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An Analysis of Monstrosity in "The Little Mermaid" With Respect to Christian Theology and Western Ideology

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The Little Mermaid is a story of monsters – or, at the very least, it is a story full of creatures that many might construe as monstrous in the Western understanding. Oftentimes, monsters are described as being outside of what is deemed as normal. This distinction "others" the creatures in a way that is evidently non-human, and in this inhumanity, they become lesser beings. Society paints these supposed monsters with perceived deformities, disabilities, or otherings – contrivances that we don't recognize or understand, and thus become fearful of.[1] In the case of Hans Christian Andersen's land under the sea, we encounter creatures with fishes' tails and bare breasts, seafoam souls, and serpentine dwellings. These descriptions are vastly different from what we have been conditioned to understand as human and good: beyond the fish tail, we see a nudity that we condemn for its supposed impurity. Similarly, a soul made of seafoam does not adhere to the idea of the ghostly spirits we're familiar with in Western understanding, and, as Eve's story in Genesis would have us believe, a serpentine home is one to be feared.

The discomfort we feel when confronted with these sorts of descriptors stem from our own societally-manufactured preconceptions of what is normal, human, and pure. These almost innate ideas stem from the cultures and societies we were raised in. In this story written and reproduced by Western authors, we see that the Western tradition dictates our perception of the normal and the abnormal and ultimately determines how we understand and interact with the world around us. Those from other cultures may be similarly influenced by Western thought if exposed to this media, but that is a conversation for a different paper. The emphasis on abnormality in *The Little Mermaid* only goes further in the 1989 Disney version of the tale, in which Ursula, the Sea Witch, is depicted with wicked purple-and-black-skinned tentacles connected to a fat body.[2] Neither these tentacles, nor Ursula's size, conform to what is "pure" and "good" in the Western framework, which is a system that emphasizes thinness and innocence in women. Since the Sea Witch does not fit within this standard, she is automatically ugly and monstrous in our eyes. In this way, the idea of monsters reflects more on our society and the prejudices we hold than the fantastical odious creatures we are familiar with. This societal reflection can then reoccur in a cyclical fashion, where prejudiced depictions of monsters and/or monstrous traits reinforce preexisting stereotypes in our subconscious, and vice versa. In allowing this cycle to take place with no intercedent, we give it the power to turn viewers themselves into the monsters. The depiction of monsters in *The Little Mermaid,* in both the Disney production (1989) and Hans Christian Andersen's original telling (1836), exposes many ideals regarding Christian theology and Western culture.[34] Evaluating these standards of monstrosity allows the audience to consider who the monster really is.

There is no concrete definition of what is or isn't a monster. Colloquially, though, beyond the fanged teeth and glowing eyes, a monster can be understood as something we as a society don't understand or accept, and that we come to fear. The example of the little mermaid is exactly that. With her human top and fish-tailed bottom, she is a hybridized creature not seen in the natural world we know. In this hybridization, the viewer is met with conflicting sides of human and inhuman, which only work to further define her as an Other, a concept developed by Stephen Asma.[5] Moreover, this little mermaid is, by the very nature of the word, a "maid"(en). She (*she* acting as the operative here) is a female, a member of the so-termed "other" sex. In Elizabeth Johnson's *She Who Is*, the author states:

> Women, children, and those men who do not fit this [strong male] standard are considered not fully human but secondarily so, in a way derivative from and dependent upon the normative man. In its language

1. Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford University Press, 2011).
2. *The Little Mermaid,* directed by John Musker and Ron Clements (1989; Orlando, FL: Disney Animation Studios), DVD.
3. Ibid.
4. "The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen," n.d. Hans Christian Andersen: Fairy Tales and Stories, 1836.
5. Asma, *On Monsters*.

> and theoretical framework, the androcentric world view self-affirms the ruling male as normal and standard, and alienates the female and non-ruling males as deficient, auxiliary, "other."[6]

This statement was made in further explaining the effect of the male-dominated ruling class on the rest of society. In placing the emphasis of normality on phallocrats, we automatically single out every non-male (or non-stereotypical male) person as "other." Johnson's statement above defines women–and by extension, these sea creatures–as doubly less than human, and thereby brands them as monstrous.

