

Analytical essay about the little mermaid and the wild swans

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



The Affection of Vanity; behind the scenes of " The Little Mermaid" and " The Wild Swans" I believe that the stories " The Little Mermaid" and " The Wild Swans" are fundamentally about vanity and the craving for self-satisfaction by main characters in each story. Hans Christian Andersen was born on the 2nd of April, 1805, in the city of Odense outside of Copenhagen in Denmark. He was a Danish author who wrote lyrical poems, fairy tales and novels. He was known as H. C. Andersen throughout the world since he preferred using his first two initials instead of signing his whole name.

He succeeded in writing over 200 fairy tales and 1000 poems during his lifetime and his stories and poetry have been translated into more than 150 languages inspiring different plays, ballets and movies. H. C Andersen passed away on the 4th of August 1875. People still, even after H. C Andersen's death, reminisce about how he lit up the world with his amusing children's stories and unbelievable fairy tales, such as for example " The Little Mermaid" and " The Wild Swans. The main character's choices in each story is an action of vanity and these are the ideas from which my essay will emanate and give me the possibility of laying the fundamental proofs of my thesis statement by indicating the patterns of vanity throughout both stories. " The Little Mermaid " is generally about a young mermaid whose dearest wish is to become a human being so she could fall in love above the waters with a prince. She is even willing to precede her identity as a mermaid and leave her life and her family behind, at the darkest bottoms of the ocean for the sake of turning this dream into reality. " The Wild Swans" is on the other hand a story about the sacrifice which one princess makes in the hope of rescuing her eleven brothers who have been cast under a spell. These two

stories do not differ so much from each other since the main character in “ The Little Mermaid” is willing to give up her life and make bodily sacrifices for the sake of love, while the princess in “ The Little Swans” believes that she is able to save her brothers by making bodily sacrifices as well and all of this for the sake of her own love, believing they are able make it on their own by their abilities.

Vanity is the excessive reliance on one’s ability to impress others, either by looks or abilities. According to many, vanity is a bad characteristic and can be related to egotism and arrogance. Vanity is often portrayed as a peacock in the artistic world, except for in the Bible, where it is represented by the Whore of Babylon according to The Free Encyclopedia. (Section: Thesymbolismof vanity. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanity>). Vanity falls together with arrogance and presumption into the context of pride as one of the seven deadly sins.

There are different references to this theory in the Bible where the classical example for this sin is shown in the story of the Tower of Babel which can be found in Genesis 11: 5-8 in The Holy Bible. The characters in “ The Little Mermaid” have in general been self-centered throughout the whole fairytale by questioning their abilities of beauty and possibilities. They have kept on battling the chase of beauty by trying to glamourize themselves. The biggest factor which leads me into making these kinds of assumptions about the Mer-people was the fact that their will to be different was far more important than showing compassion for each other.

Evidence can be found in on page 136 of the booklet where H. C. Andersen is describing the Mer-King's mother as an old and typical posh lady which has settled in the big palace and adapted her way of living to the needs provided by the services of the house. Andersen has also given her the characteristics of believing that she is far better than the rest of the inhabitants of the sea and to prove it she is described wearing twelve oysters on her tail, while the rest of the mermaids in the ocean are only allowed to wear six.

I believe that this is what influences the little mermaid into committing these superficial decisions such as wanting to live on land because of love, later on throughout the story by being influenced by factors of her surroundings such as for an example, her home. The palace where the Mer-Kings family lives has walls out of coral, high pointed windows of amber, and roofs made out of mussel-shells which are described as glittering pearls. This is what causes the little mermaid to feel eccentric and full of herself by believing that no one is as good as her since no one has a house as beautiful as hers.

This is a psychological remark of the mind of the mermaid, since she is affected by the environment around her she is bound into developing as a person thinking that she deserves nothing but the best. This behavior is obviously caused by the fact that she is described as the most beautiful child out the 6 children and as the loveliest one. When living in such an environment as the little mermaid is she is clearly affected by the fact of living in a place as gorgeous as the palace is. Their home is described as the most beautiful building at the bottom of the sea.

