

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

2004

Illusions of idle prattle: Disney, voice and The Little Mermaid

Veronica Diaz-Cox

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Diaz-Cox, Veronica, "Illusions of idle prattle: Disney, voice and The Little Mermaid" (2004). *Theses Digitization Project*. 4336.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/4336>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

ILLUSIONS OF IDLE PRATTLE:
DISNEY, VOICE AND *THE LITTLE MERMAID*

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Veronica Diaz-Cox

June 2004

ILLUSIONS OF IDLE PRATTLE:
DISNEY, VOICE AND *THE LITTLE MERMAID*

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Veronica Diaz-Cox

June 2004

Approved by:


Cindy Cotter, First Reader


Jennifer Andersen, Second Reader

May 26, 2004
Date

ABSTRACT

By analyzing Walt Disney's animated film *The Little Mermaid* this project identifies the illusions gendered lyrics in the film provide for young viewers. Lyrics from *Poor Unfortunate Souls* and *Part of Your World* are examined to determine the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes within the context of these songs, focusing particular attention to voice, gender issues regarding silence, and marketing tactics directed toward children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Eulogio and Amparo Diaz, for their love, support and understanding. Without them I would not have been able to persevere in this endeavor. I thank them both sincerely for their encouragement and strength.

I would like to acknowledge my friend Jennifer Money. Words of "thank you" are insufficient and cannot possibly express my gratitude. Her insights, suggestions, and guidance were invaluable to the completion of this project.

Finally, I would like to offer my thanks to all those who were so kind to help me throughout the various stages during the writing of this thesis: Diane Ayres, Rob Begley, Denise Dollard, Jennifer Kirchoff, Mary Alice Rivers, PJ Teel, The BBG'S, Pat Wagner and Darryl Wear.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER ONE: STATUS IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM	1
CHAPTER TWO: BATTLING BETTELHEIM	16
CHAPTER THREE: WALT DISNEY'S THE LITTLE MERMAID: THE SECRETS OF THE VORTEX	31
CHAPTER FOUR: DISNEY'S GENDERED LYRICS: BEAUTY, BLABBER OR BRAINS	49
CHAPTER FIVE: MARKETING THE MAGIC OF A PRINCESS	62
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION: SHHH . . . NOW MAKE A WISH	70
APPENDIX A: SONG LYRICS POOR UNFORTUNATE SOULS	76
APPENDIX B: SONG LYRICS PART OF YOUR WORLD	78
REFERENCES	81

CHAPTER ONE

STATUS IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

Children's literature often receives peripheral treatment, since there are some who view "kiddy lit" as negligible in the wider scope of serious literary research. In the same way that feminist criticism has altered the view of the male dominated discourse of literary theory, so too have those who have undertaken to study and define children's literature as a serious scholarly endeavor. There is widespread recognition that the study of children's literature still has serious hurdles to cross before being fully recognized as a legitimate field of academic pursuit. In *The Future of the Profession* Jerry Griswold points out that in the not too distant past those who studied children's literature, "complain[ed] that they ha[d] to defend the legitimacy of their field to their colleagues, that they and their discipline [received] no respect" (Griswold 236). Although Griswold is quick to point out that, "my generation fought those battles [over the academic merit of children's literature] years ago and [...] I'd say we won. Children's literature is now taught by hundreds of universities in their literature departments[...]," he, nonetheless, acknowledges that

scholars of children's literature still have great strides to make in establishing children's literature as a thoroughly rounded field of study: "Children's Literature is a genre maintained, by a circle of scholars[...] the profession constitutes a kind of closed club, and . . . in talking about Children's Literature we are only often talking to ourselves and our protégés" (Griswold 237). Other scholars of children's literature take a more aggressive approach in their analysis of children's literature's progress towards becoming a legitimate field of academic research. Feminist critics of children's literature have cogently argued that, "the proximity of children's literature to the domestic, nurturing, maternal, and thus, the feminine sphere can be seen as a contributing factor in the marginalization of the subject in academic discourses" (Thacker, *Feminine Language* 3).

Historically, fairy tales have not always been marginalized as a distinct sub-genre of children's literature. In the nineteenth century Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm strove to capture the authentic voice of the common people, while Charles Perrault sought to please an aristocratic audience. The Grimm Brothers' goal in collecting, transcribing, and publishing folk tales was to

preserve German culture. Moreover, "Theirs was an idealistic effort to capture German folk traditions in print [...] and to make a modest contribution to the history of German poetry" (Tatar 11-189). As a member of the French Court of Versailles, Charles Perrault aimed to expand upon oral and literary tales as a means of mapping out proper social behavior for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie in French salons (Zipes, *Breaking the Spell* 23). Perrault's *Histoires ou Contes de Temps Passé* also served to civilize children and prepare them for idealistic social roles, which he believed they should play in society (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 14). Many authors, including Perrault and Grimms had a devoted adult reading audience employing the tale to engage in an ongoing institutionalized discourse about mores and manners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 16).

Despite recent scholarship debating the academic merit of children's literature, this is not a new frontier. A number of changes have occurred in children's literature during the past thirty years. At one time, children's literature was the domain of librarians, bibliographer and historians; today the study of children's literature has become a legitimate field of interest in both undergraduate

and post-graduate programs, literature departments and cultural studies (Thacker *Feminine Language* 3). Children's literature has long struggled to reach the surface of mainstream academia. Fairy tale scholars, most notably Bruno Bettelheim and Jack Zipes, have successfully pioneered the field of children's literature to "bridge the seriousness gap" (Thacker, *Disdain* 1). Literary theorists' turn to children's texts have raised the scholarly stakes in regards to the merits of children's literature, but as Deborah Thacker argues, "While critics of children's literature use theory to argue the case for children's literature, theoreticians in general seem slow to use children's literature, despite its relevance" (Thacker, *Disdain* 1). In our culture of media over-saturation, children's literature must be examined, alongside literary theory, in order to understand how media culture uses children's literature to instill in children, and even adults, ideological values concerning gender and consumerism. In other words, for many Disney consumers the criterion of children's literature is defined as Walt Disney's fairy tale films. Contemporary American children's first contact with fairy tales is more often than not through a Disney film. Films such as *Cinderella* and

Sleeping Beauty are marketed as Disney "masterpieces" and as "classic" Disney fairy tales. As a result, the Disney Corporation has defined children's film, and by extension, children's literature, for the past sixty years. Surprisingly, little work has been done on the cultural influence of Disney. The scholarly work that has been done on Disney has tangentially touched on the factors of Disney's material production, such as the marketing of books and other products under the Disney name; yet; little work has been done on the interdependent relationship between Disney's material production and the implications for sex-gender roles in the content of Disney films. The fairy tale and its cinematic adaptations have created enduring gender specific stereotypes that have influenced the gender socialization of American children. An examination of gender portrayal in Disney's adaptation of the traditional fairy tale is particularly relevant since a little girl can not only dream about being Cinderella, but she can also continue the dream as an adult by being married in Cinderella's Castle at Disney World.¹ The cultural implications of such commercial enterprises launch Disney's heroine into mythic proportions, while solidifying gender role expectations for girls. By way of romance and

marriage, girls interpret Cinderella's story as representative of a normal and natural cultural eventuality.

Before an analysis of Disney's representation for gender/sex roles can be undertaken, an important question must be first asked and then answered: are children harmed by the male and female stereotypes developed in traditional literature? The problem is that children begin believing fairy tale heroines who are submissive are displaying acceptable gender specific behavior for women. While some critics mistakenly argue that Disney's animated films are too superficial to impart any significant meaning to audiences; the sex-gender system typified in Disney films has the potential to influence a child's developing sense of gender identity for two distinct reasons. First, if Disney's representation of traditional gender stereotypes remains uncorrected, then it contributes to the validation and continuance of socially inequitable subject positions for boys and, primarily, for girls. Second, the strict binary model of Disney's sex/gender roles reinforces "normative" gender behavior and discourages violating established gender appropriate behavior: those characters which act outside prescribed gender roles are labeled as

"deviant." Disney typically showcases gender deviance in their films in order to demonstrate how "bad" a character is in relation to "good" characters. In Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, the contrasting representation of Ursula's obese octopus body and ruthless quest for power over Triton and his kingdom is set in dramatic contrast to the slim and lithe bodies of the mer-people. The characterization of Ursula's body and behavior marks her simultaneously as bad and as masculine, and her inappropriate "masculine" quest for power represents a semiotic of her "deviant" moral character. Subsequent Disney films depicting female heroines such as *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998), have been praised for their characterizations of females that are not only beautiful but also intelligent and independent. The characterizations of Pocahontas and Mulan certainly reflect change, since they exhibit strong problem-solving abilities and action on a more equal footing with their male counterparts (Hoerrner 225). Critics were quick to point out and correctly so, that, although Belle, Pocahontas and Mulan are characterized as fiercely independent, they nonetheless fall victim to the one major source of gender stereotype: Disney's standard plot resolution of marriage and

submission. Embedded in these films is an understanding that marriage ultimately looms in the future of these heroines. Belle marries a prince who has exhibited an abusive nature; Pocahontas is duty bound to marry within her tribe although she loves John Smith. Mulan, although she returns home victorious, reverts back to her role as the dutiful daughter with a suitor and an impending marriage. Recent depictions of heroines like Belle, Pocahontas and Mulan, demonstrate increasing change in Disney fairy tale films, they find love, but it is not necessarily on their own terms.

The aim of this thesis is not merely to provide an analysis of Disney's animated depiction of sex roles, for to rely solely on the theories of sex roles would mean that, "social change must be conceived in individual terms" (Franzway and Lowe 15). Proponents who advocate the need for strong female role models in children's literature and films argue that by being provided with proper role models, girls can be shaped as strong, assertive, and independent individuals, and in this way, they will be able to achieve equality. This argument implies that sexism persists because women, individually, have not been strong enough in the past. History has proven this is not the case:

"Talking about gender relations in terms of roles, internalized expectations, attitudes, and traits directs attention away from larger structures and focuses explanations of inequality on what is going on inside the heads of the subordinated group. It is a classic case of blaming the victim" (Kessler 35). This implies that inequality between men and women is rooted in female personality rather than in capitalist patriarchy, in an individual rather than in a structural establishment. Nevertheless, replacing stereotypical depictions of women and girls with liberated ones is insufficient to overcome the traditional stereotypes of women's subordination. As Franzway and Lowe argue, "locating the source of women's inequality as the point of the acquisition of skills and attitudes fails to recognize the political character of the social relations within which they are acquired; so it leaves unexamined and unchallenged the social/economic institutions which maintain and perpetuate those social relations" (35). Therefore, this thesis will analyze the social and economic aspects of Disney's animated films, specifically Disney's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, in order to understand how

Disney uses social and economic ideologies to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes.