Furthering this concept of othering with regard to our principal example of the little mermaid is the fact that the young woman was originally unnamed. In Hans Christian Andersen's telling, she is referred to simply as the "little mermaid" or the "little princess," both written specifically in lowercase.[7] Similarly, the rest of the characters are unnamed and referred to only in description or by what role they play in the story (i.e., grand-mother or second sister). This depersonalizes them to the reader, making them less human and less relatable – perhaps, even, less understandable. There is great power in a name, and to not have one almost removes a person (or creature) from definition and personhood. Andersen's utilization of lowercase lettering demotes his characters from proper nouns to simply nouns, removing them of the capitalization their personhood would normally grant them. With this namelessness and decapitalization, our mermaid is stripped of the relatability her human upper body may have given her.

If we expand this concept to the real world, we can also see many examples of depersonalization through the removal of names. In what might be the grossest genocide utilizing dehumanization as an inducement to violence, Nazi soldiers during the Holocaust reduced Jewish victims to black numbers tattooed on their forearms, stripping them of their names in an attempt to destroy their relationship to their culture and heritage. While this is an extreme example, the connection between the lack (or the stripping) of a name and monstrification is a very real one. On a similar note, albeit to a lesser degree, the little mermaid suffers from a lack of personhood in a way that makes sense to us. We can't identify her without a name; we can't see her as a person, but rather as a thing, an object, or an "other." This teenage girl is connoted as a monster by our preconceived notions of normalcy.

While namelessness can contribute to the depersonalization of a character, it may also work to accomplish the opposite effect. Not having a name can increase the relatability of a character, making them more moldable. If a character doesn't have a name, we can give them a part of our own experience. We can imprint our feelings onto them, solidifying our interpretations and forming a connection to that which is supposed to be connectionless (if the character is a monster, we are typically not meant to identify with them). This relationship between reader and character works in the reverse as well, where we might become sympathetic to their characteristics, aspects of their personalities, or their mannerisms. At the same time, however, we can absorb their biases. Hans Christian Andersen refers to his little mermaid as the most beautiful of all, with her ivory skin and "eyes as blue as the deepest sea."[8] This description of beauty is a product of its time and Western influence. It's a subconscious, seemingly harmless description of what beauty is, but it creates a basis of comparison between the reader and this asserted pinnacle of beauty. This basis develops a beauty standard, which subconsciously becomes the ideal. When one has such a rare standard to compare themselves against, there's little else they can do but fail – and when they fail, they begin to believe that they are less beautiful. When one becomes less beautiful, they become less human in the eyes of society. Kelsey P. Yonce expands on the concept of preferential treatment towards attractive people in her paper on the subject:

> In childhood, children rated as more attractive tend to be more popular, be better adjusted, score higher on tests of intelligence, and perform better in school (Langlois et al., 2000). As adults, higher levels of attractiveness correlate with greater success in the workplace, being better liked, more dating experience, more sexual experience, greater health both physically and mentally, higher levels of extraversion, higher levels of confidence, higher levels of self-esteem, more positive self-perceptions, and better social skills (Langlois et al., 2000).[9]

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6. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is* (Crossroad Publishing, 1992).
7. "The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen."
8. Ibid.
9. Kelsey P. Yonce, "Attractiveness Privilege: the Unearned Advantages of Physical Attractiveness" (Master's Thesis, Smith College, 2014) https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/745.

Society has manufactured an ideal that equivocates being more beautiful with having more opportunities, and therefore being more worthy. We tend to treat people with more respect when they are physically attractive, or, in other words, when they conform to the standards we have created. Outside of the beauty standard lies the "ugly," or the "other." In ostracizing the ugly, we treat them with less respect than their humanity demands (as we humans should be able to expect a baseline of cordial treatment from one another for the health of society). By treating them with less respect, we make them less human. Again, this phenomenon occurs cyclically: we see the ugly ostracized in society, then reflect this bias onto our media, then reflect it again back onto society.

However, despite this emphasis on physicality in determining our perception, the Sea Witch in the original story isn't given much description. Yes, she is surrounded by slithering creeps and spindly creatures, but her own physical appearance is left unacknowledged. Andersen moreso uses her surroundings to describe her wickedness and her monstrosity. Even then, though, we only think of her environment as wicked and monstrous because of the biases we hold. Her dark, serpentine home doesn't automatically make her evil, nor does her spell. After all, the little mermaid was the one who sought her out and asked for it. In accordance with that perspective, the Sea Witch simply made a deal, agreeing to a proposed business transaction. She clarified the potential consequences of using the spell, and the little mermaid agreed to them despite the risk. The latter fully knew that failure to allure the prince would result in her death, and that obtaining the spell required her to barter her tongue, but even so, she accepted. In her desperation to belong, find true love, and acquire a human soul, she gave up her life and the voice she loved, and even subjected herself to knife-stabbing pains with every step she took. This could monstrify her, for she embodies misunderstanding and the longing to belong, or it could just make her a typical 15-year-old girl. At her pivotal age, especially with consideration of the liminal stage of puberty, older readers might find monstrosity. Youth are often misunderstood and misrepresented; they don't quite have the tools to express themselves well, so they become petulant and they rebel. They are reduced to "angsty teens," and their feelings are pushed aside in favor of the adult logic that older generations have developed beyond their teenage years. We don't understand them, just as this little mermaid remains misunderstood. In that way, she could be monstrous.

