptation arcs could show the universality in those tales and the themes that lend themselves to that fairy tale's core. Understanding fairy tales and their cores and the themes that accompany them are vital. Fairy tales are one of the many tools used to influence younger generations and shape the future. Their adaptation is how they "evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places" (Hutcheon 177). A thorough understanding of this phenomenon shifts the power dynamic of culture. To find who is shaping the future generation and the values they are instilling, one needs to look no further than the stories aimed at children.

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