Ultimately, children's films must be examined, "historically, ideologically, theoretically" so that both children and adults can understand and utilize a "language that enables them to understand and thus resist the images before them" (Wojcik-Andrews 52). The aim is not so much in critiquing the wholesome Disney image that today's parents have grown up with and have come to trust, but in teaching children to become educated consumers of the images they see in Disney films. Addressing parents' roles is particularly relevant since, as Zohar Shavit posits in *The Poetics of Children's Literature*, children's literature, and by extension film, tends to have an official, as well as an unofficial, address (68). The "unofficial address" is the adult mediator, who plays a constitutive role in the process of communication of children's literature; without his or her mediation, communication could not take place since the child is not yet able to act independently in the literary market place. The child is dependent on the adult mediator to recognize his/her needs and to select available material accordingly. Adult mediators use their indispensable role in order to exercise control and to

patronize, and as Shavit rightly points out, it is sometimes difficult to recognize the border where assistance turns into regimentation. Complexities occur in the interwoven communication processes of author and adult mediator. The adult mediator is persuaded, usually through strategic marketing and advertising, that the work in question corresponds to his or her conception of a "good" children's book, and that it, therefore, be safely handed on to its actual addressee, the child recipient. Therein lies the problem: American culture has long associated Disney with quality family entertainment for children, and hence does not view it as a threat. A close examination of Disney films, and in particular the song lyrics which accompany these films, reveals an underlying recurring patriarchal motif that maintains the traditional gender hierarchy, with women occupying silent and passive roles and men enacting aggressive and outspoken behaviors.

This model is critical to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale and to Walt Disney's versions of *The Little Mermaid*, since both texts require the silencing of the heroine as a key element of the plot. The parallel between dialogue, silence, and song reveals the ways language is integral in connecting women to archetypal gender

expectations. The literary and film versions perpetuate negative portrayals of women through archetypal motifs of silent, submissive and, therefore, ineffective heroines. In addition to examining the social and economic impact of Disney's gender roles, this thesis will also examine the recurring trope of singing in both Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and Walt Disney's film adaptation. A close reading of the song lyrics in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* is particularly relevant since Disney's main way of "selling" a film and its related consumer products is through the songs. The song lyrics of *Poor Unfortunate Souls* and *Part of Your World* advocate silence as a positive and viable option for girls, because as Disney's *Little Mermaid* demonstrates, those who remain quiet are pleasing and appealing to men. Although one can argue it was Ariel's singing voice that captured Prince Eric's heart, this notion does not hold up under closer scrutiny. For Prince Eric does not fall in love with Ariel the mermaid or Ariel the young woman; he instead falls in love with a disembodied female voice. He can only vaguely recall the face or figure of the voice that haunts him, yet Eric wants the voice which is an only a fantasy of his imagination and desire. For Prince Eric, as long as women

can remain silent, he can control the female body by imposing his fantasy voice. He succeeds with this hope first in Ursula's alter persona, Vanessa, and finally with Ariel. Prince Eric's fascination is in the disembodied woman, which is manifested in Ariel's singing. An analysis of the lyrics specifically calls attention to the grossly exaggerated sexualized characterizations of women. Disney's *The Little Mermaid* continues to perpetuate patriarchal ideologies about women through the animated characterizations of singing, sexuality, and ultimately the commodification of the female body in order to sell the Disney "magic." These are the notions that are the concentration of this inquiry, and this investigation of silence and stereotypes of submissive heroines adheres to the following format.

Chapter 1 is grounded in psychoanalytic, structuralist, feminist theories, and especially hypotheses developed by Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim argues that fairy tales are both educational and therapeutic for children, arguing that no other literary form so effectively teaches children to overcome their inner fears, while stimulating their imaginations. Additionally, this chapter will provide a feminist analysis of the sexist behaviors

inherent in the characterizations of Ariel and Ursula. This chapter also offers a background of Han Christian Andersen's society and how the interpretation of his story undergoes a shift from class to gender roles. This chapter provides evidence of the patriarchal notion that the "ideal woman" is silent, which is integral to a stereotypical concept that has a profound effect on our culture. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of the formulaic message contained in Disney's animated version of *The Little Mermaid*, a patriarchal message that employs characterization and motif not only to broadcast, but also to maintain and to perpetuate the characteristics that serve to confine and restrict women, which has important social significance. Chapter 3 of this thesis provides a discussion centered in the literary context of the songs *Poor Unfortunate Souls* and *Part of Your World*. In addition, it also analyzes the behavioral constructs proscribed by its lyrics and rhetorical devices evidenced in allusions to singing, speech and silence. The subsequent discussion in Chapter 4 identifies the consumer impact, the economic effects and pervasive influence that this stereotypical ideal has on children today.

Hopefully, through an analysis of the meanings and messages contained in Andersen's and Disney's versions of *The Little Mermaid*, girls will one day be able to "read" the negative influence of the hegemonic binary sex/gender system perpetuated by Disney. Perhaps they may learn how media literacy continues in manipulating ideals of femininity by promoting beauty, not intelligence, and silence, while discouraging them from asserting, discovering, creating and asserting the power of their own songs.

NOTES

¹ Disney has had great economic success in the wedding industry. In the FAQ section of Disney's wedding website, it states that, "The Cinderella Wedding is by far the most requested "theme" at Walt Disney World. Bride's can truly become Cinderella for the day as they arrive in Cinderella's Glass Coach and exchange their vows with Cinderella Castle in the background." Fantasies however do not come cheap. In the same section, it states that, "Prices for Disney's Intimate Weddings start at \$3,000. Custom Weddings Require a minimum expenditure of \$10,000 for events Friday through Sunday, or \$7,500 for events Monday through Thursday, excluding tax and gratuity. During the holiday season, a higher minimum may apply. There are also room and food and beverage minimums. Food and beverage, flowers, decor, music, entertainment, photography services, special transportation, spa services, ceremony site fees, and any other services provided by Disney exclusively for the wedding event will apply toward reaching the minimum." See: <http://disneyweddings.disney.go.com/disneyworldweddings/faqs#1>

CHAPTER TWO

BATTLING BETTELHEIM

[Ursula:] Have we got a deal?
[Ariel:] If I become human, I'll never be with my father
or sisters again.
[Ursula:] But you'll have your man. Life's full of tough
choices innit? Oh - and there is one more thing.

Before children's literature became a topic for debate in academia, child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim published *The Uses of Enchantment*, a psychoanalytic study of children's interaction with and comprehension of traditional fairy tales. Building on Freud's theory of children's psychological development, Bettelheim posits that fairy tales help children through various stages of psychological growth. By reading about the heroes and heroines in fairy tales, children learn strategies for dealing with a variety of problems, such as separation anxiety and sibling rivalry. According to Bettelheim, fairy tales prove invaluable for educating and strengthening children, both emotionally and psychologically. His insistence on the educational value of fairy tales lies in an analysis of how children respond to specific fairy tale character types. Bettelheim argues that, "figures in fairy tales are not ambivalent—not good and bad at the same time, as we all are in reality" (9). This lack of ambivalence in

fairy tale character development results in what Bettelheim defines as "polarization" - characters are either all good or all bad "polarized" along an axis of clearly defined appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Given that this polarization of good and bad behavior dominates the child's mind, it also dominates the young child's conceptualization of the fairy tale and its characters: "Juxtaposition of opposite characters is not for the purpose of stressing right behavior [....] The child has a basis for understanding that there are great differences between people, and that therefore one has to make choices about who one wants to be. This basic decision, on which all later personality development will build, is facilitated by the polarizations of the fairy tale" (Bettelheim 9). What proves to be of importance about Bettelheim's theory is the idea that children are not so much concerned with right versus wrong, but are instead likely to identify and respond to those characters who "arouse the child's sympathy:" "[t]he child identifies with the good hero not because of his goodness, but because the hero's condition makes a deep positive appeal to him" (Bettelheim 10). Children do not inquire as to whether or not a fairy tale character is good or bad; instead the child asks himself:

who do I want to be like? It is through this negotiation or struggle that evokes sympathy and identification. Children decide with whom they want to identify by, "projecting themselves wholeheartedly into one character" (Bettelheim 10).

Bettelheim offers a compelling argument, but he does not always succeed in establishing his more challenging points. For instance, Bettelheim does not address the fact that many fairy tales do not end well for many of the heroes and heroines. How then could children, consciously or otherwise, learn to believe in the power of goodness, or even their own power to find resolutions to difficult problems? Further, Bettelheim's theory does not adequately address the characterization of female characters in fairy tales (Bettelheim 10). It is true, Bettelheim does not directly address the issue of gender in his analysis of fairy tales, but his theories, nonetheless, have implications for gendered readings of fairy tales. Critics of Bettelheim, notably Marcia Lieberman and Karen Rowe, argue that fairy tales play a significant role, culturally and socially for young girls in their acquisition of traditional gender roles. Those fairy tale heroines characterized as "good," are more often than not depicted

as engaging in behavior that "glorif[ies] passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice" (Rowe 210). Lieberman argues that this type of submissive behavior on the part of the heroine is always rewarded, usually with marriage. This expectation of submissive behavior and marriage in fairy tales serves to acculturate young girls to traditional gender roles and behavior (Lieberman 185). Lieberman and Rowe both effectively argue that the submissive heroine of the traditional fairy tale, who is rewarded with the formulaic marriage at the end of the story, is a major factor in a child's developing comprehension of expected gender roles and behaviors, particularly for girls who learn that silent and submissive behaviors are essential to be considered both "good" and marriageable (Lieberman 185-200). Although Lieberman disagrees with arguments that maintain fairy tales do not perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, scholars continue to ponder Bettelheim's assertion that female characters in traditional fairy tales are developed through binary or polarized character development and behavior.