Age, however, doesn't stop an individual from being vilified even once they are past their teen years. This concept may also reoccur in old age. Andersen's description of the Sea Witch elicits the image of an older woman whose beauty has long since left her. At this point in life, many people lose their ability to self-advocate, or become shunted off to the edges of society as their age has left them ignorant of current norms. They become reclusive, othered, and misunderstood, turning cranky from their ostracization. Often, the elderly have lost touch with the world simply because the world has lost touch with them, moving forward and leaving them in their modern dust. An example of this could be the forced retirement many older workers undergo in favor of the younger generation of employees, or even just the common stereotype of older people not understanding modern technology and needing their children's help to use the internet. The older generation is deemed unfit to participate in society in this way, effectively othering them (and through that, monstrifying them). This idea of monstrous maturity ties back to our question of what really makes a monster. Because both characters may be justified as monsters, the ultimate conclusion comes down to what one has come to believe about monstrosity, as determined by the culture and society they were brought up in.

Further analysis of Andersen's description of the Sea Witch's home reveals several adjectives that can be considered to be evil, reestablishing the idea of biases influencing personal interpretation. Much of her environment is described as "slithery," "slimy," or "strangling" – or, in more definite terms, serpentine. This description calls to mind an image of scales and sin, creeping and constriction.[10] Why is that? Why do snakes provoke such an evil, monstrous form in our consciousness? I posit that this discomfort goes back to when, in the Biblical tradition, a deceitful snake offered the saintly Eve an apple in the Garden of Eden. In Eve's acceptance of the apple, she condemned humanity and womankind for all time. Women would now suffer horrific pains during childbirth and remain subservient to their husbands at all times; men would now live off of the ground that made them, though it is now cursed. Humanity never forgave the snake for tricking Eve, nor did they forgive Eve for being tricked (a topic that will be discussed later). Why was it a snake that offered Eve the apple in the first place? Snakes are, essentially, the antithesis of what it means to be human. They have no arms or legs, their eyes remain unlidded, their skin is hard

10. "The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen."

and scaly, and their blood is cold. Our limbed, eye-lidded, fleshed, warm-blooded sensitivities can't understand them, especially in a time before biology. We cannot relate to them, and therefore we condemn them for being things that we cannot understand. We monstrify them, and turn them into creatures that trick our women and destroy a life in paradise that would have otherwise been ours.

In addition, we as humans cannot align ourselves with the way snakes move in twisting, curving forms. Their bends and coils are hypnotizing, leading our eye around and capturing our attention. Speaking broadly, the way snakes move is alluring to our human capacities. It is so alluring, in fact, that society has a tendency to sexualize them to an almost uncomfortable degree. Snakes are associated with temptation, due to the original hoodwink, and in some cases it's a temptation that turns sexual. There are even some accounts of the Genesis tale wherein Eve and the snake had a sexual relationship (whether accurate or not), thus establishing a sinful lust that ruined humanity.[11] This relationship, referred to as the snake seed theory, and this lust (along with its association as one of the cardinal vices) have in turn vilified open sexuality and prioritized innocence and chastity. For these reasons, the Sea Witch's association with serpentine creatures vilifies her in our Western consciousness, causing us to see her as the monster.

Beyond that, if we associate the snake with temptation of any kind, we can turn the little mermaid into an Eve-esque character. In this version, she is tempted away from her life of peace and ignorance of the world above by the prospect of knowledge and the love of a man, just as Eve was tempted away from a perfect life for similar curiosities, especially if we consider the snake seed theory.[12] This would turn the world above, or perhaps even the prince himself, into the alluring snake that tricked the young "Eve" into sacrificing everything. Alternatively, the Sea Witch's provision of a means to access the human realm could turn her into the temptatious snake, and the world above as simply the apple. With our preexisting vilification of the Sea Witch, this second option fits more squarely within society's expectations and biases.

