

# Comparative Analysis of Hans Christian Andersen's and Walt Disney's The Little Mermaid

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**Abstract:** Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, *The Little Mermaid*, published on April 7, 1837, remains an exemplary childhood classic that Disney Studios retold as an animated film on November 17, 1989. This paper examines the comparison between Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* and Disney's *Little Mermaid* through a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of literary elements found in each version. Dissecting such elements reveals the characters' motivations and goals by highlighting the differences between the fiction and film versions. Structuralism and New Criticism research has used canonical evidence to examine this comparative analysis. The discourse analysis method is used to incorporate non-numerical data presentation in Andersen's *Little Mermaid* and the visual-textual features of Disney's version, ultimately forming a structured narrative about its dissimilitude and resemblance. This literary study emphasizes the artistic changes between the written version and its film rendition to understand the story's underlying themes, which may be distorted in dramatization.

**Keywords:** comparative, discrepancy, dramatization, mermaid, tale.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the history of entertainment media, there have been numerous adaptations of the same story with slight variations. In comparing and contrasting two media adaptations of the same story, the goal should not be to determine which is superior but rather to learn how artistic changes affect the audience's imagination. Thus, the ability to investigate media, to develop cognitive and higher-order thinking skills, and to express both subjective and objective ideas in writing is enhanced by the ability to compare and contrast things on the basis of differences and similarities.

This study compares *The Little Mermaid's* film and literary elements. Over the years, Disney has orchestrated the art of retelling fairy tales and folklore in a Disney-like way that not only captures viewers' perceptions profoundly or in a way that's totally heartening, but also makes an excellent compact of taking it into an advantage (Sardarsdóttir, 2015). All adaptations of Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* have been successful. World-famous mermaid tale. In 1989, it became a favorite of at least one generation,

especially Disney-loving kids. The animated film is more popular than the original, so many people don't realize the difference between the two.

*Moral Simplification in Disney's The Little Mermaid* by A. Waller and Mortensen of *The Little Mermaid: Icon and Disneyfication* agree that Disney's portrayal of women and its moral simplification gave viewers the wrong impression of women and their lives. Many literary critics and academic scholars call Disney's structured simplification "Disneyfication," especially in *The Little Mermaid*. Disney's *The Little Mermaid* follows Hans Christian Andersen's original tale. A. Waller says, "Some elements of the fairy tale are still discernible in the Disney film adaptation. However, Disneyfication and a morally incongruous ending overlap.

Andersen wrote remarkable fairy tales. According to Bruno Bettelheim, it is a "magic mirror which reflects parts of our internal world," and when one has an appropriate conversation or tells the story, one automatically realizes its importance and acquires internal memory. Andersen appreciated giving the audience "a little something to think about" because it included children and adults (Bachlund, 2018). Andersen never lost sight of children's perspectives, even when presenting cutting-edge or difficult concepts (Bachlund, 2018).<sup>1</sup> These stories lose their fluidity and versatility when filmed (Bendix, 2018). This delivery method somehow inflicts a specific image, preventing any other images. Disney completely "transformed the Little Mermaid into a vehicle for the American corporate perspective, which Disney studios have assisted with molding since the 1930s" (Bendix, 2018). Bendix compares Andersen's version, which explores the little mermaid's heartache, desire, yearning, and penance, to Disney's, which is bland and stale. Disney's adaptation and Andersen's story have two completely different plots, which could be a drawback (Bendix, 2018).

There are many analyses of Disney's alternative to "*The Little Mermaid*" and other fairy tales, but each person's imagination creates the setting and character descriptions. Disney directors and producers approve or reject each character as they develop fairy tale films. Instead of shattering the fantasy, this film may be seen as a different take on the story (Lambert, 2018). The

<sup>1</sup> This article tackles that Andersen wrote gore genre but never lost sight of children's perspective.

Disney version of this mermaid tale is the most popular, even though the two versions are different. Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* depicts our creative mind, while Disney's version awakens Disney fans. The institution's use of cutting-edge technology has tarnished the reputations of literary fantasy experts like Hans Christian Andersen, along with its name (Zipes, 1999).

Thus, although academic sources above indicate a comparison of both Andersen's and Disney's versions, this research analyzes specific literary details such as plot, characterization, and imagery that provide valuable emphasis on the main character's goal.

*Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" Fairy Tale*, written by Dr. Oliver Tearle, makes the point that the arrangement of the plot reflects the author's background, therefore it is thus referenced in studying the plot's relevance to culture and beliefs. Plot contains references, intentional or not, to its associating cultures and traditions, and it goes on to show what is to be and what is to be expected. In Dr. Tearle's research, the author begins by summarizing the plot of the story, then points out characteristics of the plot of the tale of *The Little Mermaid*. Tearle's writing also identifies elements of an ending that may be seen by the readers as good or bad while also pointing out the implications of its arrangement. Such arrangements of the plot go to show the beliefs held by the author, as well as the central message that the story is meant to send. Dr. Tearle's writing does not, however, provide a concrete answer to the question of how a plot should be interpreted and the subjects it discusses and leaves it to the readers to decide what to make of it. This also goes to show that one of the functions of the plot is to carry meaning and make the story a message to its readers.<sup>2</sup>

*Hans Christian Andersen's "Characterization of the Protagonist in "The Little Mermaid"* is a piece of writing focusing on discussing the little mermaid's characterization and how it transports moral values to readers. To quote Yee's writing, the characterization of the little mermaid combines "reasonable inspiration and the force of decision and independence." This piece of writing highlights that even when studying stories and tales meant for children, studying, and understanding the more complex aspects of characters has its own necessity. The observations made about characters and how characters change show what values an author has when writing a story. It also shows what the author's society thought is normal and what is weird. Virtues are changing subjects that are central to the study of literature, and the study of characterization brings out the virtues that the characters in a story embody.<sup>3</sup>