In the fairy tale tradition, there is a wide spectrum of "polarized" female characters—those that are either categorically good or bad. Lieberman argues that submissive

and silent behavior is defined as "good" while vocal and independent behavior is defined as "bad." This binary opposition can be problematic when analyzing the role of women in fairy tales because it results in a misinterpretation of gender roles. Just because a woman chooses to be independent does not necessarily make her evil or bad. Nevertheless, young girls learn from reading and watching their favorite fairy tales that independent heroines are few. Psychological studies have demonstrated that silence, as opposed to vocalization, is still a preferred behavior for girls and women. Carol Gilligan has found that young girls often demonstrate strategies of silence, willingly suppressing their voices to disguise their discontent. In addition, silence has been defined as one of the "ways of knowing" that women routinely employ. The authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, argue that silence is not only perceived as a lack of vocalization, but is also perceived as being intellectually voiceless (Belenky et al). That is women who are "silent" define themselves as being incapable of receiving or retaining knowledge. The authors conclude that as a result of this silence, such women can become subject to the control of those around them. Such

traditional gender behavior has its roots, at least in part, while young girls are reading or watching fairy tales.

In addition to addressing Bettelheim's limited treatment of polarized gender characterizations in fairy tales, it is also important to note that Bettelheim bases his theory on a study of *traditional* fairy tales, as opposed to the *literary* fairy tales, like those of Hans Christian Andersen: "Andersen's tales were not, like those of the Brothers Grimm, which revived the taste for folk stories, but original creations derived from the folk genre" (Easterlin 266). Andersen also purposely introduced "adult themes and modern ambiguities into tales essentially childlike in their simplicity, naiveté, and humor" (Easterlin 266). Jack Zipes and Laura Sells have convincingly argued that the ambiguities in Andersen's tales are a result of Andersen's ambiguous status in Danish society. Social position was paradoxical for Andersen, resulting in his ambivalent feelings toward class distinction. Few artists born into families with little or no class status were admitted into the inner circles of the upper classes, and the exceptions like Andersen were often reminded of their low birth and obliged to act as dominated

subjects (Zipes 77). Laura Sells argues that *The Little Mermaid* can be read as Andersen's painful expression of class-consciousness in his entrance into and patronage from aristocratic circles (177). The ambiguities in *The Little Mermaid* are also indicative of Andersen's uncertainty about his social status in Danish society. An analysis of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* reveals several of these ambiguities and unclear factors. Structurally, traditional fairy tales conclude with a happy ending that occurs as a result of an evil witch's destruction, or which leads to the heroine marrying the prince and ultimately overcoming the villainous intentions of the witch; however, this is not the case in Andersen's story (Cashdan 162). Andersen's mermaid and sea witch clearly do not adhere to the traditional roles typically assigned to such stock characters in traditional fairy tales. The characterization of the little mermaid and the sea witch stand out in stark contrast to the traditional fairy tale. Andersen's story lacks a happy ending, the heroine dies at the end and the sea witch tries to dissuade the mermaid from changing into a human being. Andersen characterizes the sea witch by her physical loathsomeness and malevolence, yet she warns the mermaid that the desire to be human is unwise (Andersen

69). Moreover, the witch explains to the little mermaid that once she becomes human, she will never be able to be a mermaid again. At the end of the story, it becomes apparent that the sea witch has amended her previous warning. The mermaid's older sisters go to the sea witch and sell their hair for a sword with the hope that their younger sister will use it to kill the prince and his bride and thus return once again to the sea. Andersen's witch is physically frightening and brutal, yet Andersen is ambiguous in her characterization. The witch looks like the archetypal witch, but certainly does not act like the archetypal fairy tale witch. Instead, the sea witch fulfills a more maternal role, characterized by her repeated warnings and the second chance she gives to the little mermaid.

At the end of *The Little Mermaid*, Andersen's witch goes unharmed, and the little mermaid dies with unfulfilled dreams of marrying the prince. There are also additional ambiguities in the characterization of the sea witch. The little mermaid simultaneously fears and respects the sea witch. The sea witch lives in, "a great, slimy, open place in the middle of the forest. Big fat eels played in the mud, showing their ugly yellow stomachs. Here the witch

had built her house out of the bones of drowned sailors" (Andersen 68). Andersen clearly depicts the domain of the sea witch as dark and terrifying. This is the type of environment that is typically associated with witches and is usually metonymic of a witch's inherent evil nature. Once the little mermaid approaches the sea witch, the sea witch cautions the little mermaid in an oddly maternal manner: "I know what you want [and] it is very stupid of you, but you shall have your wish, and it will bring you to misery, my little princess" (Andersen 69). The sea witch even gives the little mermaid a second chance to reconsider her desire to become a human, obviously explaining to her in a non-threatening manner the consequences of her actions:

"But remember," screeched the witch, "for once you have a human body you can never become a mermaid. Never again shall you swim through the waters with your sisters to your father's castle. If you cannot make the prince fall so much in love with you that he forgets both his father and mother, because his every thought concerns only you, and he orders the priest to take his right hand and place it in yours, so that you become man and wife; then the first morning after he has married another, your heart will break, and you will become foam on the ocean." (Andersen 69)

The sea witch's admonition is reminiscent of the little mermaid's grandmother's advice to her before she swims to the surface of the ocean on her birthday:

"Let me dress you, just as I dressed your sisters."
She put a wreath of white lilies around her hair; each of the petals of every flower was half a pearl. She let eight oysters clip themselves onto the little mermaid's tail, so that everyone could see that she was a princess. "It hurts" said the little mermaid. "One has to suffer for position" said her old grandmother. The little mermaid would gladly have exchanged her heavy pearl wreath for one of the red flowers from the garden (she thought they suited her much better) but she did not dare. (Andersen 61)

Both the grandmother and the sea-witch are instrumental in providing advice to the little mermaid during important transitions in her life. Both characters clearly define and explain the significance of pain to the psychological and physical transitions that the little mermaid must undergo. In addition, the little mermaid turns to both the sea witch and her grandmother for advice: she questions her grandmother about the mortality of human beings and asks the sea witch how she can attract the prince without her voice. Given that the sea witch lives as a social outcast exiled to the dark boundaries of Triton's kingdom, she shares certain characteristics with the stereotypical good and protective grandmother. This correspondence in character development supports the ambiguous nature of Andersen's literary fairy tale.

In producing the film version of *The Little Mermaid*, the Walt Disney Corporation chose to eliminate the

ambiguity of Andersen's tale and instead depict animated characters that were distinctly polarized as "good" and "bad." More often than not, these polarizations are reinforced through depictions of traditional gender roles. Disney's *The Little Mermaid* now invites a gendered analysis rather than a reading of class and social acceptance in aristocratic circles that Andersen's tale once offered (Sells 177). Today, Disney's influence on popular culture is partially responsible for the interpretative shift of Andersen's story, a shift from class to issues of gender and sexuality. If fairy tales are "chameleon-like," as Sells suggests, "the colors of its background, 'living and shaping itself' to adapt to the requirements of the moment, then Disney's contemporary version has shifted colors from class to gender privilege" (177). The underlying theme to Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* is one of class; however, the concept of class in today's age carries less importance and is certainly more fluid in definition. Disney has appropriated Andersen's story and metamorphosed the issue of class into one of sexuality. This is not a necessarily a conscious choice on Disney's part, but the issue of sexuality has come to take the place of class in terms of social awareness and anxiety. The emphasis that Disney

places on sexuality in *The Little Mermaid* is apparent in the characters' signature songs and this proves to be engaging to children, Disney uses songs to interest children to identify with the movie's characters and, ultimately, appealing to children into wanting the material goods that accompany the characters and their respective songs. The sexualized singing and animated characterization of the characters in *The Little Mermaid* provides an easier platform from which to sell their consumer goods to children and their parents.

This combination of charming animation and music is a proven Disney formula and has been in use since Disney produced its first feature length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This film captivated movie audiences in 1937 with a highly sophisticated animation style that placed emphasis on aesthetically beautiful life-like images and a delightful musical score. At this time, these achievements in animation were unprecedented. Walt Disney developed the method of using a "multiplane camera to capture the live-action depictions that he desired, the depth of the scenes, and close-ups" (Zipes, *Breaking the Disney Spell* 40). Disney animators and researchers experimented with colored gels, and blurred focus, and

filmed through frosted glass in order to accentuate facial expressions and movements. Today, this legacy of Disney animation continues with every new Disney animated film released. The advancements in the animation process are surpassed in every film: *The Lion King* (1994), *Toy Story* (1999), and *Ice Age* (2002) are proof of Disney's continuing growth as an innovator in animation technology. The result is a beautifully crafted, technologically sophisticated artistic film that continually sets the standard higher for animation and the film industry (Zipes, *Breaking the Disney Spell* 21-41). As a result of Disney's emphasis on technological advancement, the story in Disney's films is driven by the state of the art animation and the story itself is simply secondary. Unlike the folktale tradition, the story itself is not important, but is instead a vehicle for showcasing Disney's animation skill. Illustrations and placement of cell sequences serve to create a seamless quality of realism and depth. The characters are illustrated and "fleshed out" unlike the more common and conventional flat appearance of cartoon characterizations (Zipes 40). The emphasis is on an attention to detail in the illustrations, manipulation of movement, and frame orchestration, leading from one event to another.

Bettelheim bases his theory on the oldest and most faithful versions of the oral tradition and although Andersen's tale does not come from the oral tradition Bettelheim would have applauded Andersen's story for its symbolic presentation of reality. Bettelheim posits, explicitly graphic details are necessary for children in their struggle for meaning and understanding in the world. At the same time, Bettelheim would be appalled by the Disneyfication of the fairy tale tradition, since Disney's revisions invite gendered interpretations thereby changing the form and meaning of the fairy tale.

On one level, Disney changed the way movie audiences view animated films, but on another level, Disney also influenced the ways in which society perceives romantic relationships and the appropriate behavior for men and women engaged in such relationships. Disney films often portray their female heroines as ultimately submissive to their male counterparts. More often than not, it is the song lyrics that best embody this gendered characterization. These song lyrics in modern Disney films do not adequately reflect American society today, but rather the often-patriarchal social climate of the 1930s. Within the past forty years, American sensibilities have

changed, particularly concerning the roles for women. Hence, the representation of young girls and women conducting themselves in silent and submissive ways, although commonplace in the 1930s, are no longer acceptable or appropriate for children or adults.

CHAPTER THREE

WALT DISNEY'S THE LITTLE MERMAID:

THE SECRETS OF THE VORTEX

We haven't discussed the subject of payment.

[Ariel:] But I don't have any -

[Ursula:] I'm not asking much. Just a token, really, a trifle. What I want from you is . . . your voice.