To complicate matters further, Disney's 1989 interpretation of Andersen's story provides a physical description of the Sea Witch. The filmmakers give her eels (or water snakes) and they make her purple and fat. They turn her voice raspy and her hair short and white. Essentially, by our tradition, they make her ugly. In making her ugly, she becomes evil — an idea discussed above, as well as in Stephen Asma's *On Monsters*.[13] The story here diverges in several places from the original. For one, all of the characters are given names. The little mermaid is now called Ariel, and her sisters all have lovely flowing monikers. Our Sea Witch, however, is given the name "Ursula," or "little she-bear" in its native Latin. Ursula is not a name that rolls easily off of the Western, Americanized tongue. It feels foreign and unfamiliar to us, just as she is supposed to be. We aren't meant to know the name of this purple, tentacled, fat creature who takes our skinny, red-haired, and blue-eyed heroine's voice. We question the form that she takes; we don't understand her monstrous appearance; we turn her into a villain.

We do, however, understand her physical characteristics. She's overweight and curvaceous, with heavy makeup and a low-cut dress that is evocative of drag queens who are the supposed perpetrators of "child endangerment."[14] Ursula's high-arched brows, flamboyant bright blue eyeshadow, red lips, and mole are all reminiscent of the legendary drag queen Divine, on whom she was based in the movie. Drag queens are generalized as predominantly gay men, and are largely vilified and hated. Modern-day radicalists argue that drag queens are turning their children gay, where being gay is a negative characteristic. Tracing this prejudice back in the Western mindscape, we come across Leviticus 18:22, which states "[y]ou shall not lie with a man as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination." Many use this verse to condemn homosexuality and justify their violence towards others. However, Dr. Idan Dershowitz, a Biblical scholar, posits that this line is a misrepresentation of Leviticus and

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11. Robert Velarde, "Did Eve Have Sex with Satan? The Serpent Seed View of Genesis 3:15 - Christian Research Institute," Christian Research Institute, August 4, 2017, https://www.equip.org/articles/eve-sex-satan-serpent-seed-view-genesis-315/.
12. Ibid.
13. Asma, *On Monsters*.
14. Ja'han Jones, "Conservatives Are Suddenly Obsessed with Drag Queens," *MSNBC*, June 14, 2022, https://www.msnbc.com/the-reidout/reidout-blog/drag-queens-conservatives-rcna33478.

was actually written by a later editor who held homophobic tendencies.[15] He states that the original Leviticus oriented itself more against incest than homosexuality, and that it is very likely that same-sex intimacy would have been allowed. There are other studies to support this conclusion, the primary instigator being that there is no line in the Bible, in either Testament, that explicitly condemns homosexuality. Despite this being the case, extremists continue to ostracize, belittle, and assault (sometimes fatally) gay people and drag queens. Though there are and have been movements in support of homosexual liberty and it does seem that times and conceptions are slowly changing to be more accepting, this scar on our history is still bleeding and affects millions every day worldwide. Ursula's association with this vilified group further monstrifies her in the viewer's eye, and in turn further monstrifies the group she is based on in society.

Additionally, Ursula's rough and gravelly voice and purple skin are all characteristics that may be associated with Black women, a group that has also been vilified, monstrified, and subjected to brutality across time. Her voice has a sort of husky drawl to it, a depth that is reminiscent of popular stereotypes of Black women, especially in the American south.[16] In Courtney Kurinec and Charles Weaver III's study on the racial stereotypicality of speech, the authors investigated the relationship between "sounding Black" and the establishment of stereotypes on Black people by listeners, ultimately concluding that people who were perceived as Black were assigned far more stereotypes than their non-Black counterparts, and were often assigned the much more reductive stereotypes associated with Black people. For example, in North America, they found that 19.5% of listeners assigned Black participants as poor, compared to 2.5% for non-Black participants.[17] Society's tendency to generalize this deeper voice as belonging to Black women likely stems from an attempt to make them seem more masculine in comparison to the (supposedly) fairer-voiced white woman. Removing Black women from their femininity in this way allows society to treat them as "lesser" women, just as Ursula is treated as lesser throughout the film. Ariel, in contrast, is said to have the most beautiful voice of all, singing delicate melodies with a soft, almost operatic voice. This voice is what Ursula wants the most, creating a clear inequality between them (and thus mirroring the inequality between Blackness and Whiteness) that is continued throughout the film. Beyond that, her purple skin separates her from the rest of the fair-skinned characters, alienating her in both her physicality and her vocals. This difference is significant, because it creates an association between color and evil in the mind of the viewer. It speaks to the further monstrification of individuals within our society, and the demonizing of Black women and Black people in general for merely the color of their skin. Due to this association, we subconsciously begin to further classify Black women as evil and just as monstrous as the mythical Ursula.

