Disney Bases *The Little Mermaid* on a Short Story:

But Why Do They Leave Out the Most Important Concepts?

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We all know the routine. The girl falls in love with a man and after some struggle, she finally marries him: the man of her dreams. This, however, is just Disney's version of princess stories such as *The Little Mermaid*. In this story, Ariel, a mermaid, falls in love, marries a human prince, and lives happily ever after. The original story is not so blissfully happy. I, a twenty-one year old college student, have recently read the original short story "The Little Mermaid" which made me second-guess what made Disney's movie version so special. Disney's version of *The Little Mermaid* was released back in 1989, but the original story by Hans Christian Andersen was published in 1837. I was always a fan of the Disney

Disney's – *The Little Mermaid*

- **Screenplay by:** Ron Clements
  John Musker
- **Rated:** G
- **Released:** November 14th, 1989
- **Running Time:** 82 minutes
- **Country:** United States
- **Budget:** $40 million
- **Box Office:** Over 200,000,000

**Hans Christian Andersen's –
"The Little Mermaid"**

- **Original Title:** "Den Lille Havfrue"
- **Country:** Denmark
- **Publisher:** C. A. Reitzel
- **Publication Date:** April 7th, 1837
- **Pages:** Approximately 19

stories as a young child just like most five to ten year old girls. I have, however, recently

reflected on Disney's *The Little Mermaid* and asked myself a question: What is the movie really

about? The three main elements from the movie that I remember are overcoming father-daughter

issues, materialism, and love. I pondered on how narrow, and possibly shallow these concepts

are. I began to wonder if this Disney movie taught the morals that I had needed in my childhood

because once I read Andersen's original story, I saw how many life lessons I could have learned.

Now, I love my father deeply, but we have had our issues over the years. The fact of the

matter is that Disney's *The Little Mermaid* did not help us overcome our issues. Ariel went

behind her father's back because she loved a human, Prince Eric. Her father, King Triton,

learned to accept Ariel's strong willed personality, but Disney never shows where Ariel

apologizes or feels remorse towards her father for putting him through so much pain. I have gone

behind my father's back and disobeyed him before, but I always felt remorse, apologized, and

asked for his forgiveness, which he gave due to his love for me. Why does Ariel, when little girls

look up to her, not show that? Why does she not ask for forgiveness? It is obvious in the movie

that King Triton and Ariel love each other, but Disney avoids showing how they overcame their

issues. Andersen's original version of this story does not even mention the father, so there are no

struggles to overcome in that aspect.

In Andersen's version, it is known that Ariel[1] has a father, but he never plays a role in the

story itself. It is Ariel's grandmother who plays the main adult role in the story. She is the one

who relays all of the information about the life of mermaids to Ariel. Information such as how

mermaids live three hundred years then turn into foam at the top of the sea, and how they can

only gain an immortal soul by making a human fall in love with them. She is the elder in the

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[1] There are no actual character names in Andersen's 1837 *The Little Mermaid,* but Ariel is who Andersen's main
mermaid is known as in Disney's version.

story: the symbol of knowledge. This teaches readers that they need to respect their elders because the elders have more knowledge then them. People should turn to their elders for advice and information which is exactly what Ariel does. Ariel gains much information from her grandmother and later becomes obsessed with gaining an immortal soul.

The emphasis on family in Anderson's version of "The Little Mermaid" is inspirational. The reader of Andersen's version does not realize this, however, until the very end. At the end, Ariel is on a ship waiting for the sun to rise because that is when she was scheduled to die by the Sea Witch. Since she did not complete the deal with the Sea Witch, Ariel must accept her fate and turn into foam on top of the sea. She stares out of the window before her death and sees her five sisters swimming towards her, completely bald. They had given their beautiful hair to the Sea Witch in order to save Ariel's life. Ariel also, however, had to kill the prince in order to survive. She refuses to do this and decides to accept her fate, but the fact that her sisters were there for support meant the world to her.

In Disney's version of the story, sadly, Ariel's sisters find her to be odd and they do not understand her. You hardly see the sisters in the movie and they are definitely never seen giving Ariel support. Family is important to have in times of need; it would be nice if the popular Disney movie portrayed this instead of leaving it completely out of the story line. Disney was more focused on incorporating other things such as materialism.

Three hundred years of a happy life is not enough for Ariel, she wants more. In the Disney version, she wants more as well, but she is only speaking of being human and living their lifestyle. She collects objects form the human world and hides them in a secret room of hers. She hoards these human objects. People could view this as Disney supporting materialism because Ariel's collection is an obsession. She thinks that they are the most spectacular items in the

world and treasures them dearly. This obsession with materials is unhealthy, but Disney made it out to be positive and fun.

Andersen's version goes deeper than materials. It deals with life after death. I did not see anything wrong with Disney's portrayal of materialism until I read Andersen's version. Disney had actually based there movie off this story, but they neglected to include its main concepts. There is nothing in Andersen's version that speaks of material objects. Its focus is on something greater: the beauty of this world. The movie focuses on man-made items, but the original story focuses on the nature, beauty, and life after death which is something that people have a hard time seeing or believing in today's world.

Every Disney princess movie focuses on love, but the original tales do not. In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast, Snow White,* and *Cinderella*, all of the main female characters fall in love with a wonderful prince and live happily ever after. It is a pattern and a seemingly necessity with these movies. In Disney's *The Little Mermaid,* as our example, Ariel falls in love with Prince Eric and lives happily ever after, just like all the other Disney princess movies. Ariel wants to become human so that she can be with Prince Eric. After some struggle, she does succeed with this and all is well.

The original stories, however, do not follow this pattern above. They focus on gaining a better self and working towards gaining personal happiness. Love is incorporated, but it is not the main concept. Sometimes love does not work out as shown in Andersen's version of "The Little Mermaid." Yes, Ariel becomes human because she loves the prince, but mainly because she wants to gain immortality, as stated earlier. Religion and spirituality can be a touchy subject for some people, especially when it involves their children. The spirituality of living after death in Andersen's version of "The Little Mermaid" can be interpreted as religious. People view

certain religions as fake, but movies in general are fake as well. If Disney can portray a fake, unrealistic, instant love connection between two people, then why can't they incorporate spirituality? Andersen's story was accepted among people one hundred seventy-six years ago, why is it not portrayed as it was written?

In Andersen's story, the prince and Ariel do not live happily ever after; the prince even ends up marrying someone else. Andersen shows that it is okay to not win love. What is important in Andersen's story is to make the right choices in order to live a better life for yourself. He also emphasizes that family is there for support during rough times in a person's life. Disney's focus on love may be happier to watch, but children will not gain strong morals by watching a love story. What they need is an entertaining way to teach them about the world. Andersen's story is not a sad one, Ariel does die but she gains what she was longing for: an immortal soul. So the next time you are with children, whether your own or another's, I would hesitate when pressing play if I were you. Instead, grab a book and open the way of the world with an original written, entertaining, and happy story.