[Ariel:] But without my voice, how can I -

The Little Mermaid is encoded as a text of gender and patriarchal instruction not only through its retelling of Andersen's story, but also through animation. As a result of Disney's long association in creating cartoon characters in animated feature films, there are those who believe Disney's animations exemplify beautifully crafted, celluloid images. What these observers fail to see beneath the beauty are the sexualized drawings, and as a result, sexualized characterizations of Disney's heroines. As Gilligan points out, Disney artists were predominately men and Ariel's image, like other Disney heroines, "is grounded in the psychology of men constructed from the animators' notion of how "the perfect girl" should appear (Gilligan 33). In other words, the animators who sketched the classic Disney princess heroines, such as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, in the palest of blues, yellows and lavenders were

men. At the time *The Little Mermaid* was produced, the lovely pastels of pale yellow, pink and light blue were replaced. Ariel's color scheme consists of bolder primary colors that vividly and immediately focus attention on the shape and voluptuousness of her physical attributes.

From her head to her hips, Ariel's body construction is an objectified image of physical perfection and budding sexuality. Disney artists sketched the sixteen-year-old Ariel with large wide-set blue eyes, an upturned nose, with excessive bangs and long auburn tresses (Bell 110). She is outfitted in a flirty strapless clamshell bra that hints at a well-defined cleavage. Ariel's décolleté is unencumbered by straps and, however subtle; the teenage mermaid seems to be endowed with a healthy bust line that seems rather provocative for a sixteen-year-old teen. At the widest part of her hips, Ariel is adorned with a flowing hip hugging transparent sheath, accentuating the curves of her lower mermaid form. The sheath is slung far below her navel, but just above her pelvis, giving her a daring, but not quite lascivious, quality. Her childlike enthusiasm and exuberance contradict her sexually mature body, but ironically, this contradiction only adds to her sexualized

nature. She is simultaneously innocent and sexual. Ariel's curvaceous upper body and playful demeanor lend a quality that borders on elements of titillation. Ariel displays a teasing childlike demeanor that is erotically tempting in her bandeaux clam shell bra. In her opening scene, the animators have positioned Ariel in a coquettish striptease or "peek-a-boo" pose as she peers over the broken mast of a shipwrecked vessel. Her shoulders are bare, yet her chest is hidden behind the horizontal mast, causing a heightened sense of postponing the discovery and curiosity for the audience if indeed the mermaid is nude (Bell 114).

Without doubt, Disney showcases state-of-the-art technology, yet Disney's film formula continues to structurally adhere to the same cinematic and gender constructions found in the 1937 production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Disney has made strides in integrating cultural diversity in the characterizations of Pocahontas and Mulan, the changes in ethnic characterizations do not extend into altering gender portrayals and stereotypes. Collectively, the portrayal of heroines in Disney's earliest animated films continues to be problematic because by contemporary standards, the

gender roles Disney's heroines represent bear little resemblance to our society. Modern audiences have seen less Eurocentric images of heroines in films, such as *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*; however, the formulaic traits and behaviors of the romanticized Disney princess heroine continue today, just as the early heroines were modeled, much in the same manner as actresses in Hollywood's musicals of the 1930s. Walt Disney supposed the fairy tale heroine of his animated films needed a basis in realism for the viewing audience (Wright, *Romancing the Tale* 102). Audiences of the 1930s were accustomed to filmic use of fantasy and romance popularized in Hollywood films. The Disney heroine evolved by incorporating comedy and romance consistent at that time, thereby setting the standard of the princess heroine (Wright 99). Through the combination of plot, comedy and character constructions Disney created a full-length animated film that rivaled other Hollywood film (Wright 102-103). By establishing particular formulaic characterizations of beauty, helplessness, and passivity, "a composite" emerges as to how young femininity in western tales is defined (Bell 112). Disney continues to present heroines as that portrait of perfection: innocent, yet sexually enticing.

Ariel's quest is about uncovering the qualities of her sexual nature, and by traveling into Ursula's domain Ariel begins looking deeper into the female realm. Ariel seeks to understand the meanings of sexual desire, which is foreshadowed while singing in her treasure trove. One of her treasures is a painting by the artist Georges de la Tour called *The Magdalene with a Nightlight*;² and it hangs high on the wall of her secret cave. The painting depicts Mary Magdalene staring into the flame of a burning candle that is on a table in front of her. Ariel wonders what Mary Magdalene sees gazing into the flame. Ariel reaches out to touch the flame in the picture and ponders "what's a fire and why does it burn?" (Ashman and Menken) Ariel swims up to take a closer look at the details in the picture examining all of the subtleties. For Ariel, the flame illuminates the darkness of her unanswered questions about love and life as a human, while the darkness represents the aspects of human love and sexuality that Ariel does not understand. The light that emanates from the flame sheds light on the answers Ariel is seeking. Ariel is in search of something that eludes her, and what eludes her is an understanding of the mysteries of being a woman. Just like treading water in the dark cave, Ariel struggles in a

holding pattern between being a mermaid and becoming a grown woman. The significance is ironic on two levels. At one level, in maritime folklore, mermaids are a sexualized image, half woman, half seductive animal enchantress. At another level, the significant facet of their sexuality stems from their long, flowing, usually red, tresses. Symbolically, in medieval art mermaids usually carry a mirror and comb, representing their vanity and a commonly held attribute of Mary Magdalene. For mermaids and Mary Magdalene, their hair is a vain and sensuous reminder of "the toils in which she ensnares her prey, as well as the flowing abundance of her appetites" (Warner *From Beast to Blonde* 406).

As Ariel curiously ventures into this dark and forbidden world, her transition begins: she learns how to successfully navigate and negotiate her way to becoming a woman. The beauty and tranquility of the azure ocean floor drastically changes into dark and foreboding tides; the living space where Ariel finds Ursula's boudoir is deep within the throat of a dead creature, a hollow skeleton of a sea serpent. There is enormous, hairy sea weed laced Wentletraps Sea shells strategically placed at the entrance of Ursula's environment, which bear a striking resemblance

to female genitalia. Further down, into the longest part of the skeletal neck, are huge Murex Indiva shells and a large Pacific triton shell that functions as Ursula's vanity and bedroom. The overall image is womb-like, and Ursula's song is well within the confines of this uterine atmosphere. It is here in this unexplored setting where Ariel begins to comprehend her love encompasses a sexual attraction for Eric. Ariel tenaciously continues to swim in hopes of discovering her own sexuality. Ursula's chamber symbolizes not only a place where life begins, but Ariel's rebirth as a human girl.

By examining the sexualized aspects of the vortex in Andersen's story there is a close connotation between the pull of the tides of the whirlpool and the fascination it holds for the mermaid. Venturing closer, she is drawn to the whirling waters, "her heart beating with fear, she almost turned back" (Andersen 68). The mysteries of the ebb and flow of the ocean currents offers imagery of longing within the mermaid and the uncertainties of her future. In other words, she is crossing a threshold from childhood into womanhood, and in order to get to the other side, she will endure the possibility of pain and discomfort. The vortex is symbolically representative for the mermaid as a

rite of passage from the lightness of innocence into the dark mysteries of being a woman.

In Andersen's story, the pairing of sexuality with the mysteries of the witch's habitat is similar to the lack of the mermaid's understanding of sexual intercourse, which is ultimately what she fears most-- participating in the sex act. This is the major feature or issue for the mermaid, her vulnerability and sexual maturation. For instance, there are significant phallic and yonic representations that define the sexualized atmosphere within the witch's domain. The constructs are erotic images that bear a striking resemblance to male and female genitalia, and once set in an erotic metaphor, these images are difficult to miss. The witch's comments are instructive and the broad spectrum of information she shares with the mermaid includes how to navigate or find her way out of an area filled with images rampant in erotic possibility. Andersen describes "The sea witch's house was in the midst of the strangest forest. The bushes and trees were gigantic polyps that were half plant and half animal. They looked like snakes with hundreds of heads, but they grew out of the ground (Andersen 67).

Actually, the polyps underscore an erotic content in that the polyps are sexual, which is not surprising in that a polyp looks like penis. The ensuing images of Andersen's description are not inhabitants but rather representative of sexual knowledge the mermaid does not have. The mermaid must swim to this area in order to discover how to become a woman and what will make her appealing to the Prince. On one level, it seems that she "always feared" the witch, but on another level, she perseveres by swimming to the hostile environment to obtain knowledge of how to use her charms to get what she wants (Andersen 67). The mermaid fears the unknown of an environment that is dark, vast, and foreign, yet actively turbulent with the ebb and flow of uncharted ocean currents, it is an area the mermaid has never ventured into to explore. The little mermaid is afraid to examine her own sexual desires, and that is why she ventures into the dark damp mud bog, which is the manifestation of the vagina.

Despite the implications of erotic imagery in Disney's film, the text stresses a determined mermaid swimming towards the discovery of sexuality. Ariel swims away from her life under the sea and asks Ursula, "if I become human, I'll never be with my father or sisters again" and Ursula

replies that yes indeed, this will be the case (Ashman and Menken). More importantly, Ursula convincingly argues that the final outcome is worth the price of never living with her family again and after all Ursula cajoles "you'll have your man" (Ashman and Menken). Ariel is leaving the parent - child relationship and she is at a threshold of entering into adulthood of men and women relationships. She is also on the verge of gaining autonomy. This is represented (symbolized) through Ariel's development of voice.

Gilligan defines voice as, what people say when they speak, which is essentially the core of the self. Voice is "composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language," yet the most important issue is that "to have a voice is to be human and to have something to say is to be a person (Gilligan xvi). Gilligan theorizes that girls undergo a psychological seclusion from "the public world" during the time of adolescence setting the stage for impeding the development of their voice and presence in the public world (xxii). In other words, girls begin to experience "resistance to entering conversations," and knowingly their reticence changes how others hear them and how they are perceived after they have spoken. Girls need to learn how to hear, to listen and to believe in

themselves rather than embrace and believe the exterior forces that popular culture deems acceptable. When girls are bombarded with stereotypical portrayals of women, they learn to doubt themselves, their essence, their value and, in particular, their voice. Girls learn to express their candid dialogue in the safest and most private of relationships. Thus, there is a distinction between how girls willingly assert their voice and judgments in public and in private. Unless young women are situated in what they consider a comfortable environment, they tend to withdraw and resist from asserting what they want to say in favor of who is listening. Gilligan posits there is a discrepancy between womanhood and adulthood which extends into "the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making and responsible action" (17). Girls equate personal autonomy and asserting their voice too loudly or too vigorously as an unattractive trait "associated with masculinity and considered undesirable as attributes of the feminine self" (17). By asserting their voice, they do not appear feminine and their utterances do not adhere to the gender roles that they have come to understand. Many girls who persist in asserting their personal strength through active use of an autonomous voice become isolated alone,

and unpopular. This is becomes problematic because girls become convinced that to enter into womanhood requires the silencing their own voice. This notion is reinforced by popular culture through films like *The Little Mermaid*.