Furthering Ursula's monstrification is the fact that she is fat, which in modern American terms equates to laziness, gluttony, and immorality (once again calling back to the cardinal sins). Overall, she's the epitome of what we're *not* supposed to strive for. She is a large, non-white, ugly monster. As Stephen Asma asserts, this ugliness correlates with the ugliness of her soul and her lack of goodness.[18] The things that we find displeasing are automatically othered, placed in a group of "lesser than." We justify this by convincing ourselves that there must be something wrong with that individual because of their physical appearance: a flaw on the inside, manifesting itself in the unpleasurable image on the outside. This thought process is dangerous, especially when considering that this movie is targeted towards younger audiences. In representing Ursula in this way, we subconsciously code her large, ugly, bold traits with badness. Thus, when confronted with these traits in our daily lives, a part of us assumes that the people who hold them are also bad. We associate these people with the monsters we've come to know and turn them into monsters ourselves. While most stories need a villain, it is important to consider the way we portray those villains, particularly when targeting young and impressionable viewers. When we assert that certain traits are monstrous (whether subconsciously or not), we expose easily influenceable audiences, such as the children the film is marketed towards, to underlying societal biases that they

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15. Idan Dershowitz, "The Secret History of Leviticus," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/21/opinion/sunday/bible-prohibit-gay-sex.html.
16. Courtney Kurinec and Charles Weaver III, "'Sounding Black': Speech Stereotypicality Activates Racial Stereotypes and Expectations About Appearance," *Frontiers in Psychology,* December 24, 2021, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.785283.
17. Ibid.
18. Asma, *On Monsters.*

will take with them as they navigate their lives. This calls back to the cyclical nature of monstrification. We perceive things as evil or monstrous, we depict them as such, and then we further establish that prejudice in the minds of the young.

We move, then, to the idea of disability and monstrification. Depicting monsters as othered, whether by physical appearance or mental incapability, paints a negative narrative around disabilities. Being overweight to the extent that Ursula is would be considered a disability in our society. Regardless of her ability to swim and her buoyancy in water, translating her physical appearance to the world we know effectively disables her. This isn't to say that all obesity is necessarily a disability, nor is it to say that Ursula herself is inherently disabled, as it is entirely possible to be obese and perfectly healthy. A recent article from the University of Rochester's Medical Center even quotes Dr. Holly Richards M.D. with saying, "[t]he fact is, there is not a precise link between weight and health outcomes, nor is there evidence to support a fixed belief that higher weight always equals worsening health. A person's health is influenced by a complex mix of health behaviors, genetic factors, lean mass, fitness, and environmental risks."[19] However, the perception of her weight potentially causing disability does speak to the societal conceptions of weight and ability and how we perceive fat people. Being fat, especially when compared to the thinness of the rest of the characters, removes her from the societal norm and marks her as a target for ridicule. Similarly, in becoming mute and resigning herself to feeling sword-stabbing pains with every step, the protagonist of Andersen's original version of the story develops disabilities of her own.[20] It is interesting to note, though, that she chose these disabilities — chose to be voiceless and pained on land rather than singing and free underwater. Some might say that it was a noble sacrifice in pursuit of true love, but that is debatable. Doing this to oneself is not noble, and should not be idolized — it is instead an act that removes oneself from freedom of movement. Moreover, the harsh realities of disability are sanitized in the story, removing the inner turmoil, shame, and hatred that many people with disabilities face. This sets an unrealistic example for disabled viewers, and might instill within them that their pain is not enough to justify self-compassion, or that they just need to find love to "fix" all of life's dissatisfactions.

Looking at Anderson's story through the lens of monstrosity, the prince, object of the little mermaid's affection, could also be termed a monster. In Andersen's depiction of the little mermaid, upon the loss of her tongue she begins to be referred to almost exclusively as "dumb."[21] This becomes a common theme: the mermaid has lost her ability to speak, and therefore is perceived as unintelligent and lesser. The prince thereby infantilizes her, at one point literally referring to her as "my dumb child."[22] He doesn't see her as a person to love romantically, but rather as an object to treasure for her devotion to him. In this way, he might be the true monster for refusing to understand her and only loving her for what she gives him. By conforming to this patriarchal ideal and exercising control over her, he is monstrous.