Written by Felix Morrison, *Hans Christian Andersen: Fairy Tales Imagery* is a piece of writing dealing with the imagery used in Andersen's writings, including *The Little Mermaid*. Imagery, being something that connects a story's inner idea,

themes, and focus to the story's plot and narration on the surface, is one of the important assets that an author may employ to send non-literal messages and express ideas in a slightly more subtle way. This piece of writing, for example, points out that Andersen makes heavy use of the idea of "heart" in writing, and that the "heart" in the tale often does not stand for the literal part of the body but instead a character's love. Imagery is significant to the story of *The Little Mermaid*, for it conveys emotions and sets up moods that are not directly told to the reader or reinforces those that are. In Andersen's stories, images also show what is right and wrong and give hints about the characters.<sup>4</sup>

This study investigates Hans Christian Andersen's, and Walt Disney's *The Little Mermaid* presents similarities and differences. Specifically, it delves into plot, characterization, and imagery.

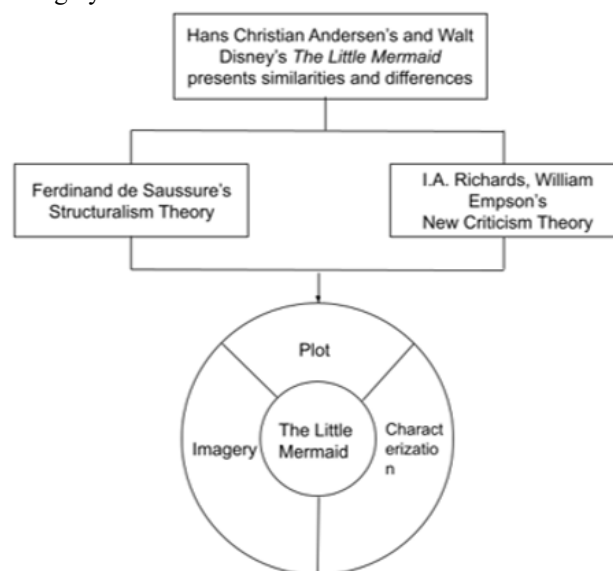


Fig. 1. Schematic presentation of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

The New Criticism Theory pioneered by I.A. Richards, William Empson, and others is the first used to understand and discuss each version of *The Little Mermaid*. William Empson, who led the Theory of New Criticism, performed literary analysis for that. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Empson suggested isolating a text's linguistic properties to understand and critically analyze it. In the same book, Empson suggested classifying ambiguities to better understand a text. This research breaks down a text, finds its message, identifies significant symbols and motifs, and comprehends it. This study applies literal and contextual evidence separately. This research involves critical analysis. This research affirms the New Criticism theory.<sup>5</sup>

Structuralism, developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, Vladimir Propp, and others, used in psychology, literature, and

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Tearle's article reveals that plot structure can have cultural meaning, whether deliberate or not.

<sup>3</sup> This article concentrates on the little mermaid's character and provides the idea that the moral values of the character are meant for the readers to absorb.

<sup>4</sup> This article examines the story's imagery, arguing that imagery reflects unspoken thoughts and ideas.

<sup>5</sup> Richards, I. A. (2018, December 5). *Principles of Literary Criticism*.

anthropology, is the second theory. Structuralism holds that culture must be viewed with outside elements. In *The Morphology of the Fairy Tales*, structuralism pioneer Vladimir Propp wrote that analysis looks for variables and constants across literature. Structuralism requires analyzing a literary work in relation to a larger structure, such as its genre, its recurring motifs and symbols, or an overarching model or story structure. This method contrasts with New Criticism, which isolates elements to discuss literature, and is used with it. This study uses Structuralism to compare *The Little Mermaid* adaptations to Hans Christian Andersen's original story to find similarities and differences.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Methodology

### A. Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative method, particularly discourse analysis approach. Qualitative research is used to comprehend collected and non-numerical data and is analyzed to fully understand concepts, perspectives, and experiences. It helps to learn more about the problem at hand or come up with new research questions. Discourse analysis is primarily a qualitative and interpretive approach for examining language that has been written or conveyed in a social context. Qualitative study provides tools in this study to portray, classify, and order common words, expressions, and thoughts in qualitative data. Discourse analysis is used to analyze the structure of texts and how it solidifies accentuation or sets up a narrative. Through the utilization of this method, Hans Christian Andersen's and Walt Disney's *The Little Mermaid* receives a thorough investigation to achieve the purpose of this study—to disseminate the data gathered that upholds the main problem and sub-problems. Additionally, to provide credible and reliable information to literary arguments.

### B. Sources of Data

The primary data source is taken from the initial collection of *Fairy Tales Told for Children* which the publication date is April 7, 1837, published by C.A Reitzel; Eventyr, fortalte for Børn. Første Samling. Tredie Hefte. 1837, thoroughly republished on December 18, 1849, as a prominent section of *Fairy Tales; 1850 Eventyr*, and significantly a piece of the central volume of *Fairy Tales and Stories; Eventyr og Historier. Første Bind. 1862*;<sup>7</sup> the film information source is taken from Walt Disney produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and Walt Disney Pictures composed and directed by Ron Clements and John Musker to which it is released on November 17, 1989.

The secondary sources of data are taken from e-resources, Google, blogs, articles, reliable websites, published theses and dissertations.

### C. Data Gathering Procedure

To thoroughly fully attain the aims of this study, the data gathering procedure follows three phases: Phase 1. Plot, Phase

2. Characterization, and Phase 3. Imagery.

#### Phase 1 Plot.

Phase 1 analyzes the plot. New Criticism, Structuralism, and Aristotle's Freytag's Pyramid are used to analyze the plot. Scenes and lines from each version's plot structure are taken to compare and contrast similarities and differences. Two tables are used in this phase titled Plot Analysis on Similarities and Table Plot Analysis on Differences.

