

But can Mermaid's have Sex? Explorations of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* as Queer Icon

The mermaid, as an icon, has a history of being related to the body and those who are marginalized because of their body and sexuality. As Lene Hansen points out in her article, *The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School*, "The tale of the Little Mermaid highlights the importance of voice and body for the construction of subjectivity." In this way, the mermaid has often been used to represent those who identify as queer, either because they are marginalized by society in more general terms, or because of their gender and sexuality.

Arguably, the marketing tools used to sell the mermaid to modern queer communities find their roots in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*. Many scholars, including Roberta Trites, Mara Tatar, and Sophia Kingshill, have pointed out that Andersen portrays the mermaid as the functioning relatable "other". She is a creature filled with desires, but she also faces the difficulties associated with growing into her identity. This is further complicated when the mermaid realizes she doesn't fit in with the other merpeople. The comparisons between Andersen's mermaid and today's use of the queer icon of the mermaid are deepened as the reader acknowledges the little mermaid's own sexual desire as it combats and connects with the mermaid as a creature *to be* desired. However, Andersen did not come up with such characteristics within a void; he built upon the complicated and contradicting creature that had filled hundreds of stories prior to his publication.

In order to best understand Andersen's mermaid as queer icon, it is important to understand how mermaids, in general, have historically functioned as the queer icon throughout history. Through such justifications, I hope to illustrate how this mermaid served within Andersen's story as a safe space for the queer community, using the mermaid in order to empathize with the community by properly articulating the physical and emotional hardships that members of the LGBTQ+ community experience as they discover and come to terms with their own identities.