Ariel opens the film with a powerful aria or Sirenian song that speaks of her brave adventures and dreams as she journeys to self-discovery. Ariel sings with an intellectual curiosity of her quest for knowledge about the world above the ocean. Her treasure trove is a huge collection of odds and ends of unmatched items that were on board ships that were lost at sea. From shipwrecked vessels, Ariel retrieves books that she cannot read, yet yearns for the knowledge her books hold. Although she has no use or understanding of the items and artifacts she finds at the bottom of the sea, she is a collector of human articles and novelties in hopes of uncovering the mysteries they hold. The mermaid sings with an adventurous spirit, questioning aspects of a human world, a world that fascinates, yet confuses her, with its subtle nuances. She hungers for a different life with heroic, if not willful, determination; she bravely challenges her father, King Triton. Just like the Sirens of Homeric poetry, Ariel

initially sings with strength and courage but, more importantly, with the power of her voice.

In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel's song starts out with a great power her Disney heroine predecessors did not demonstrate. Initially, she is speaking and asserting herself in ways Disney audiences had not seen in fairy tale film genre before 1989. The viewing audience sees Ariel as rebellious, talking back to her father and arguing with him, yet he does not understand her curiosity. She asserts herself by stating her interest in the human realm. In other words, she verbalizes exactly what she wants to examine, although her explorations carry her to regions that are forbidden to mer-people. Indeed, there exists a change in the characterization of this Disney heroine, but her metamorphosis leads to the conventional or more traditional role of the fairy tale heroine once she falls in love.

Figuratively many girls have a signature song or a defining a way to articulate their dreams. When Ariel sings, "what would I give / if I could live out of these waters? /what would I pay /to spend the day /warm on the sand?" she sings to herself or day dreaming her secrets out loud and her words are a metaphor for her curiosity and her

quest to be human. *Part of your World* is the manifestation of her explorations and adventures and her independence. Ariel's song is her commentary about her life and how the audience comes to see and understand her plight as a mermaid who wants to be human.

As Ursula sings and dances, she casts and conjures spells with her voice. Ursula recognizes the authority of articulation. She knows the power of speaking in order to be persuasive and she also knows that Ariel does not realize the strength in that power. Deep within the dark environment of her chambers the witch chatters to Ariel about the insignificant aspects of voice. Ursula explicitly states that voice is "just a token, really a trifle" (Ashman and Menken). This scene is a beautiful extravaganza, but behind the disguise of her playfulness is Ursula's wicked fundamental nature. Ursula's song, *Poor Unfortunate Souls*, is staged as a burlesque musical production with her ponderous body moving and gliding over the ocean floor. She floats beautifully but in a sinister way, which heightens the illusion of her predatory nature. She mixes magical potions while singing her commentary on men and sex and continues conjuring a powerful spell for Ariel. This tune is catchy with a melodic shiver, like an

old fashioned Vaudeville show tune providing a strong downbeat for Ursula's rhythmic bump and grind shoulder quivering dance. "I admit that in the past I've been a nasty/ they weren't kidding when they called me, well a witch" establishes Ursula's identity and her deadly magical skills, but more importantly others fear her (Ashman and Menken). She has all the answers and Ursula knows exactly who she is and her place in Triton's Kingdom. For Ariel to be a part of Eric's world, she can only gain access by following the implications of Ursula's song. Ariel turns to the power and influence of Ursula's conjuring. This is where Ariel's song undergoes a transformation. She moves away from her dreams and adapts the misguided notions that Ursula convincingly and persuasively posits. The authority of Ariel's singing and the fervor for independence and empowerment is lost once she sees the prince and falls in love - Ariel willingly relinquishes her song. In essence, Ursula proposes to the young mermaid and the viewing audience that women can articulate themselves successfully by utilizing their sexuality to communicate with men. Most significantly, girls in the audience may see this, and realize that sexuality is a tool used to persuasively manipulate.

Before Ariel journeys to the cave of the Sea Witch, she sings and dreams of independence and a sense of her, own autonomy in the aria *Part of Your World*. Ironically, once Ariel hears Ursula's song explaining and defining what men on land want and desire in women, Ariel re-thinks and abandons her song altogether. In essence, she values the song of another over her own, and she reacts by redefining her dreams for the purpose of "getting a man," namely Prince Eric (Ashman and Menken). Indeed, the mermaid changes, but not because she wants to change - - Ariel alters herself and her perceptions because she believes she must. Ariel no longer values her voice, and this is why she surrenders it so easily. In folklore, the mermaid's voice is her power, which is manifest in her song. The authority of her speech and the fervor for empowerment is lost once she relinquishes her greatest asset: her voice. Voiceless heroines convince girls that they should comply and rethink what they dream and wish in their song, and this is the most damaging message. This is the magic: the Disney mantra - repetitive images beckoning to girls to comply and relinquish the power of their song, and eventually their autonomy. At the end of the film, Ariel conforms to the traditional role of princess heroine, just

like Cinderella, Snow White and Aurora - - the loss of speech is not as important as marrying the Prince. Ariel doubts herself, her life aspirations, her intellect; when she begins to lose her song it becomes clear that she is no longer listening to the melody of independence and curiosity. Eventually, Ariel adopts Ursula's suggestions by utilizing her sexuality as a tool to entice Prince Eric. In other words, she loses her personal power when she gives up her song and therefore her voice is silenced.

Similar to the mermaid exploring her options, generations of young women, without world wise experience, ponder the meanings, social constructions and images that encompass womanhood. Disney is a modern day siren in the form of a cultural force that has proven, through its global reach - equal to the sirens of Homeric epic poetry the power to influence. Even if girls may not crash onto mythological shores meeting their death, as did ancient mariners, girls experience, instead, a collision between gender role expectations and the failure to utilize and recognize their voice - - just as they are beginning to discover the power of a woman's voice. Sexist images and lyrical content in this film are repeatedly used and have the effect of devaluing the subjectivity of the heroine,

while promoting a loss of self in her quest to be married, yet silent and beautiful. Consequently, these rhetorical elements are emphasized within Ursula's song *Poor Unfortunate Souls*, while the Sea Witch sings and proselytizes Ariel with the positive rewards that accompany silence. The implication becomes very clear to young viewers that, by adopting Ursula's strategy, Prince Eric will fall in love with Ariel. The patriarchal reasoning is intellectualized into social behaviors for Ariel to observe. The erroneous and most damaging social perception girls learn is that silence is a valuable tool if indeed men find silent women attractive. Subsequently, this imparts to young girls a specific set of values; they must alienate themselves from the power of their voice in order to be appealing to men. Conversely, it is through a sea of coercive imagery such as *The Little Mermaid*, that girls are served life lessons through textual and visual interpretations of Disney film text.

²Christian mythology associates Mary Magdalene as the prostitute who washed the feet of Christ with her hair, and who is later redeemed by Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISNEY'S GENDERED LYRICS:

BEAUTY, BLABBER OR BRAINS

[Ursula:] You'll have your looks! Your pretty face! And don't underestimate the importance of body language! Ha!

In American culture, generations of adults associate nostalgic childhood memories with Mickey Mouse, Disneyland and Disney's animated films. However, behind the magic of endearing characters, amusement park frolics and films like *The Little Mermaid* is a serious message that communicates the idea that girls should be silent. This notion may have been an acceptable message in the 1930s but it is not acceptable today. Girls need strong role models to help them grow into strong women but this is not communicated in Disney's fairy tale films. Instead, Disney conveys to girls that when they are silent they are rewarded with a prince. This message is often either ignored or trivialized as innocent childhood entertainment; Americans continue to embrace the magic from songs like *Poor Unfortunate Souls*, and *Part of Your World, Some Day My Prince Will Come*. These songs are beautiful melodies from Disney's classic films, yet as sentimental and romantic as these songs are, they nonetheless consist of lyrics that glorify passive

behaviors for girls. Songs in Disney's animated fairy tale films preserve the power of the Disney magic with each passing generation by spinning a melodic mantra of enchanting songs that are not women friendly.

The moment Ariel loses her voice the climate of the sea changes. With a loud clap of thunder, the sea explodes changing colors from dark blue to luminous yellow and bright crimson orange. The ocean floor, once calm, trembles and the water begins violently churning, and whirling wildly around Ariel. Ariel's long green scaled fish tail splits in two and turns into legs. Her swirling naked body is rotating in small tight circles, flinging her into a chaotic spin, but as she transforms into a girl she is unable to breathe under water. Sebastian and Flounder, sensing the potential danger of Ariel drowning, quickly take hold of her and swim with her to the surface for air. Once she is above the water, she dresses herself in a discarded piece of canvas left on the shoreline. Gathering her thoughts, she rests on the beach, wiggling her toes and examining her newly acquired limbs. Off in the distance she hears noises on the beach and scurries for protection on top of a large rock. Her transformation is complete; she is

clinging to the rock when Prince Eric and his barking dog Max discover her.

The Prince inquires of Ariel if she is hurt or lost, and puzzles over the strange and silent girl in distress. In turn, Ariel tries unsuccessfully to communicate with the Prince with flailing hand gestures and comical facial expressions. She rapidly nods her head and waves her hands and arms ineffectively; the elaborate efforts she mimes are frustrating for Ariel and the Prince. He wonders if she could possibly be the lovely girl who saved him from drowning. Then, realizing the hapless girl dressed in a canvas tarp cannot speak, and surely cannot sing, he decides he must be mistaken. Finally, their initial meeting ends with Eric offering Ariel a steady hand as she climbs off the rock. Ariel wobbles a little and thankfully leans against Eric's strong and supporting arms. She shyly smiles, and nods her acceptance as Eric offers her the comforts of his castle.