#### Phase 2 Characterization.

Phase 2 focuses on the characters, both present in the fiction and the movie, to analyze the similarities and differences in the characterization. The characterization is analyzed through New Criticism and Structuralism Theory. Characters are evaluated through the roles, personality, and growth. Specific scenes are scrutinized to determine the distinction of each character. Characterization Analysis on Similarities and Characterization Analysis on Differences are used in this phase.

#### Phase 3 Imagery.

Phase 3 addresses the analysis of the imagery in both versions to scrutinize the similarities and differences. The imagery is determined by the use of plot structure and analyzed through New Criticism and Structuralism Theory by stating the scenes descriptively. The gathered information in the plot is employed as a reference to reveal the imagery. The discussion table is titled Imagery Analysis on Similarities and Differences.

### D. Data Analysis

This study utilizes a qualitative discourse analysis method. This method incorporates non-numerical data presentation and analysis of the work under investigation. It analyzes and interprets primary and secondary sources to gather the information needed to answer the research questions. These data are treated using New Criticism and Structuralism Theories. Furthermore, the study follows three (3) phases which are Phase 1, which talks about comparing and contrasting the plot of fiction and film by taking out scenes from the plot structure in each version. Phase 2 talks about the characterization, characters, and the development of the characters in each version are analyzed. Phase 3 addresses the imagery, using different types of imagery employed to reveal the imagery.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### A. Plot

The table below contains data used to determine the similarities and differences between Andersen's and Disney's plot of *The Little Mermaid*.

From the data presented and laid out above, the sequential similarities of both versions are evident through the little mermaid and Ariel's only motive: to win something that would benefit both characters' hearts, feelings, and overall goals. As it is noticeable, the Disney version managed to capture the striking and impressive details of Andersen's diction and morphed it into a series of picturesque scenes unraveled in the

<sup>6</sup> Propp, V. (1928). *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. The American.

<sup>7</sup> *History of The Little Mermaid in Timeline*. (n.d.). Popular Timelines.

film version. Moreover, the state of the world above and below in Andersen's little mermaid and Disney's Ariel have a defined similar conflict that drives the entirety of the plot. The great preponderance of both mermaids that weigh the story is notably the strong motivation and desire to be a part of the world above.

Table 1  
Plot analysis on similarities

Plot Structure	Fiction	Movie
Exposition	undersea kingdom	
Rising Action	meeting and rescuing	
	going to see the sea witch	
Climax	castration	
	prince's unrecognition	
	prince falling in love	
Falling Action	help to escape the contract	
	contract consequences.	
Denouement	happy ending	

At the story's exposition, the ocean is vividly described as "as blue as the petals of the loveliest cornflower, and as clear as the purest glass," while the film adaptation's first scene describes the ocean surface musically, starting with Fathoms Below's first line: "I'll tell you a tale of the bottomless blue." The descriptions are similar because both versions have been modified. Little mermaid and Ariel seek refuge above the sea.

Jumping right into the rising action of both versions, a sea tempest has begun, and little mermaid and Ariel must save the prince. The little mermaid also has a marble statue of a handsome human boy. In Disney's version, Grimsby commissions Prince Eric's statue. Prince Eric's statue fell into the sea and was picked up by Flounder and placed in Ariel's secret grotto when the storm sank the ship. Ariel's desire and the little mermaid's marble prince statue symbolize admiration. Thus, both mermaids fell in love and sought the sea witch. Disney's sea witch is named Ursula, while Andersen's is unnamed. Since Andersen's little mermaid and Disney's Ariel had the loveliest voices of all the sea folk, the sea witch made a deal: the little mermaid would have a human form, with legs instead of a fishtail, but has to give up her voice in exchange. She agrees out of desperation. Afterward, both mermaids are bestowed a voiceless human form.

Peripherally in the state of climax, Andersen's little mermaid and Disney's Ariel finally met the prince with the burning hope that the prince could recognize the mermaid as the one who

saved the prince's life, which might ultimately lead these characters on the pathway of romance, but, the prince thought that it is an entirely different girl who rescued him. Yet, in the corner of Andersen's prince and Disney's Prince Eric's heart, there's a room for fondness and affection toward the mermaid.

Including the film's discernible romantic scenery, pointing Ariel and Prince Eric in a wooden boat, basking in the canopy of stars and silver moonlight, and sharing a kiss. Andersen's version also had the prince placing one's own lips on the mouth of the little mermaid, denoting

*"If I ever had to choose a bride, it would rather be you, my speechless foundling with the eloquent eyes!" and he kissed her red lips, played with her long tresses and placed his head close to her heart, so it dreamt of human happiness and an immortal soul.*" pg. 9

It's obvious that the yearning is present—Prince Eric and Ariel just could not yield it because of an obstacle, and that is the presence of the other maiden, whom the prince thought was his savior. Both versions of the mermaids' love and desire for the prince did not help the prince recognize the real mermaid who actually saved him.

During the falling action, the little mermaid and Ariel's negotiation with the sea witch heavily impact the bargain's required conflicts. Each sea witch restores the mermaid's voice. The plot falls apart because Andersen's little mermaid and Disney's Ariel only have a short time to win the prince's heart. If the little mermaid cannot do that, she will either get rid of Ursula and stay muted indefinitely or turn into seafoam without an eternal soul as a sign of unrequited love. The little mermaid's pursuit of independence and love leads to a bittersweet happy ending. Both versions have wedding bells that depict a fairy tale's eternal happiness and the possibility of one-sided longing being returned. Despite reckless behavior and centering the world around a man, Ariel's ending is less harsh, though the film's background noises are harsh. Both mermaids can return to the ocean whenever they want, leaving endless memories of the strong otherworldly individuals who fight for what burning hearts truly want and the sacrifices and ordeals needed to get it. While it is obvious that Andersen's fiction and Disney's adaptation did not occur in the same period of time, one must take into account that this comparative analysis hinges on New Criticism theory, which refuses to scrutinize the author's environment as well as the intentions in writing the story. With

