

Children of Queer Bodies: the Legacy of the Sea Witch in Disney's *Descendants 2*

In this paper I will discuss the role of queerness and bodily difference in both *The Little Mermaid* and *Descendants 2* for those marked as monstrous within the Disney canon. Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* draws creates an empathetic depiction of a queer body willing to endure pain in order to be accepted as fully human. Yet, when Disney adapted the tale to film in 1989, it was not the mermaid who was marked as queer, but the villainous sea witch. Modeled on the drag queen Divine, Ursula threatens the mermaid by providing sexual competition, luring the prince away from a fairytale ending.

Scholars have discussed Ursula as a queer body and sexual threat, highlighting the camp and drag elements of Ursula's performed femininity, and noting that she, like other fairy tale monsters, must be destroyed to achieve a heteronormative happily ever after. I seek to update this critical framework by expanding the conversation surrounding Ursula's queer presence to include Disney's newest iteration of the sea witch, Ursula's daughter Uma from *Descendants 2*.

In *Descendants 2* the children of Disney villains navigate their parents' legacies alongside the children of heroes and heroines. Uma is marked as different as the only named black character. Uma also functions as a sexual rival for the protagonist, Mal. Disney films have long been criticized for their portrayals of women and girls as sexual objects, but this analysis is often focused on the princesses. Uma is a capable pirate, yet, it is her sexuality that presents the true danger, threatening to take over the kingdom through influence rather than force. In the film's climax, Uma jumps into the sea and becomes a giant octopus monster, like her mother. She is defeated by the prince, not through violence, but through a promise to expand his kingdom to include those like her. *Descendants 2* combines concerns about class, race, and sexuality, weaving them together into the socially perceived "guilt" and monstrousness of villains.