Ariel settles into the luxurious surroundings of the castle by allowing herself the pampering delights of a bubble bath. In the meantime, the servants are first scrubbing, but then discarding her canvas garments, replacing them with an iridescent gown of soft pink. Ariel

happily and patiently allows others to dress her before descending the stairs into the dining room. She is a little shy as she walks with hesitant steps towards Eric and Sir Grimsby and sits at the table for dinner. Ariel tries to assimilate and act as normally as possible; she is seated at the dining room table waiting for dinner to be served. With her hands on her lap and batting her eyes Ariel smiles at Eric waiting and wondering what to do next. Suddenly Ariel sees a fork on the table and remembering Scuttle's explanation of its purpose she starts to comb her hair with this object. Eric laughs uproariously, while Grimsby looks at her in disbelief; immediately Ariel understands her actions are a social *faux pas* and not appropriate. She replaces the fork and resumes sitting once again with her hands in her lap and feeling very embarrassed. Eric notices her self-conscious demeanor and hides his chuckles under his breath. Grimsby sits across from Ariel observing her and begins to light his pipe. Unable to restrain herself Ariel reaches across the table and snatches Grimsby pipe out of his hand. She recalls the pipe is a musical instrument and proceeds to blow into it and play music. Unfortunately, black ashes are blown out and cover Grimsby's face with soot. Horrified, Ariel commits another

social error and is at a loss how to recover. Eric finds her naiveté amusingly innocent if not refreshing laughing again he stands up and invites her to take a tour of his kingdom, which Ariel gladly accepts.

Eric's reactions to the silent Ariel range from curiosity and confusion in terms of how he can successfully communicate with the silent girl. He finds himself at a disadvantage for many reasons. He does not know if others are worried about her whereabouts; her mysterious appearance seems very strange, yet somehow potentially wonderful. Moreover, all the important answers elude him, since her silence prevents him from obtaining the answers. Eric believes the girl who was singing on the beach is the girl who saved him and this is the moment he falls in love with Ariel.

In Andersen's story, after the mermaid agrees to the bargain with the sea witch she sticks out her tongue allowing the witch to cut out it out, but this graphic scene is missing in Disney's film. In Disney's version, there is no pain associated with it, short of Ariel grimacing while she is signing her name on the contract. The audience does not actually see Ursula cutting out Ariel's tongue. In the film, when Ursula takes possession

of Ariel's voice the witch locks it away in a sea shell and wears it around her neck as a locket. Whenever Ursula is seen, she is wearing the sea shell around her neck. When Ursula first appears as Vanessa on the beach, Ariel's voice is heard first before Vanessa comes into view. Prince Eric is out on the balcony looking at the setting sun trying to discover the identity of the girl shrouded in darkness walking on the beach. He wonders if this is the girl who saved him from drowning. A single light escapes from the shell around the girl's neck and it begins to ascend up towards the balcony where Eric is standing. The closer Vanessa comes into view the higher the light travels up to Eric. The moment the mysterious light reaches Eric he is under the spell of a disembodied voice. He does not blink and stares straight ahead and hypnotized by Ursula's spell he decides to marry the Vanessa.

Disney has successfully socialized girls from one generation to the next with delightful tunes, such as *Poor Unfortunate Souls* and *Part of Your World*. The song lyrics and gender role characterizations in *The Little Mermaid* encourage inappropriate conduct for girls. The signature songs of Ursula and Ariel portray gendered stereotypes and sexualized imagery. For example, Ursula sings to Ariel

that, "the men up there don't like a lot of blabber/ they think a girl who gossips is a bore/ yes, on land it's much preferred/ for ladies not to say a word" (Ashman and Menken). These song lyrics demonstrate that silence is an important social skill for girls. Ursula sings directly to Ariel that remaining silent is the way to access the Prince and his world (Sells, *Where Do the Mermaids Stand?* 176). Embedded within the classic narrative about Ariel's coming of age is a contemporary story about the costs, pleasures, and dangers of women's access to the human world (Sell 176). These lyrics explicitly state that in order for women to successfully socialize in their environment, they must learn how to maintain their silence while interacting with men. Ursula's melody directly implies that it is custom and convention in the world above the ocean that men do not want to listen to or hear women articulate their own voice. Ursula's words like "blabber" and "gossip" suggest that the utterances of women lack meaning and as a result, whatever men hear women say is not important enough to be considered of merit or value. The romantic bent in the song justifies this silence, because in the end, the girl will be rewarded for her silence with marriage to the Prince. Such lyrics have proven to be the backbone of the Disney magic and the

prevalence of patriarchal notions in Ursula's and Ariel's song continues to remain strong today, sixty years after the creation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937.

Not only does Ursula's song advocate silence for girls, but the song also glorifies the sexual objectification of the female body. When Ariel asks how she will communicate to Prince Eric without her voice, Ursula sings, "you'll have your looks! /your pretty face! / and don't underestimate the importance of body language" (Ashman and Menken). These lyrics are not subtle because they plainly offer sexual options to girls by flaunting one's sexuality; hence, young women acquire a flirty and provocative means of communication. In other words, Disney's heroine uses her sexuality to communicate. Some fairy tale scholars have criticized *The Little Mermaid's* Ariel because she has no ambition beyond getting the Prince, while others find this criticism simplistic (Sell 176). Actually, the message of this film and the songs Ursula and Ariel sing are far more dangerous and less liberating. The traditional American romanticized images of discovering true love portrayed in the Disney film can be viewed as more alarming because the film sanitizes the costs of women's access to the "male sphere" by vilifying

women's strength and eliminating a woman's integrity to express herself freely while in the company of men. In addition, *The Little Mermaid* is more damaging than *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* or *Cinderella* because Ariel learns from Ursula how to flirt, tease and project a sexualized demeanor to access the Prince and live in his world (Sells 176).

Sexism remains firmly entrenched within our society, especially within the messages Disney conveys to young girls. This is important because what becomes increasingly evident is that an unacceptable perception of women in Disney's fairy tale films continues to undermine how little girls psychologically and emotionally develop into young women. This means that our culture has not seen enough of a change in how women are perceived. The failure to embrace new ways of imaging fairy tale heroines is the result of Disney's formulaic "synchronization, one-dimensionality, and uniformity for the purpose of maintaining the Disney brand name as the champion of entertainment" (Zipes, "Once Upon a Time" 89). Disney's influence in the television, music, and film industries reinforces our assumptions about "appropriate" gender characteristics and behaviors.

Just as the mythological sirens of Homeric epic poems beckoned Odysseus and his ancient mariners to their doom, so does Disney beckon young girls to accept their doom, a fate that negates their individuality and authority by imprisoning them within patriarchal lyrics and plots. Disney's beguiling mythological song is equally as dangerous to young girls as the song of the Sirens was to ancient mariners, for Disney's song, like that of the Sirens', has lured and continues to lure, generations of women into believing the enchantment that Disney spins, an enchantment founded upon the innocence and sense of family espoused and marketed by the Disney Corporation itself. Our society has come to trust the Disney name and to equate it with wholesome family values, it is difficult for us not to hear Disney's sirenic song because we trust the "innocence" and "wholesomeness" connected to the Disney name.

However, this innocence and wholesomeness soon dissipates upon closer examination of the products Disney markets, especially the song lyrics in animated films. It is the comments within the lyrics referring to speaking or singing as "idle prattle" that lure young girls into thinking that silence and submissiveness are admirable

qualities (Ashman and Menken). Girls understand the mistaken idea that speaking too much or too loudly is not desirable, and that conforming to gendered behavior it will bring success and the happily-ever-after dreams. There is little doubt that commentaries like "[b]ut they [true gentlemen] dote and swoon and fawn/On a lady who's withdrawn/It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man" serve and shape social skills for girls (Ashman and Menken). The truth of it is that this film has an underlying patriarchal motif that is consistent in the signature songs Ursula and Ariel sing.

Through Disney's animated films like *The Little Mermaid*, ideas of femininity have been structured in and of American cultural standards and their promotional campaigns and have continually reinforced what has come to be accepted as traditional gender roles (Spigel 36-71). In the after effects of World War II, post-war families underwent transitions between solidifying traditional family concepts and returning to the family values before the war. Disney tailored his films based on the trends and themes of the American society during that period. It was during this time that Walt Disney found that the movie going audience wanted fantasy and peaceful films that

reflected an honorable and traditional society. Walt Disney's personal feelings about old fashioned family values and family gender roles are integrated into his animated films (O'Brien 155-183). Disney wanted to create filmic fantasy, which mirrored the concerns of the 1940s in restoring a male-dominated family and a return to traditional gender roles (Berland 97).

Ariel takes young girls by the hand and magically shows them how to behave and to entice boys into getting their way. Her signature song shows girls that in order to become *Part of your World*, or the world dominated by men, girls grow and mature into women who are acculturated into learning how the world works and it works most effectively by utilizing one's sensuality. Little girls see Ariel become part of the human realm by giving up her voice and independence; they understand through Ursula's song how to go about accomplishing this assimilation process.

Over the past sixty-five years, audiences attend movie theaters with preconceived expectations and interpretations about Disney animated films. Theater going audiences bring textual meanings that coincide with the social, political, and cultural climate (O'Brien 155-157). From this perspective, one views films as a cultural extension that

mirrors the Zeitgeist of a generation. By looking at *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*, contextual analysis finds that the Disney formula depicting silent heroines remains in place and has not changed since the first full length animated film in 1937. The legacy of silent princess heroines is the result of Walt Disney's patriarchal perspectives of women in society. His ideas and family values carried over into the beautiful animated films, and along with creations in animation, his desire was to reaffirm and restore American traditions to post - WWII families (O'Brien 155-157). Therefore, the wholesome and mythic image of safe and innocent family entertainment is steeped in significant paternalistic beliefs that are a reflection Walt Disney's personal value system.

Walt Disney's signature notions of femininity and family values are evidenced within the characterization of the silent and beautiful fairy tale heroine. Walt Disney's patriarchal viewpoint about gender is a significant ideological concept that is well entrenched within the canon of Disney animated fairy tale films. An inquiry into Disney film text reveals the omnipresence of his personal interpretations of how women are portrayed in Disney films (O'Brien 55-157).

CHAPTER FIVE

MARKETING THE MAGIC OF A PRINCESS

The men up there don't like a lot of blabber
They think a girl who gossips is a bore
Yes, on land it's much preferred
For ladies not to say a word
And after all, dear, what is idle prattle for?

Disney has marketed the signature Disney magic since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. In the early 1930s, Mickey Mouse clubs turned the foyers of movie theaters into locations for merchandising of Mickey Mouse watches, dolls, and figurines (Buckingham, "Dissin Disney" 285-293). As a result, by combining a medium for family entertainment that especially markets merchandise associated with animated fairy tale films, Disney discovered how to touch the American culture by equally influencing both children and adults as consumers.