Table 2  
Plot analysis on differences

Plot Structure	Fiction	Movie
Exposition	surface's stories	musical element intro
	sisters' visitation at 15	Sneaking to the surface
Rising Action	saw and rescued the prince	Sneak again and rescue the prince
	youngest girl found the prince	attendant found Prince Eric
	little mermaid stays on land	Ursula grants Ariel's wish
Climax	prince unrecognition	Ariel's voice and song recognition
	forced to marry the princess	unhappy and trickery of Ursula
	Prince and Princess married	the sabotage
Falling Action	sisters' beautiful hair gone	over-writing the contract
	death comes soon	contract expires
		great storm
Denouement	sea witch in the undersea kingdom	Ursula died
	Little mermaid dispersed	Ariel's transformation
		Ariel and Eric got married

this in mind, the production goals of Disney's technical staff are also off limits, since New Criticism only looks at the art or text on its own, apart from its outside sources.

Disney's lighthearted and fun approach is the biggest difference. During Andersen's little mermaid's dark, angsty sequence, characters are introduced through a musical concert. Andersen wrote a dark fairy tale that adults would have loved to read because of its angst. Disney's Ariel fulfilled the little mermaid's wish and goal throughout her life, while Andersen's mermaid lost something precious.

Taking the exposition of the differences, the original little mermaid of Andersen's motivation to become completely human comes from the knowledge that even though mermaids can live up to 300 years, they do not possess an immortal soul according to the mermaid's grandmother. Mermaids do not go to paradise once these creatures depart the world, but mermaids turn into sea foam instead. Along with that, the only way to obtain an everlasting soul is to gain the affection of a human, so that the human's soul might flow into the little mermaid and grow within; hence, the little mermaid seeks a person for a soul.

On the other hand, Disney's Ariel is ruled by pure ambition and recklessness. Ariel immediately falls in love with Prince Eric and wants to marry the prince without even entering into a slow-build connection. Ariel barely suffers and is quite passive towards the struggles and a bit insensitive toward King Triton's reprimands. Ariel's only motivation to pull out of the ocean revolves around wanting to love and be loved by Prince Eric. In a sense, Ariel is obsessed with humankind because of such freedom that sea creatures don't seem to have, which leads Ariel to rebel against her father by collecting human artifacts that are displayed in the secret grotto. In the film, it is introduced to that notion by Ariel singing *"Part Of Your World."*<sup>8</sup> The little mermaid wants immortality, while Ariel wants matrimony, which explains why the original story and the film adaptation differ so much.

Adjacent to the rising action of the tale and the film, following the storm that wreaked destruction on the ship, Andersen's Little Mermaid saves the prince, igniting the desire to capture the prince's affection for the sake of the little mermaid's journey to earn a soul. The little mermaid has an obsession similar to Ariel's, but there is a significant difference between their obsessions: the little mermaid's obsession is with attaining transcendence by pursuing the prince, whereas Ariel's obsession is of dependence that begins with the longing for Prince Eric to reciprocate her for the prince. When the little mermaid's stubbornness comes into play, inner tensions and difficult decisions arise. Ariel is faced with the dilemma of choosing family or the prince. However, the crucial difference here is that Andersen's little mermaid's consequences lie in killing the prince to save oneself from turning into seafoam, while Disney's Ariel's inner strife mostly stems from King Triton's authority in forbidding contact with the human world.

Consequently, the sea witch in both versions plays a

significant role in driving the little mermaid's initiative to chase the goals. The sea witch is not as wicked as Ursula; in fact, this character even warned protagonist about the torturous consequences of having a human body. Extensively, in the climax segment, the perspective of Andersen's prince toward the little mermaid can be compared to that of an elderly person looking after a child. Simultaneously, the little mermaid begins to question whether the prince's feelings for the little mermaid are best, to which the prince replies respectfully. Implicating the prince's emotional stirrings for the little mermaid, indeed, the prince love the little mermaid because the prince only mirrors what the little mermaid felt, implying:

*"Yes, you are dearest of all to me," the prince said, 'for you have the best heart of them all, you are the most devoted to me, and you resemble a young girl I once saw but will surely never find again."* pg. 9

The prince never truly recognized the little mermaid as the woman who saved his life during the shipwreck and saw her as someone closely related, physically or psychologically, to his savior. The prince recognized the neighboring kingdom's princess as his savior when his parents arranged a marriage. Ursula seduced Prince Eric by shapeshifting into the maiden he thought was the rescuer. Concussively, Prince Eric had already fallen in love with Ariel, despite being voiceless, but Eric was in a moment of internal conflict that he wanted Ariel to be the rescuer, even though the maiden already made it clear that Vanessa (Ursula) saved the prince. However, Ariel and the sea comrades sabotaged the wedding, and Prince Eric later discovered Ursula's true nature.

The hidden meaning is that Andersen's little mermaid loves the prince to get an immortal soul, not romantically. Under Disney's patriarchal undertones, Ariel pursues a man and marriage. Ariel believes that marrying the man she loves will free her from her father and complete her independence and womanhood.<sup>9</sup>

Maneuvering around the falling action part and identifying the differences, the original tale is extremely matriarchal, and it's evident through the little mermaid's sisters' willingness to cut one's hair off in exchange for the sea witch's knife. The mersisters wanted the little mermaid to murder the prince with the knife to save herself, but the little mermaid's affection for the prince is so strong that the little mermaid could not kill the prince. Because of that, the little mermaid's body dissolves into seafoam.

Ariel's conflict stems from her father, and she can only find freedom with a man's approval, so the film adaptation emphasizes patriarchal values. The plot's accessory—the loss of Ariel's identity and freedom, which led her to want independence and feel complete only with a man (King Triton) and a man (Prince Eric)—needed to be examined.