I think that the house was a compensation for the loss of the Mer-kings wife since he made it this big and remarkable. This story has its resemblance to the story of the Taj Mahal, when the Sultan built the building in honor of his late wife. Since her father had been a widower for many years and the little mermaid had no mother-figure to look up to and to rely on, so her grandmother had to take that role upon herself and raise the little mermaid and her 5 sisters. It is noticeable throughout the whole story how the little mermaid's affection for her grandmother is absurd since she constantly asks for the tales off the world above waters.

The grandmother is her only source of knowledge of the upper world and she is always asking her about the land above and how it is like. The little mermaid had a special love for dry land and could not wait to turn fifteen since that was the age when a mermaid was considered mature enough to rise to the surface of the world above. By having such a classy grandmother and by growing up at a home such as the palace, H. C Andersen had no choice but to create the character the little mermaid as rather a alone child and very " high-thinking" of herself.

This high standard of life and the high expectations of life drove the little mermaid into believing that she was able to do impossible things, such as start a life on dry land and being able to win over the prince's heart by getting him to love her more than he loved his mother and father. The little mermaid's voice is mentioned multiple times as an unbelievably beautiful voice throughout the story. She thinks of her voice as the best attribute.

She wished that she were one of them. Their world seemed to her much larger than that of the Mer-people. " I interpreted this as meaning that she once again doubted her place in life and felt as she deserved more than just being an imprisoned of the ocean. Her hopes for her abilities of becoming something better were once again showing her own lust of the affection for the bigger world. She believed, she wanted and she felt as she deserved something better than the life she had below the surface and was ashore that she could change it on her own.

The little mermaid is once again showing signs of vanity by craving self-satisfaction which is in this case the love and life above waters. She was willing risking her own life for the sake of getting an immortal soul so she could live unhappiness for the rest of her life by proving to the prince that she was more deserving of his love than his parents were. It is clearly stated in the story, on page 149, that she is determined to go to the enchantress whom she has feared so much before for the slightly chance of making her dream come true.

Even though the path to the enchantress was dangerous and frightening, she was still confident enough to rely on her abilities of surviving the horrible way to the witch in the hope of finding a way to spend her life with prince. One of the obstacles on the path were the whirlpools which the little mermaid was bold enough to believe that she could survive, the description of this horrible obstacle can be found on page 149 as well, "... she had to traverse an extent of bare grey sand till she reached the whirlpool, whose waters were eddying and whizzing like millwheels, tearing everything they

could seize along with them into the abyss below. This proves the trust which the little mermaid had in herself by being able to get to the enchantress on her own. Even though few mermaids had made it through to the witch, the little mermaid forced herself into believing that she could make it. Not once did she stop to think if the prince would return her love with blessings of his own, she just assumed that he was going to love her as much as she loved him. That she was beautiful enough for to make him fall in love with her.

The theme of vanity within the story "The Little Mermaid" is greatly focused on the abilities of the little mermaid, if she is bold enough to endure the pains for which she has to go through in the hope of being loved by the prince. Her plan was to find a way of spending the rest of her life on dry land with the prince and this is what caused her to go to the enchantress looking for answers. She hoped that the enchantress of the sea would have a way of letting her spend her life above waters, which proved to be right.

The witch had a potion which would enable the little mermaid to grow legs and to be able to walk but she warned her that the transformation would be very painful. The witch described it as "letting a knife cut through your body". On page 151 the enchantress is telling the little mermaid that it will even hurt when walking, the description of this so called "lucrative" solution was described as; "...it will seem to hurt you as though you were walking on the sharp edges of swords, and your blood will flow". Even when being warned, the little mermaid did not get scared of the fact that she had to endure such pain. She would not abandon her dreams. The witch mentioned as well that if she does not succeed in making the prince fall in love with her,

the little mermaid would be turned into foam and vanish. When the witch mentioned a repayment for the potion, the little mermaid became stunned. She then bared the thought of asking what the enchantress wanted from her.

“ Thou hast the sweetest voice of all the dwellers in the sea, and thou thinkest by its means to charm the prince, this voice, however, I demand recompense. The best thing thou possesses I require in exchange for my magic drink. The little mermaid agreed to these demands and proved that she still believed that she was beautiful enough to charm the prince even without her wonderful voice. This is the mental affection of vanity, the little mermaid was still bold enough to believe that her beauty and body would make the prince fall in love with her. This turned out to be true, since she amazed the prince with her wonderful eyes.