Today, the Walt Disney Company is one of the world's largest media conglomerates, with a reported net income of \$440 million, second only to Time Warner.³ Disney is a diversified, international family entertainment and Media Company with interests in broadcast and cable networks, amusement parks, resorts, studio entertainment, and consumer products (Thomson). Since economics and entertainment are the core of the Disney machine, it is not

surprising that Disney ventured into producing Broadway musicals based on the enormously popular animated films *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast* in 1997 and 1998 respectively (Fricker). On the whole, many theater critics agreed, the musical productions of *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast* were not particularly innovative, since the productions were a literal staging of the animated films. Disney's theatrical producing style parallels how the company produces and markets its films. Disney was aware that, as popular as *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast* were with theater audiences, these plays were unlikely to make a long-term profit. The budget for the Broadway play of *The Lion King* topped \$20 million, and by the middle of 1998, there was a reported loss of \$30.8 million (Fricker). Disney does not calculate success purely on box office success because the revenue a play generates is paltry in comparison, since the company stands to make the largest profits on related merchandise. For this reason, upon entering the realm of theater productions, the focus was in the earnings from the overall merchandise and any future American or foreign productions (Fricker 6). The earnings from *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast* merchandise, such as T-shirts, posters and

CD's, may demonstrate the play's popularity with theater audiences, but in the final analysis, merchandising holds the most significant source of revenues for Disney (Fricker).

Disney has elevated trademark name recognition and marketing strategies to levels resulting in extremely profitable revenues, all the while exerting an enormous influence on American culture. This feat is evident on two levels: by properly saturating the American consumer and world public with the Disney name and an assortment of Disney products, the marketed auxiliary items are what actually yield the long-term profit margin. By combining of media for marketing the Disney name and family entertainment, Disney simultaneously reaches children and adults as consumers on an equal footing. It is difficult to imagine another entertainment force that possesses the immense worldwide, generational and cultural magnitude of the Disney Empire. It is easy to visualize the many ways the Disney Corporation has touched generations of consumers, the culture of American families and, more importantly, American cultural perceptions of women.

Disney's multi-marketing rests in the repetition of gendered depictions of women that take form in the images

of the fairy tale heroine. The problem with this particular perception is that American culture has acculturated children and adults simultaneously with the misperception, linking Disney fairy tale heroines to a standardized gender role for women. Disney's lasting impressions of gendered images concurrently reinforce the Disney name and the silence and submissiveness that characterize heroines like Ariel. Every time children see the ever-present images of Ariel on Disney products, they not only relive the plot and storyline, but they also revisit Ariel's loss of speech and her powerlessness.

There is a two-fold problem with Disney's marketing practices. Since Disneyland first opened its gates in 1951, the public has come to believe Walt Disney's motto, that Disneyland is the "happiest place on earth." What has evolved is a sense of harmless and wholesome Americana associated with the trademark Disney name. For instance, *The Little Mermaid* is a child friendly story simply because it is a Disney product, so the image of a Disney heroine, like Ariel, is considered safe and wholesome, and in addition children feel a close association with Disney's heroine characterizations, and ultimately they identify with the fairy tale princess. This is evident today in

Disney's princess ice show extravaganza *Disney On Ice*. Just like Disney's Broadway productions, *Disney on Ice* is not innovative; it simply parallels the storyline of the animated films. Women dress as various Disney fairy tale princesses ice-skating in Cinderella's ball gown, Ariel's fish tail and Jasmine's harem costumes, just like those in the animated film version. In effect, the princess heroines become real and life like, which is appealing to young girls because they can also aspire to become fairy tale princess. Since American culture has come to trust the Disney name, the merchandise bearing the trademark name is naturally equated with quality family values. For some families, Disney products translate into ideas consistent with virtue and decency and these concepts resonate with the ever-growing Disney products to consumers of all ages.

Disney is the world's largest distributor of popular media to children, yet there remains the lack of a concentrated effort signifying a genuine shift in gender role behaviors in heroine characterizations. Some sociologists go so far to suggest that children may acquire gender schema from cultural myths portrayed in popular mediated messages from television and film. By virtue of what contemporary culture has seen in last sixty years of

Disney's advertising and mass marketing practices, it is not difficult to visualize the way Disney has touched American perceptions of cultural definitions of gender (Matti and Lisosky). It is little wonder when the commodities that stem from fairy tale film products like *The Little Mermaid* are constant recapitulations and representations of gender specific limitations or concepts depicting heroines who are silent, submissive and, ultimately, relegated to hearth and home. The consequence of the ubiquitous presence of Disney's merchandise purveys traditional notions, which continue to transfix young girls into believing the repetitious dimensions of female domestication for their gender, which is so closely associated with Disney animated fairy tale genre. The ever-present depictions of the quiet and yielding heroine serve in perpetuating the manner in which Disney tells consumers how women should behave.

Disney markets sexism and this proves problematic, given the power and influence of Disney as a marketing machine, the images from animated films and the ideologies that ensue are elements that contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes for women. The name Walt Disney evokes nostalgic memories for many people, underneath the

beautifully animated story and delightful musical score lays a sexist mentality. Sexism remains firmly entrenched within the messages Disney conveys to young girls when the portrayals of the princess heroines do not change. This is important because what becomes increasingly evident is that an unacceptable perception of women in Disney's fairy tale films continues to undermine how little girls grow and become young women. In other words, this means that our culture has not seen enough of a change in how women are perceived. The failure to embrace new ways of imaging fairy tale heroines is the result of Disney's formulaic "synchronization, one-dimensionality, and uniformity for the purpose of maintaining the Disney brand name as the champion of entertainment (Zipes, *Once Upon a Time* 89). Walt Disney's film and Hans Christian Andersen's literary fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* are vehicles that help to develop and perpetuate patriarchal notions about women. Stereotypes and sexist constructions of women continue to exist within our culture, because people still buy into the biggest myth of all - that Disney provides safe and innocent entertainment for families.

³ Hoover's Inc., Austin, TX Hoover's Company Database. The Walt Disney Company. 2003

Disney has stakes in several cable channels such as ESPN (80%) and A&E Television Networks (38%). Walt Disney Parks & Resorts, which includes Walt Disney World and Disneyland. Walt Disney Internet Group oversees the Mouse's Web properties (ABC.com Disney Online, ESPN.com).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: SHHHH . . . NOW MAKE A WISH

True gentlemen avoid it when they can
But they dote and swoon and fawn
On a lady who's withdrawn
It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man
Come on, you poor unfortunate soul
Go ahead!
Make your choice!

The primary issue of concern is epitomized by the sexist connotations in the lyrics of *Poor Unfortunate Souls* and *Part of Your World*. Disney has demonstrated propensities for using sexist language within lovely melodies, since notions of patriarchal ideology are rampant in the song lyrics that Ursula and Ariel sing. At the heart of the beautiful music are seemingly innocent lyrics imparting outmoded notions delineating how silence and submissive behavior are traits young women need to cultivate. This analysis proposes to those who embrace the Disney legacy as wholesome Americana to realize what really lies beneath the surface of the Disney magic is sexist intolerance and old-fashioned capitalism in marketing a trademark name.

By situating *The Little Mermaid* in a genre that is primarily for children, one must question the purpose behind the adult theme of Ursula's song. The song lyrics

deliver very mature guidelines demonstrating how, when and why girls should consciously marginalize and disenfranchise themselves. Ursula's lyrics are exacting and urging Ariel how to utilize her physical attributes as a tool of persuasion by not "underestimating the importance of body language" (Ashman and Menken). The nuances of the lyrical content surrounding Ursula's recommendations are blatantly the wrong advice to give to young girls or adolescents. The concept of girls favoring whatever socialization skill boys are supposed to prefer is not an empowering message to girls.

Essentially, Ursula's advice plays out because Ariel begins to rethink her priorities and changes her focus from swimming freely in the ocean to devising a plan to capture Prince Eric's heart. Ariel's line of reasoning in relationship to transforming herself to suit a young man is problematic. Emulating the behavior of women on land drives Ariel's logic. Notions of what women do on land is a powerful indication of the Disney perspective because there is a specific reference about women and what, according to Disney, is perfectly normal and acceptable behavior for women. In other words, the image allows a clear understanding for girls of a need in learning to

dismantle their ability to speak by remaining silent. With this in mind, part of the acculturation means that girls, like Ariel, willingly use silence as a social strategy, thereby accepting traditional cultural influences framed within an apparently wholesome genre.

It is hard to tell how many parents take exception to the magnitude of Disney's generational and gendered influence, since Disney is so well entrenched in Americana and it is difficult to separate family entertainment without including the magical world of Disney. By examining the lyrical meaning and content in *Poor Unfortunate Souls*, it is clear that the lyrics contain sexist terminology offering gendered life strategies. Lyrics, such as "It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man" certainly leave little doubt of gender biases. However, what is the most troubling is that the inappropriate gendered mentality behind the lyrics has existed in just about every animated film since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Sexist notions are forgivable in the first film, because the film was intended for audiences of sixty years ago, but these sexist notions are not acceptable by the societal standards of today.

Only in recent years have fairy tale scholars posed questions connecting Disney's recurring portrayals of women in traditional gender sex roles and the ways Disney markets the fairy tale film to children. Disney's legacy is so well entrenched in American culture, most often, and children's first contact with classic fairy tales is through the Disney film genre. It is no surprise that generations of children believe Walt Disney is the author and creator of the fairy tale, which affirms Disney, is wholesome as a creator behind the magic. Since Disney is perceived as a wholesome and innocent source of American family values, *The Little Mermaid* epitomizes an on going tradition in animated fairy tale films. Characterizations, like Ariel, hold two truths; one continues in confirming female subjugation, and the other maintains an adherence to Disney's view of gender roles.

Through contextual analysis of the lyrical content and songs of *The Little Mermaid*, this inquiry illustrates the ways female characters are defined in Disney's film. To this end, this analysis exemplifies how the characterizations of Ursula and Ariel are creations of "conscious decisions made by the management and the creative forces, and influenced by social financial

contexts that dynamically interact with a text's readings" (O'Brien 179).