Veering into the events' denouement, after reappearing, the prince marries the monastery princess, contrasting the film's platitude ending with Andersen's. The "daughters of the air" tell

<sup>8</sup> *The Little Mermaid* (1989) movie, time stamp 25:00.

<sup>9</sup> Tselon, E. (1995, November). *The Little Mermaid: An icon of woman's condition in patriarchy, and the human condition of castration*. Research Gate.

the dying mermaid that they don't have souls either, but they can gain one by helping people. Now becoming wind, the little mermaid can finally cry, indicating that its emotional anguish is over. The little mermaid kisses the prince on the forehead and smiles at the bride, calming the women. Disney's Ariel gets legs and independence from King Triton. Ariel's happy ending is mixed with Disney's "happily ever after" because other sea creatures and her family celebrated her marriage to Prince Eric.

Disney's "Disneyfication" formula turns folklore and traditional tales into enchanted fairy tales. It sets a questionable example for girls. Disney's formula usually includes physical beauty, love, good versus evil, and a happy ending. Andersen's mermaid story barely mentions these. The most obvious difference is Andersen's story's lack of a typical fairy tale ending, while Disney's end with a "happily ever after." After absorbing these, the presuppositions of interpreting Andersen's fiction and Disney's film adaptation raise many questions and theories that scholars always examine. A story that has such a large impact on the audience always leaves ideas to be considered, whether it's a story about immortality, love, spirituality, or selflessness, or a film about women losing identity for matrimony, undergoing sacrifices like castrating a part of the whole existence to feel a sense of belonging or mortality. Structuralism theory is advantageous for comparing Andersen's story to Disney's film adaptation. Humans and mermaids' beliefs, ideas, and actions reveal their true motivations and how cultural, social, and psychological structures shape them.

#### Characterization:

The table below contains data used to determine the similarities and differences between Andersen's and Disney's characters in *The Little Mermaid*.

**Table 3**  
Characterization analysis on similarities

Characters	Fiction	Movie
Sea King	father	
	sea ruler	
Sisters	sympathy	
Prince	to marry the rescuer	
	love to sail	
	Uncaring to cabin-mate	
Sea-Witch	feared	
	terrible consequences	
	consistent	
Little Mermaid	persistent	
	captivated	
	Sacrificial	

Disney's adaptation enlivened some of the characters in Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. It took a dull story and gave it more blissful energy, best suited for children as well as adults to enjoy. There are numerous similarities between the characters in both works. Six of the same characters appear in both the fiction and movie versions of *The Little Mermaid*.

Apart from the role of father and ruler of the sea both characters presented as a widower. King Triton similarly

appears to have lost the sea-king's wife as a result of the humans' evil desire.

Both versions of mersisters showed sympathy and concern for the little mermaid, even though the mersister only appeared briefly in the movie. In the story, the mersisters escorts the mermaid to the prince's Palace and by attempting to save and prevent the little mermaid from dying,

"'Come, little sister!' the other princesses said, and with their arms, around each other's shoulders they rose in a long row out of the sea in front of the place where they knew the prince's palace lay." pg. 5

Disney demonstrated the mersisters' sympathy and concern for Ariel when the mersisters were looking for Ariel, who had been locking oneself all morning,

*ANDRINA: Ariel dear, time to come out. You've been in there all morning. (27:50)*

The deuteragonist of the story in which the protagonist falls in love with the prince, is also known as Prince Eric in Disney's version. Both characters similar experiences saved from drowning by the little mermaid and found on the beach. Andersen and Disney instill the prince with the same love of sailing.

Furthermore, following the event, both the prince and Eric exhibited little compassion or concern for the cabin-mates, as mentioned by Dye's in the blog about Prince Eric From *'The Little Mermaid' Is The Worst*. Despite this, Eric smiled and cared more about the beautiful lady and even let a strange mermaid into the palace, without questioning the mermaid's sudden arrival. The fundamental desire that drives both characters is to marry a lovely maiden.<sup>10</sup>

Antagonist drives the main character's character development and complexities throughout the plot. The characters in each version are nearly identical in that sea witches are both ruthless. Each version is feared by the merpeople and enters into a contract with whoever wishes. Some of the occurrences in Andersen's version were adopted by Disney, such as giving the little mermaid a liquid substance in exchange for a pair of legs. Ursula is significantly less violent than the sea witch. The sea witch is responsible for more heinous and gruesome acts in Andersen, as detailed below;

*'You want to get rid of your fish's tail and have two props instead to go around on just like human beings so that the young prince can fall in love with you and you can have him and an immortal soul! pg. 7*

In this manner, the two sorceresses' level of violence differ but are consistent in each role: the sea witch is driven to aid all merpeople at an immense cost, and Ursula is integral in the role as a power-hungry, ambitious, and manipulative witch.

Finally, to flesh out the protagonist no more, the little mermaid of Andersen's version is popularly known as Ariel in Disney's version. Both characters are the sea-youngest king's daughters. The strongest desires and most persistent in achieving it, are to wonder how life would be and to be a part of the surface. These characters go in the same events of the

<sup>10</sup> This article claims and points out Prince Eric's bad personalities which one of them are mentioned above.

story that shaped the protagonist's character. The little mermaid and Ariel went through rescuing and being captivated by the prince, as well as sacrificial events to achieve their desire.

Both protagonists' transformation from mermaid to human represents a significant change throughout the character's identity, as this character is being transformed from one being to another, and to do so, Ariel must abandon everything that defined oneself before meeting the prince.

As a whole, the interpretation of the aforementioned in the characters' similarities noted earlier shows that Walt Disney is a rendition of the narrative version of *The Little Mermaid* by Andersen. As a result of Disney fleshing out the characters that are formed from words and ideas and giving these characters an animated life through animation. Going through characters' experiences, Andersen's and Disney's characters share the same motives and roles. The solely textual narrative of New Criticism adjacent to the characterization of characters is in no way related to outside sources but rather examines the specific central point as well as the main focus of this characterization phase which is emphasized on the similarities of each character.