The evidence of this is on page 155, “ If I were obliged to choose, I should prefer thee, my silent foundling, with the speaking eyes. This was what the prince told the little mermaid after she glanced upon him with her beautiful eyes. While the prince was enchanted by the little mermaid’s eyes he was indirectly strengthening her bad characteristic by making her believe that she was pretty enough and able to make him fall in love with her, even though she was not able to speak. The little mermaid did unfortunately not succeed into being loved by the prince, since he married another princess from another kingdom. The little mermaid had to face the destiny from which the enchantress warned her about.

The enchantress told the little mermaid that if she did not achieve to be loved by the prince, she would turn into foam and die. Since this unavoidable

outcome was destined to occur, the little mermaid got a visit from a transparent figure, probably an angel. It appeared in front of her and told her that the blessing of an immortal soul was not necessary to obtain from the love of the prince but from the suffering of a soul and the acceptance of their good deeds. The moment right before the little mermaid was about to die, her sisters swam up to the surface to tell her that there was a way to become a mermaid again and survive.

They went to the enchantress and she told them that the only way of saving the little mermaid, was if she stabbed the prince right in the heart and waited for his red blood to touch her feet and as repayment for the enchantress answer the sisters had to cut off all of their hair. The little mermaid refused to do so because she loved the prince far more than she loved herself and would not let him die instead of her. She waited for the sun to rise, for it was when the first rays of light would hit her that she would die. So, the little mermaid sacrificed all of it with in the hope of achieving her biggest dream.

She managed to fulfill half of it by being able to live a life on land, but she failed to make the prince fall in love with her. She was able to suffer through everything for the sake of love and with the help of vanity. Vanity is referred to as something negative but the choices she made due to this sin, resulted into benefiting her in the end since she changed her destiny. "The Wild Swans" had a similar beginning as the story "The Little Mermaid", since they both explained which types of characters we were being introduced to. The "Wild Swans" expressed right at the beginning of the story that both Elise and

her eleven brothers were far different from the other people and citizens of their kingdom. H. C Andersen had done a great job of getting this point across by describing that the eleven brothers went to school with stars on their breasts and swords on their sides. Feeling pride while they wrote on golden tables with diamond pens and could read fluently. By letting the eleven brothers differ from the “ regular folk” H. C Andersen created barriers between the different characteristics associated with this situation.

By showing them acknowledgment you are proving to the princes that they are better than others. I think that this is the concept that H. C. Andersen wanted to convey. This incident is related to “ The Little Mermaid” where the principals of the scenario are identical. The grandmother had put 12 oysters on her tail to show status and differ from the rest while the eleven brothers are distinguished by their star, sword, golden tables and diamond pens. Elise is separated from the people in a different way, H. C Andersen did this by letting her have a picture-book which was worth as much as half the kingdom.

By letting a child have an expensive possession like this for her pleasure of playing with it, one is clearly marking the fact that she is something special and I think that by this cause that H. C. Andersen, as in the “ The Little Mermaid” did not have another choice than to give Elise and her brothers the flaw of vanity. While letting them believe that they are far more different than the rest of the citizens with their possessions they are made into believing that they are of a bigger importance. One thing which shows the affection of Elise’s beauty is seen page 14 of the booklet with “ The Wild

Swans" story, where she asks the roses; " Who is more beautiful than you? " and receiving the answer; " Elise".

This evidence is showing Elise's obsession for her beauty by going around asking these questions. One similar scenario can be found as well on page 14 of the booklet where she asks the hymn-book; " Who is more pious than thou? " and receiving the same answer back as before; " Elise". While the same problem is repeating itself throughout H. C Andersen's stories we can draw the similarities between the little mermaid and Elise. The little mermaid was betrayed into a sort of vanity where she was blinded for all the possible outcomes except for when it came to the love of the prince. While the little mermaid was seeking around getting approval of her beauty by singing with her beautiful voice, or succeeding in making persons fall in love with her she could strengthen the fact that she was beautiful while Elise on the other side is striving for the acknowledgment for her beauty by being more direct and asking things and people about her appearance.