In accordance with this sort of patriarchal ideal, however, it becomes obvious that the prince cannot be the story's monster in our eyes — not when there are two conniving women present. Calling back to the earlier discussion of feminine physicalities, regardless of the varying forms of the women described, femininity is still seen as wrong. Society vilifies women, and reduces them to stereotypes and pretty labels. In Johnson's discussion of Aquinas's theology, she quotes, "[o]nly as regards nature in the individual is the female something defective and misbegotten."[23] Essentially, there is something inherently wrong with women no matter what they do. They are intrinsically bad and amoral, intrinsically monstrous. It therefore could not be said that Andersen's prince is the monster, because it wouldn't fit with our definition of manhood versus womanhood. This once again calls back to the Genesis story, where, despite Adam's compliance in the crime, Eve is the only one who is vilified. Yes, she chose to take the apple, but Adam did too. Genesis 3:6 states that Adam was present for the deliberation, saying "...and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate." He could have refused at any time, could have even stopped her if he wanted to, but he chose to join. He chose to eat the apple, chose not to intercede, and even blamed Eve during

19. Lori Barrette, "Is BMI Accurate? New Evidence Says No," *URMC Newsroom*, January 8, 2024, https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/news/publications/health-matters/is-bmi-accurate.
20. "The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen."
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Johnson, *She Who Is.*

God's questioning, but he is not described as the monster. Men cannot be the villains, or else everything we've been taught in a patriarchal society was for naught. So we choose to vilify Eve, to vilify women everywhere, because it is less obtrusive and fits into the narrative that has been created and that we continue to create for ourselves. Therefore, in an examination of who must really be the monster, it has to be one of the two women: mermaid or sea witch.

This patriarchal perspective is borne from the centuries-old insistence on phallocentrism that exalts males as the supreme, righteous rulers of our society. There isn't anything inherently wrong with women or femininity. These are merely the biases and prejudices that we are taught. With this consideration in mind, we become able to see the problems with male behavior and dominance over femininity, and begin to feel sympathy for womanhood. In "Part of your World" from the 1989 Disney film, Ariel sings "Bet'cha on land they understand / Bet they don't reprimand their daughters / Bright young women, sick of swimmin' / Ready to stand."[24] She, a 16-year-old girl (they aged her up a year in the movie) — and a potentially monstrous hybrid by multiple accounts — just wants to have a chance to be herself. She wants the chance to go after what she wants and experience the world the way she wants to. Her restriction, though, is the androcentric society by which her life is run. Her father, King Trident, controls her existence just as God (and by extension, the male sex) controls modern society.

In all of this discussion, the definition of "monster" has been that which is unknown, other. It is something incomprehensible because it varies so much, and perhaps because we make it intentionally difficult to recognize. Could this definition not also apply to God, though? A being that, by definition, we can't begin to understand; a figureless non-anthropomorphic creature that knows all and sees all but who we can't see; a *thing* that was majorly unnamed until Hagar's story in Genesis 16:13. In the very first sentence of *She Who Is,* Johnson defines Christian theology as "faith seeking understanding."[25] By this, we confront the futility of searching for understanding of the almighty, and thereby make the decision to have faith in it instead. What makes God worthy of this faith, though, over any other monster we've seen? Why is God not considered a monster too? Truthfully, it's doubtful that any of the figures discussed in this paper are truly monsters. There is no absolute definition of monstrosity we could possibly assign to any of them. Rather, it seems that in searching for the monstrous, we begin to consider the evil in others without ever looking inward. We see harsh stereotypes play out in our media and absorb them; we hear cruel prejudices in our sacred literature and we repeat them; we feel hatred and anger towards people undeserving and we express it. We other *ourselves* in looking for the evil in others, and thereby let that same evil grow within us. Could it not be said, then, that we the — the readers and the viewers of *The Little Mermaid* and similar media — are the real monsters?

24. Jodi Benson, "Part of Your World," *The Little Mermaid: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* [Special Edition], Disney, 1989, USA. https://audio-ssl.itunes.apple.com/itunes-assets/AudioPreview126/v4/9b/65/ec/9b65eca8-17cd-1df6-e710-6d1111e253a4/mzaf_16262542128563208488.plus.aac.p.m4a.
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