Table 4  
Characterization analysis on differences

Characters	Fiction	Movie
Sea King	passive	Fatherly
	indifferent	Strict
Sisters	sacrificial	Passive
	loving	
Prince	obedient	pertinacious
		brave
Sea-witch	vicious sorceress	Manipulative witch
		Power-hungry
		ambitious
Little Mermaid	Curious	Adventurous
	Patient	Rebellious
	Kind	

Characters present in Disney films revolve much more around the human world than the merfolk, who are much more dominant in Andersen's narrative version. As a direct consequence of this, other involving characters such as the grandmother, the "daughters of the air," the neighborhood kingdom princess, and the prince's parents in Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* are excluded in the comparison, as well as Disney's side characters.

The Sea-king appeared unnamed; Disney portrays it as King Triton. Disney based the character on a Greek god of the sea name, who is the son of Poseidon and dwells in a palace under the sea as supported in the article *The Little Mermaid Explained: A Mythological Analysis*. The sea-king is barely mentioned in Andersen's story, which leads to the conclusion that he is a minor character and a passive father.<sup>11</sup>

"...one night, far out, she saw her old grandmother, who had not been up to the surface of the sea for many years, and the sea-king with his crown on his head – they stretched their arms out towards her but did not dare come as close to the shore as her sisters did." pg. 9

<sup>11</sup> This article discusses *The Little Mermaid's* Greek mythology-mythological creature inspired characters.

Amidst the circumstances, Disney is able to give King Triton's character much screen time to give more details to this character of Ariel's loving, strict, and fatherly. Clear evidence of it is the following line illustrated below,

*KING TRITON: They are dangerous. Do you think I want to see my youngest daughter snared by a fish-eater's hook?*

*ARIEL: I'm 16 years old. I'm not a child anymore.*

*KING TRITON: Don't you take that tone of voice with me, young lady! As long as you live under my ocean, you'll obey my rules! (12:50)*

In contrast to the sea-king, the mersisters are passive and appear briefer in the movie than in the narrative story, whereas the mersisters are the ones who drive out the little mermaid's desire to visit the surface. However, for unknown reasons, Disney did not include the fifteenth birthday event where they visit the surface, and the mersisters only made two appearances in the movie.

Another character that stirs up the little mermaid's interest in living in the land and achieving the immortal soul is the prince. The little mermaid's yearning and curiosity provide plausible justification for the mermaid's interest in him, unlike in Disney which depicted love at first sight. Andersen's version of the prince's relationship with the little mermaid appeared to be a one-sided obsession. Since the prince appeared to be a more obedient prince to Highness's parents, the prince abided to see the neighboring king's daughter,

"...and you resemble a young girl I once saw but will surely never find again..." pg. 9

Antithetical, Prince Eric has remembered Ariel's voice which would make it easier to find the owner of that voice and resist falling in love with other maidens,

*PRING ERIC: That voice. I can't get it out of my head. I've looked everywhere, Max. Where could she be? (26:00)*

In contrast to Disney's Prince Eric, who appears to possess a pertinacious personality and is said to have a stronger bond with Ariel, clear evidence shows Ariel effortlessly gets Prince Eric attached during the Disney movie where Sebastian sings the lyrics of "*Kiss The Girl*." As Grimsby enticed Eric to overlook the one who had saved the prince and turn toward the maiden who had been with Eric "right before his eyes." On top of that, Eric possesses a braver character than Andersen's prince in the shipwreck caused by a storm, where Prince Eric swims back to the ship to save a dog, as well as taking the heroic stance of saving Ariel, by killing Ursula.<sup>12</sup>

The antagonist thus does the job of making it more difficult for the main character to achieve the goal. However, the sea witch described in Andersen's version does not appear to be particularly wicked. The sea witch simply grants the little mermaid's wish, only at a brutal and gore price.

*'You have the loveliest voice of all those here on the sea-bed, and you count on entrancing him with it, but that voice you must give to me. I must have the best thing you own for my precious drink!'* pg.7

As mentioned by the sea witch the result of drinking the feels

<sup>12</sup> *The Little Mermaid* movie, time stamp 59:40.

like being poked with a “two-edge sword” and that walking feels like “steeping on knives.” Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* darker and more brutal than Disney's version. To be concise, the sea witch appears to be more brutal by cutting off the little mermaid's tongue rather than Ursula by magically taking Ariel's voice. However, Disney's Sea witch has a clear characteristic of a villainous *cecaelia*, which means a half-human, half-octopus. Ursula's contracts are subtly designed to advance Ursula's own ambitions while causing general pain and suffering to the grantees.

On top of that, Ursula to further impede Ariel and Eric's relationship and successfully take advantage of Ariel's contract, Ursula decided to take the appearance of a young maiden named Vanessa that Prince Eric is engaged to suddenly. Whereas, in Andersen's plot, it happened to be a neighboring country's princess to whom the prince would be wedded.

*URSULA: Well, it's time Ursula took matters into her own tentacles. (1:02:25)*

The most important character in the story, the little mermaid, for whom the title is named after. Andersen's little mermaid remained nameless, whereas Disney named this character Ariel. Andersen's little mermaid patiently waits for the fifteenth birthday to arrive.

*“I know that I will grow really fond of the world above us and of the people who build and live up there!” At last, she reached the age of fifteen.” pg. 3*

In contrast, Ariel made clear that being sixteen years old is old enough to decide on one's own. Despite being rebellious, and stubborn Ariel, is popular and easily loved by the audience.

Little mermaid aspires to possess a human soul that lives eternally after death by obtaining the prince's hand in marriage, not just to visit the land as the mersisters do. The overarching message is that Andersen's little mermaid's love for the prince is almost never intimate, but rather a hint at achieving an immortal soul. As a result, the ethereal beings give a long-term reward for the act of kindness.

