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### The Little Mermaid

In Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," written in 1837, the exploration of the connection between the natural world and humans, as well as the themes of identity and belonging, are powerfully depicted throughout the story. The tale is not just a depiction of romance, but rather an analysis of the complexities and consequences of forbidden love, revealing the societal tensions and personal sacrifices entwined within these types of relationships. Through this lens of forbidden love, Andersen confronts the sacrifices inherent in pursuing a love deemed prohibited by their society.

"The Little Mermaid" is fundamentally a tale of forbidden love, exploring the difficulties of pursuing romantic relationships that defy societal norms. This claim is debatable, as interpretations of the story may vary to some readers and may view it primarily as a fairy tale about self-discovery or the sacrifices taken for love. However, by examining the narrative through the lens of forbidden love, we can uncover the deeper layers of meaning and symbolism Andersen has placed in the story. In the text, it reads, "She soon grew to be more and more fond of human beings, and to long more and more fervently to be able to walk about amongst them, for their world appeared to her far larger and more beautiful than her own" (Andersen 117). This quote from Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" highlights the theme of forbidden love by illustrating her growing affection for humans and her yearning to become a part of their world. The Little Mermaid's fascination with humans goes beyond just curiosity, as it evolves

into a deep longing to integrate herself into their society, despite the barriers and risks involved. Her admiration for humans contrasts with the norms of her underwater society, where interactions between merfolk and humans are prohibited. Additionally, the quote emphasizes how The Little Mermaid perceives the human world to be superior to her own. She sees humans as having a larger and more beautiful world than her own, which adds to the allure.

The Little Mermaid's yearning to become human and walk upon land deepens as she dwells further upon the idea. When sharing with her grandmother about her new profound passion for the human world, she says, "I would willingly give all the hundreds of years I may have to live, to be a human being but got one day, and to have the hope of sharing in the joys of the heavenly world" (118). She expresses her willingness to sacrifice her very essence for a chance at experiencing love with a human. By demonstrating her eagerness to forfeit her intrinsic identity as a mermaid, the Little Mermaid highlights the strong power of love and the lengths to which individuals such as herself may go to pursue it. This sacrifice she is willing to make emphasizes the intensity and sincerity of her emotions, magnifying the significance of her forbidden love for the prince. Furthermore, it exemplifies the universal theme of love's capacity to rise above boundaries and challenge societal norms. The young age of the Little Mermaid adds another layer of significance to her choice of sacrificing herself for the prospect of human love. Being young and impressionable, she is more susceptible to the temptation of new experiences and emotions. Her innocence and vulnerability makes her open to the romantic ideals and enticements presented by the human world. Moreover, her youthfulness serves as a main reason for her impulsiveness and recklessness in her decision making. She may not fully comprehend the gravity of her sacrifice or the potential consequences of her actions, but driven instead by an idealized version of love and happiness. Therefore, her youthfulness not only emphasizes the

sincerity of her emotions but also highlights the complexities and uncertainties inherent in navigating forbidden love as a young woman.

Through *The Little Mermaid's* longing to walk the land of the humans, this narrative proves as a cautionary tale of the sacrifices and consequences of pursuing a love that is forbidden by nature. The central motif of forbidden love presents itself in the story, as the Little Mermaid's fascination with the human world intensifies despite the societal pressure against mermaids interacting with humans. This forbidden attraction serves as the catalyst for the protagonist's transformative journey, leading her to exchange her voice and endure excruciating pain to pursue her love for the prince. Andersen crafts a narrative that portrays the allure of forbidden love, capturing the universal desire to transcend boundaries in pursuit of genuine affection. Andersen's main message is to warn readers of the dangers of recklessly pursuing forbidden love without considering the long term consequences it may cause. The Little Mermaid's ultimate sacrifice – trading her mermaid identity for the chance to experience human love – serves as a reminder of the sacrifices individuals may make in the pursuit of their desires. Her willingness to change herself for the prospect of love truly shows the lengths at which one may go to sacrifice for what they may believe is their “one true love.” However, this sacrifice ultimately leads to her tragic fate, as she forfeits her voice and suffers in silence, unable to express her love for the prince. The inability to tell the prince she loves him emphasizes the isolating nature of pursuing a forbidden love and the distress that comes from the unreciprocated affection. Stripped of her voice, she becomes a silent observer of the prince's happiness with someone else, and she is forced to endure her suffering in solitude. This aspect of the narrative resonates deeply with many readers, evoking empathy and compassion for *The Little Mermaid's* unfortunate situation.

The relevance of the lesson drawn from the Little Mermaid's story is long lasting, spanning centuries from its creation in the 17th century to its numerous adaptations and remakes in modern times. The narrative's timeless appeal comes from its exploration of universal themes of love, sacrifice, and societal expectations, which resonate with audiences across different cultures and generations. By diving into the complexities of forbidden love and the potential consequences of defying societal norms, the story takes on a lesson that remains as relevant today as it was centuries ago. Its enduring presence in various forms of media serves as a testament to its lasting impact, ensuring that its message continues to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide, regardless of the passing of time.

Works Cited

Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Mermaid." *The Penguin Book of Mermaids*, edited by Christina Bacchilega and Marie Alohani Brown, Penguin Books, 2019, pp 117-118.