There is such a close association between Disney animated film and the interrelated products that result from films like *The Little Mermaid* that the marketing of Disney's trademark products is an important aspect of the success or failure of Disney's "masterpiece fairy tale films" (Little 3). The problem with highly advertised fairy tale films is the significance they hold for children today, because "Disney animated films continue to uphold gender role definitions that limit human development and restrict access to resources" and this is the point (Little 3). There should be concern with the magnitude and influence of animated films and how young girls and women are characterized, since Disney targets children as if they are adult consumers. VCR's provide the child consumer with daily access to films that were once only released every seven years. Children watch the films as fast as they can rewind the film, memorizing the words, behaviors, and especially the songs (Little 3). Contemporary audiences purchase and view animated films at home, and gendered stereotypes are undoubtedly strengthened and reinforced repeatedly with every viewing. This is important because

this is how Disney "hooks" children as consumers (Zipes, *Breaking the Spell* 91). Disney utilizes the fairy tale film as a "medium to control children's aesthetic interests and consumer tastes" (Zipes, *Breaking the Spell* 91). As a filmmaker, a "structural network of production for profit" governed Disney's creative intentions. Although films like *The Little Mermaid* have artistic merit, they serve to tarnish rather than contribute to how children come to understand the contributions and affects of gender roles. Children are fascinated with the Disney magic and part of the magic is narrowly defined images of women. The outcome of this inquiry does not expect American consumers to stop their patronage of Disney mega stores, theme parks, or to discontinue purchasing the plethora of obsequious Disney products. The problem is that gendered stereotypes are undoubtedly strengthened and reinforced repeatedly with every viewing, and films like *The Little Mermaid* have artistic merit, yet they serve to damage rather than contribute to how children come to understand gender roles. Therefore, it seems, there is only one way for a Disney heroine to discover the happiness of independence and selfhood and that is to sail into her dreams and simply wish upon a star - in silence.

APPENDIX A
SONG LYRICS
POOR UNFORTUNATE SOULS

"Poor Unfortunate Souls"

[Ursula:] Have we got a deal?

[Ariel:] If I become human, I'll never be with my father
or sisters again.

[Ursula:] But you'll have your man. Life's full of tough
choices innit? Oh - and there is one more thing.
We haven't discussed the subject of payment.

[Ariel:] But I don't have any -

[Ursula:] I'm not asking much. Just a token, really, a
trifle. What I want from you is . . . your
voice.

[Ariel:] But without my voice, how can I -

[Ursula:] You'll have your looks! Your pretty face! And
don't underestimate the importance of body
language! Ha!
The men up there don't like a lot of blabber
They think a girl who gossips is a bore
Yes, on land it's much preferred
For ladies not to say a word
And after all, dear, what is idle prattle for?
Come on, they're not all that impressed with
conversation
True gentlemen avoid it when they can
But they dote and swoon and fawn
On a lady who's withdrawn
It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man
Come on, you poor unfortunate soul
Go ahead!
Make your choice!

(Ashman and Menken)

APPENDIX B
SONG LYRICS
PART OF YOUR WORLD

"Part of Your World"

Look at this stuff
Isn't neat?
Wouldn't you think my collection's complete?
Wouldn't you think I'm the girl
The girl who has everything?
Look at this trove
Treasures untold
How many wonders can one cavern hold?
Lookin' around here you'd think
(Sure) she's got everything.

I've got gadgets and gizmos aplenty
I've got whozits and whatzits galore
(you want thingamabobs?
I've got twenty)
But who cares?
No big deal
I want more

I wanna be where the people are
I wanna see 'em dancin'
Walkin' around on those
(Whatd-ya call 'em?) oh - feet
Flippin your fins you don't get too far
Legs are required for jumpin', dancin'
Strollin' along down a
(What's that word again?) street

Up where they walk
Up where they run
Up where they stay all day in the sun
Wanderin' free
Wish I could be
Part of that world

What would I give
If I could live
Outta these waters?
What would I pay
To spend the day
Warm on the sand?
Bettcha on land

They understand
Bet they don't reprimand their daughters
Bright young women
Sick o' swimmin'
Ready to stand

And ready to know what the people knew
Ask 'em my questions
And get some answers
What's a fire and why does it
(What's the word?) burn?

When's it my turn?
Would'nt I love
Love to explore that shore above?
Out of the sea
Wish I could be
Part of that world

"Part of Your World" (Reprise)

What would I give
To live where you are/
What would I pay
To stay here beside you?
What would I do to see you
Smiling at me?

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

I don't know when
I don't know how
But I know something's starting right now
Watch and you'll see
Some day I'll be
Part of your world
(Ashman and Menken)

REFERENCES

- Andersen, Hans Christian. Hans Christian Andersen: The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories. Trans. Erik Christian Haugaard. New York: Doubleday, 1974.
- Andersen, Hans Christian. The Little Mermaid and Other Stories. Trans. R. Nisbit Sain. London, 1893.
- Ashman, Howard. "Part Of Your World (Reprise)." Perf. Jodi Benson. The Little Mermaid: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack. Disney, 1989.
- . "Poor Unfortunate Souls." Perf. Pat Carroll. The Little Mermaid: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack. Disney, 1989.
- Belenky, Mary, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Bell, Elizabeth, L. Haas, and L. Sells, eds. From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film Gender and Culture. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. New York: Knopf, 1976.

- Bottigheimer, Ruth D. Grimms' Bad Girls and Bad Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.
- Bredsdorff, Elias. Hans Christian Andersen. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994.
- Buckingham, David. "Dissin' Disney: Critical Perspectives on Children's Media Culture." Media, Culture, and Society (1997): 285-293.
- Carma, Matti and Joanne M. Lisosky. "In Search of Sandbox Dreams: Examining the Decision-Making of Disney Female and Male Animated Heroes." Women and Language 22.2 (1999): 66.
- Cashdan, Sheldon. The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Cooks, Leda, Mark Orbe and Carol Bruess. "The Fairy Tale Theme in Popular Culture: A Semiotic Analysis of *Pretty Woman*." Women's Studies in Communication (1993): 86-102.
- Dworkin, Andrea. Woman Hating. New York: Dutton, 1974.
- Easterlin, Nancy. "Hans Christian Andersen's Fish out of Water." Philosophy and Literature 25.2 (2001): 251-277.

Franzway, Suzanne and Jane Low. "Sex Role Theory? Political Cul De Sac?" Refractory Girl (16) 1978: 14-16.

Fricker, Karen. "A New Broadway Takes Center Stage." World Book Online (2003). 19 Oct. 2003
<<http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wbol/wbAuth/jsp/wbDisplay.jsp>>.

Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.

Golden, Stephanie. Slaying the Mermaid: Women and the Culture of Sacrifice New York: Crown/Harmony, 1988.

Griswold, Jerry. "The Future of the Profession." The Lion and the Unicorn 26 (2002): 236-242.

Hallet, Martin and Barbara Karasek, eds. 2nd ed. Folk and Fairy Tales. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 1996.

Henke, J.B., D.Z. Umble, and N.J. Smith. "Construction of the Female Self: Feminist Readings of the Disney Heroine." Women's Studies in Communication 19.2 (1996): 229-249.

Hindes, Andrew. "Mouse Flexes Plex Muscle with 'Mermaid' Move." Variety 369.2 (1997): 4. Abstract. InfoTrac. Nov. 2003.

- Jung, Carl Gustav. The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 2nd ed. Trans. R.F.C. Hull Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971.
- Knapp, Bettina L. Archetype, Architecture, and the Writer. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1986.
- Lieberman, Marcia. '"Some Day My Prince will Come": Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale'. Don't Bet on the Prince. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, 1986. 383-95. Little Mermaid, The. Dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements. Walt Disney Pictures, 1989.
- Little, Patricia. "Disney's Fantasy Women and Men: Gender Representation in Disney Animated Films." Unpublished essay, 1997.
- Murphy, Patrick D. "The Whole World Was Scrubbed Clean: The Androcentric Animation of Denatured Disney." From Mouth to Mermaid: Politics of Film, Gender and Culture. Eds. Elizabeth Bell, Linda Haas, and Laura Sells. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. 125-135.
- O'Brien, Pamela Colby. "The Happiest Films on Earth: A Textual and Contextual Analysis of Walt Disney's *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. Women's Studies in Communication 19.2 (1996): 155-183.

- "Only a Fairy Tale?: The Perpetuation of Race. Class and Gender in Disney Animated Feature Films." Unpublished essay, 1997.
- Opie, Lona and Peter Opie. The Classic Fairy Tales. New York: Oxford UP, 1974.
- Propp, Vladimir. Morphology of the Folktale. Ed. Louis A. Wagner and Alan Dundes. The American Folklore Society. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- Rowe, Karen E. "Feminism and Fairy Tales." Don't Bet on the Prince. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, 1986. 237-57.
- Sells, Laura. "Where do the Mermaids Stand? Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid*." From Mouth to Mermaid: Politics of Film, Gender and Culture. Eds. Elizabeth Bell, Linda Haas, and Laura Sells. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. 175-191.
- Spigel, Lynn. Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. 36-71.

- Starbird, Margaret. " 'The Little Mermaid' and the Archetype of the Lost 'Bride'." Ed. Margaret Starbird. 7 Nov.1999. 4 Oct.2002.
<http://www.members.tripod.com/~Ramon_K_Jusino/littlemermaid.html>.
- Stone, Kay F. "Misuse of Enchantment." Women's Folklore. Women's Culture. Eds. Rosan Jordan and Susan Kalcik. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1985.
- Tatar, Maria. Off With Their Heads!: Fairy Tales and The Culture of Childhood. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992.
- Thacker, Deborah. "Disdain or Ignorance? Literary Theory and the Absence of Children's Literature." The Lion and the Unicorn 24 (2000): 1-17.
- . "Feminine Language and the Politics of Children's Literature." The Lion and the Unicorn (25) 2001: 3-16.
- Trites, R. "Disney's Sub/version of Andersen's 'The Little Mermaid.'" Journal of Popular Film and Television 18 (1991): 145-152.
- Van Evra, J. Television and Child Development. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990.

- Warner, Marina. From the Beast to the Blonde. Fairy Tales and Their Tellers. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994.
- Wright, Terri Martin. "Romancing the Tale": Walt Disney's Adaptation of the Grimms' "Snow White." Journal of Popular Film and Television. 25.3 (1997): 98-108.
- Zipes, Jack D. Don't Bet on the Prince. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- . Fairy Tale as Myth. Myth as Fairy Tale. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.
- . Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre For Children and the Process of Civilization. New York: Routledge, 1983.
- . Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales. Children and the Culture Industry. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- . Stick and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Zohar, Shavit. The Poetics of Children's Literature. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1986.