*“...have lifted yourself up to the realm of the spirits of the air, now through good deeds you can create for yourself an immortal soul in three hundred years' time” pg. 11*

Andersen's Little Mermaid has a bittersweet ending, but nevertheless, the attainment of a man's love is often not a course to eternal life and achieving the little mermaid's goals.

In contrast, Ariel consistently defies King Triton's orders in order to satisfy Ariel's selfish desire to be with Prince Eric. Ariel let the desires take precedence and selfishly wanted the goals to be met in whatever way needed to be met without considering how it would affect others or the consequences of the decisions that were made. Despite the character's flaws, Ariel is able to grasp the ultimate dream and live happily ever after when King Triton decides to permanently transform Ariel into a human using the power of the trident. The notion of Ariel's accuracy as an identity in Disney's film is limited to romance and marriage.

The psychological aspect of the character's motive and the actions related to the dilemma of particular circumstances in one's own respective parts are central to answering the question of why and how the plot of the original story and the film adaptation differ. Seeing as Andersen's characters were likely representations of the moral pursuits prominent during Andersen's time — godhood and heavenliness — the absence of these characters in each version is due to the fact that Disney's characters showed a more chaotic and joyful atmosphere.

The modifications are likely the effect of Disney's "Disneyfication" method, which makes even the most mundane individuals, while Andersen's tales are far darker and more dramatic in tone. Disney had to make some changes to the original tale in order to turn it into a fairy tale that reaches its target audience. In perceiving the characterization of structured development by utilizing Structuralism, the research detects the particular notion that people's behavior can be impelled by familial, social, cultural, and psychological structures, which are conceived in the differences between Andersen and Walt Disney's versions.<sup>13</sup>

#### Imagery:

The table below contains data used to determine the similarities and differences between Andersen's and Disney's imagery in *The Little Mermaid*.

Table 5  
Imagery analysis on similarities and differences

Plot Structure	Similarities		Differences	
	Fiction	Movie	Fiction	Movie
Exposition	underwater palace		gardens and a statue	secret grotto of collection
	jewelry and decorations		mermaid's image	ariel's image
Rising Action	party on ship		kiss	Ariel sings
	rescue		quiet withdrawal	glimpse of Ariel
	underwater den		transformation	Lagoon
	contract		painful experience	Venesa's appearance
Climax	second meeting		incoming death	Ursula's empowerment
	human transformation		mersisters appearance	Prince Eric and Ursula's fight
	ship at sea		knife to murder	ship as a weapon
Falling Action	sea and seafoam		beautiful air spirits	King Triton and Sebastian presence
			bird's-eye view	sunset
	celebration		Prince's wedding to princess	Second Ariel's human transformation
Denouement	wedding		became air spirit	Ariel and Prince Eric's wedding
			immortal soul explanation	celebration

<sup>13</sup> Sardarsdóttir, E. H. (2015). Happily Ever After The Disneyfication of H.C. Andersen's "The Little Mermaid."



The data presented in the table below is gathered through reading the original story of *The Little Mermaid* and watching the Disney movie based on it. Comparisons are drawn between parts of the story and the equivalents in the movie. The original fiction and the movie differ more significantly towards the end, and therefore comparisons are drawn between parts that are in the same positions in terms of plot structure due to many events not being shared between the fiction and the movie.

In the exposition phase of the plot, both the story and the movie open with the little mermaid being under the sea in the underwater palace of one's own royal family. This is the part where the story and the movie share many similarities. In both versions, the royal family of merpeople, with the little mermaid being one of the several princesses, live in an underwater palace of elaborate design and visual beauty. In the story, however, Andersen made a point of making imagery of how the mermaid princesses keep one's own gardens, as described as follows:

*"Outside the palace there was a large garden with bright-red and dark-blue trees, with fruit that shone like gold and flowers that blazed like fire in the constantly moving stems and leaves. The earth itself was the finest sand, but blue as a flare of sulphur..."* pg.1

*"...but the youngest princess made hers completely round like the sun, and only had flowers that shone red like it did..."* pg.1

How the little mermaid alone chose to keep only flowers the color of the sun, as well as a statue of a human. Unlike the original fiction, which paints the little mermaid as a quiet and strange young lady, the movie makes Ariel sing "*Part of Your World*" in the secret grotto and shows the collected items, remarkable things taken from stranded ships. However, it is clearly stated in Andersen's tale that the mermaid keeps those items as written;

*"...and while the other sisters added the most remarkable things they had taken from stranded ships as decoration, all she wanted to have, apart from the rose-red flowers that resembled the sun high up above, was a beautiful marble statue, it was of a fine-looking lad, carved out of clear white stone and left on the seabed after a ship had foundered..."* pg.1

During the rising action of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, the little mermaid witnesses a celebration at sea followed by a storm hitting the human ship with violent ferocity. The little mermaid then dives through what is described to be a gloomy and extremely dangerous scene of shipwrecking to save the prince who fell into the sea. In the movie, a similar string of events happened with Ariel, and similarly, the images of the scene were characterized by a violent storm, a darkened environment, and the splintering of the wrecked ship. The two versions differ slightly, however, after the prince is rescued and sent ashore. In Andersen's written version, the little mermaid kisses and touches the unconscious prince as stated;

*"...the mermaid kissed his lovely high forehead and stroked back his wet hair; to her he looked like the marble statue down in her little garden, she kissed him again, and wished for him to be allowed to live."* pg. 4

Dissimilarly, Ariel in the movie sings to the prince before diving back into the sea under the morning sun. Following that,

the story and the fiction similarly had the little mermaid going into the dark and twisted den of the sea witch to make a contract for the ability to go on land and meet the prince a second time.