Something that is noticeable throughout this story is that it is very religiously affected and implied to influence someone on spiritual level by repeatedly referring to the powers of God, and that the good inside of someone can overtake the evil. Since H. C Andersen was a very religious man who had a strong belief in Christianity it was not so surprising to find these kinds of references to the holy powers above us but the thing which did make me think was that the fairytale of the little mermaid had no religious or faithful statements throughout the story.

The only explanation I can have for this is because the Mer-people were not humans and could not possess a soul, but after the little mermaid became a human and was about to die, the transparent figure appeared itself in front of her and explained that the soul of a human and a mermaid were not dependent on if they had legs or fish fins, it was dependent on the good deeds performed during a lifetime and the suffering experience for a loved one. , but there was still no mentioning of God nor heaven as in this story.

Elise decided as the story went on to search for her brothers which her evil step-mother had casted a spell on and turned them into eleven swans. The obstacles which Elise had to go through resemble the obstacles which the little mermaid had to go through for the sake of reaching the enchantress house. The little mermaid had a more selfish cause for going through these big obstacles such as the whirlpool. She did it just to get an answer to how she would be able to fulfill her dream, while Elise went through the darkness of the woods and being sent out into the world all alone.

The cause of her searching for her brothers and enabling herself to surviving these obstacles was the fact that she was searching for her eleven lost swan brothers. She was risking her own life for the benefit of her brothers while the little mermaid risked hers for her own good. They both believed that their own abilities were enough to survive and take them self's through these horrible obstacles when being driven by love. To express Elise's beauty H. C Andersen has let the animals in the woods show it symbolically by letting the sunbeams play upon her and make a golden veil.

The birds preached as well on Elise's shoulders. These moments just strengthen her both spiritually and in the belief of that she could make it by her own. Andersen has described her moments as that God would never forsake her. I think that H. C. Andersen focused on writing about God and because of this resulted into making this story a little more believable since a human being often turns to God in tough times. It says on page number 17 of the booklet; "...that she saw the Angel of God looking down upon her with gentle aspect, and a thousand little cherubs all around him. I assume that by this sentence it is described that Elise is meant to get some faithful guidance and as a sign to show her that God is on her side. By this it is meant that she should be strengthened and believe more in herself since she has the help of God on her side. This scenario may refer to the similarities of the little mermaid where she got a visit from a translucent figure, probably an angel. Even though this scenario occurs at a different place in each story I am still assured that it has some resemblance to one and each other.

When Elise finally meets her brothers they start to talk, she is informed that they need to relocate to another site in two days, because they are not allowed to be in this side of the world for more than eleven days a year. So, they start to discuss what to do since Elise does not want to leave them and her brothers want to bring her with them. We can see on page 21, the sign of vanity, when her eldest brother is in a discussion concerning the topic of carrying Elise on their wing by their own strength. " My arm I strong enough to bear thee through the forest; shall we not have sufficient strength in our wings to transport thee over the sea? " This is referred to in the belief of that the eldest brother is strong enough to carry her by his sheer strength and

ability. Elise risked as well her brothers' lives for her own satisfaction by agreeing to let them fly her over the open ocean for two days, when she knew that the consequences would be big. The little mermaid experienced the same things as Elise even though sometimes throughout the story the actions taken by Elise were the opposite behavior of the little mermaid. The different choices resulted into experiencing different kinds of pain.

Elise had to go through a lot of mental problems in the story by being told in one of her dreams that to save her brothers she needed to pick sting-needles by hand and trample on nettles with her bare feet to get the yarn from which she was going to weave eleven shirts for each brother. But from the moment of when Elise begun her work till the day she finished it, she was not allowed to speak, not even a word. If so much as a syllable came out of her mouth daggers would fall right through the hearts of her brothers.

So Elise had to give up her voice, the same sacrifice the little mermaid had to give up and they both did it for the sake of love. These actions which were taken resulted into each character reaching self-satisfaction by the help of vanity throughout the story and the pattern of vanity can be clearly shown throughout both stories. When the stories are analytically picked apart it is easier to notice these kinds of causes, which are common in H. C Andersons writing, since he involves Christianity and God into his work.

He wrote much about the different sins which fall into the category of "religious writing" along with his talk about the church and life beyond death. Analyzing the writing of H. C Andersen based on these two stories I can claim

that his personal background had a huge impact on the outcome of these stories and that his affection of religion resulted into the affection of vanity in each main character.