The climax of the Disney version differs completely from Andersen's. The movie's climax involved Ariel and the prince engaging Ursula, the sea witch, in combat, and the sea witch quickly enlarges under a storming dark sky. The prince in the movie runs a damaged ship through waves to ram the giant sea witch, defeating Ursula. In the original fiction, no combat happened, and the prince is engaged to another princess. It is at this point that Andersen gave a detailed account of the prince's engagement, with the imagery describing the lavishness of the ritual. The little mermaid's sisters told the little mermaid to trade the prince's life for her own, but she refused and threw the knife away.

The falling action of both versions continues to be different. The movie ended on a happy note with a warm-colored sun above the sea. The lovers reunite, and the Sea King and Sebastian observe with approval. In the original story, Andersen's imagery describes the sun merely as being "bright", without a clear tonal color such as warm orange, as it did in the movie. The focus of imagery, instead, is put on the beauty of the air spirits, and how the little mermaid then saw the world from their perspective.

The denouements of the novel and the movie still differ, imagery-wise and story-wise. With the little mermaid in the air and becoming a beautiful and divine air spirit at this point, the story tells of one of the daughters of the air now-sisters explaining to little mermaid how the chance of earning the immortal soul work, and the same imagery continues from the previous part. In the movie, instead, the image consists of a happy and royal wedding between Ariel and the prince, with most of the characters appearing for the celebration. Additionally, the sun provides a notion of the mermaid's new identity and purpose. As the sun rises, one's destiny also commences:

*"Now the sun rose out of the sea. Its rays fell so gently and warmly on the deathly cold sea-foam and the little mermaid did not feel death, she saw the bright sun, and up above her there floated hundreds of transparent, lovely creatures"* pg. 11

It parallels Disney's Ariel's symbolism of the sun as its rays gently touch Eric's face when the prince awakens from the ship's wreckage, evidently in the lyrics:

*"Where would we walk, where would we run, if we could stay all day in the sun, just you and me, and I could be part of your world."* (25:00)

The first cause of the differences in imagery is the differences in plot and characters. The Disney version of the little mermaid Ariel is significantly more active than the original written depiction. To adjust for this, Ariel is portrayed with brighter colors and more motions in the film than in the original story. During the climax of the story, the film portrayed a gloomy and stormy environment, with roaring waves at sea and a now-gigantic sea witch ready to raise havoc, while in the story, there is only a distant ceremony and the tranquil sea. This change took place to fit the mood of the respective plots of both versions, as the plot of the film chose action over inner struggle

as the main event of the climax.

The changes in imagery also reflected how moral standards changed between times and societies. In the original story, the prince is described as being younger "Among them was a young prince... sixteen years of age", while in the film, prince's image is clearly that of a young adult. This dissimilarity reflects the changes in both moral standards and aesthetic standards, as a 16-year-old person would have been considered suitable for marriage in the 19th century, while many modern societies would consider this age too young to be romantically attractive. The air spirits from the original fiction, who were also completely absent from the film, were likely representations of the moral pursuits prevalent during Andersen's time: godliness and closeness to the heavens. The absence of the daughters of air from the film is the result of the film abandoning these spiritual ideals in favor of a more secular pursuit of personal happiness in life. A similar comparison can be drawn between the celebrations in the film and in the original fiction. The prince's engagement was very formal and reflected the expectations for nobility in the 19th century, while the celebration at the end of Disney's film is very chaotic and cheerful, like a modern party.

Some changes in imagery are also results of the audience's changing standards of beauty. The original fiction described the sea king's underwater palace as a castle with "Gothic windows." This minor detail is absent from the film. In modern days, the Gothic style of architecture is widely associated with historical buildings such as cathedrals, but not with comfortable homes for families. Instead, the film portrayed the underwater palace with bright, varying colors, polished surfaces, and small decorations such as mirrors. These traits help modern viewers relate to the family of Merfolk more than a Gothic building does. Similarly, a knife served as an important plot device in the original fiction, representing a plan to murder the prince in order to save the little mermaid. This element of imagery is completely absent in the film, partially because it would not have fit into the plot but also because modern viewers would not consider a knife as an implication of murder to be family-friendly. The songs and dances in the film were complete works of modern production, as it means very little to readers of a printed story but are an excellent and engaging way for characters to express the characters in an active way.<sup>14</sup>

New Criticism theory requires that these elements of imagery be reviewed in isolation for the functions in artistic expression. The structuralist view asserts that these components of imagery from the original story and from the film are influenced by the cultural environment from which it came and together should form different holistic expressions that not only carry cultural significance but also represent the human lives behind the respective creation.

#### 4. Summary of Findings

- 1) The parallels between Andersen's and Disney's The Little Mermaid plot include the motivations, desires, idealized vision of marriage as a happy conclusion, and the mermaids'

sacrificial nature and suffering. The distinctions between the film and narrative versions include the scenes of Little Mermaid's goals- immortality vs. matrimony, matriarchy vs. patriarchy, Andersen's mermaid's transcendence, and Disney Ariel's subservience.

- 2) Andersen and Disney's characters are quite similar, but Disney fleshed out to come to life through animation, while Andersen's characters are made up of words. "Disneyfication" method led to the changes. Disney lightens Andersen's narrative by adding music and humor removing the characters' despair, suffering, cruelty, and loss.
- 3) There are many parallels between the images of Andersen's and Disney's The Little Mermaid. However, there are also many differences, which are the result of changes to the plot and characters, differences in moral standards between different eras and societies, and differing ideals of beauty among other audiences.

#### 5. Conclusion

Hans Christian Andersen and Walt Disney's The Little Mermaid present similarities and differences in the plot, characterization, and imagery. While many similarities remained, the differences were present due to the two versions of the same story being in different forms of media, made for different audiences from different societies in different periods of time, conveying different morals and values.

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<sup>14</sup> The story is transformed from gothic to family friendly.

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