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## Hans Christian Andersen's Fish out of Water

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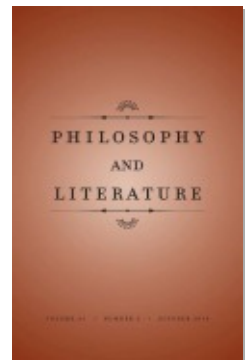
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HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN'S FISH OUT OF WATER

I

NOW THAT DARWINIAN literary criticism is on the horizon, the natural human tendency to codify manifests itself in calls to summarize succinctly what such an approach entails. Though clarity is always to be praised, bioevolutionary critics need to guard against the reductiveness that has beleaguered attempts at a scientifically grounded literary criticism since the early twentieth century; most especially, we should think twice about limiting the interpretation of complex and varied works to selected sociobiological themes divorced from other biocultural considerations. David Sloan Wilson makes much the same point to students of evolution when he quotes Celia Heyes in a recent review of *Evolutionary Psychology*, David Buss's new textbook: "When I first encountered the term 'evolutionary psychology,' I thought it referred to the study of how mind and behavior evolved. But I was mistaken. In current usage, 'evolutionary psychology' refers exclusively to research on human mentality and behavior, motivated by a very specific, nativist-adaptationist interpretation of how evolution operates."<sup>1</sup>

If, as D. S. Wilson suggests, evolutionary psychology thus narrowly defined threatens to produce a limited understanding of human mind and behavior and, in the process, fragment the discipline of psychology further, how much less potentially productive is such an approach for those of us whose central objects of study, cultural artifacts, are as the products of behavior even further removed from the study of mind? Leda Cosmides and John Tooby are most explicit about the falsity of assuming that psychological adaptations *determine* behavior. This being so, it seems impossible that such adaptations could determine the

*meaning* of artworks, which are themselves the products of complex human behaviors. As I hope this discussion of Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid" will demonstrate, an approach to aesthetics strictly following the lead of evolutionary psychology as currently defined, while supplying valuable general insights about the motives for artistic behaviors and the cognitive processes engaged in them, cannot by itself inform us about the *meaning* of individual artworks. This is a crucial issue, since interpretation is the fundamental pursuit of scholars in fields like mine, literary studies.

Putting the question of interpretive fruitfulness aside for the moment, it can be said unequivocally that criticism that fails to be sensitive to mutation and change is not properly Darwinian. Evolutionary psychology and sociobiology themselves maintain that our psychic architecture is comprised of domain-specific competences; the result, as E. O. Wilson points out, is that the human mind is not designed to understand reality but is instead an instrument for survival and reproduction.<sup>2</sup> "Natural selection," says Michael Ruse, "works in a gerry-building fashion, making do with what it has at hand."<sup>3</sup> Though our various evolved competences cannot be radically dissonant if the organism is to survive, neither are they logically integrated, neatly interlocking "modules." Under some environmental conditions, specific adaptations or epigenetic rules are not likely to produce a competitive advantage while other very different adaptations certainly will, and hence the flexibility of the organism ensures its survival. If, for instance, I place my coffee mug down on my desk and at that exact moment two cars collide on the street outside, familiarity with my environment militates against invocation of the causal rule, even though such a rule is incontrovertibly part of our adapted psychology.<sup>4</sup> Knowing, then, that we share an evolved psychic architecture whose patient excavation, so to speak, will result in a progressively better defined concept of human nature, and knowing too that the behavior of human beings as writers as well as other kinds of agents varies under divergent environmental conditions, Darwinian criticism should be sensitive to the complex relationship between individual adaptations, the total array of adaptations, subjective cognitive processes, and environmental circumstances that give literary works enduring significance. In contemplating literary meaning, as with aesthetics, we should be mindful that *epigenesis* is not simply the instantiation of *epigenetic rules*.<sup>5</sup> Ideally, literary interpretation should be informed by the evolution of mind, behavior, and culture, to modify Heyes's phrase, and

speculation about the formal or thematic role of ancient adaptations in literature is only part of that process.

Since about 1950, attempts to explain the structure, content, and function of the arts according to biologically based psychology have yielded a variety of insights that might at first blush seem contradictory, though in the long run the seeming contradictions themselves direct us not to the invalidity of each separate insight but remind us of the piecemeal, domain-specific nature of our adapted psychology. Does art satisfy our desire for form and pattern, or does it disrupt default orientations, providing a safe arena for experimental thought and virtual action? Does it feed our need for novelty? In literature particularly, does the content derive from ancient adaptations that frame a basic structure of human motives? Do stories strengthen social groups through both the reaffirmation and opportune transgression of boundaries?<sup>6</sup>

So far, the broadest general thesis about the evolution of art is supplied by Ellen Dissanayake, who proposes that art attests to a general human propensity for "making special," one that manifests itself variously and develops historically in different areas of human endeavor.<sup>7</sup> One advantage of Dissanayake's hypothesis is that it enables us to acknowledge the validity of the foregoing insights without requiring that we choose between them. The potential disadvantage of Dissanayake's approach, that it is too broad to result in a concrete, developed definition of art, disappears if we perceive two of its important implications: (1) that art, as an evolving rather than a fixed phenomenon, is not, in fact, amenable to precise definition; and (2) that, paradoxically, exploration of separate modes of "making special" from a evolutionary perspective will in the long run contribute to our general understanding of the function of art. Some insights about the adapted mind simply have striking implications for a particular aesthetic medium but not for others. If, for instance, as part of our adapted psychology we are largely disposed to construe events causally, our attraction to novelty and our other psychic attunements at the same time enable us to recognize the unrelatedness of some consecutive events. While this understanding of our basic psychology has evident bearing on literary narrative, in which the causal rule provides the adapted foundation of plot construction but which, throughout literary history, is periodically subverted in literature, it is far less promising for the analysis of other arts, visual art being the most obvious counterexample here.

For me, Dissanayake's concept, holding as it does that art is the product of a generalized and broadly exercised impulse, suggests that we should keep in mind the complex relationship between psychology and artifact and at the same time acknowledge that there is no single approach or method that all bioevolutionary or biocultural critics should now adopt. Given the complexity of art behaviors and objects, of which literary behaviors and works form a subset, no single model or approach will do, since we may legitimately engage with the process of literary study from a variety of different vantage points. If, at one end of the spectrum, the empirical studies championed recently by Joseph Carroll and carried out by David Miall and D. S. Wilson, David C. Near, and Ralph R. Miller lead us further toward a knowledge of writer psychology and neurological processes, at the other a broad-based understanding of the conditions of human life can lead to a speculative criticism that reawakens us to the connection between words and bodily existence.<sup>8</sup> Given the complex array of factors that influence a final literary work, a recognition of the role of speculation seems not only advisable but essential to the practice of informed interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

Since fairytales are highly patterned, exhibiting a striking number of formulaic features, a literary fairytale such as "The Little Mermaid" stands as a useful example of what we might, in such an elementary genre, expect to be straightforward: the relationship between dominant innate propensities, environmental (e.g., cultural and historical) conditions, subjective development, and final artifact. On inspection, however, we see that even a superficially simple artwork results from enormous complexity. Major features of Andersen's story, including the mermaid herself, who descends from a rich genealogy of water deities, as well as the essential form and content of fairytale plots, are tied to central concerns in human nature. These features indeed constitute a substrate of dominant natural preoccupations and orientations which are manifested thematically and formally. The themes of childhood vulnerability, sexual maturation, pair-bonding, reproduction, and man's relation to nature, for instance, all arise from fundamental adaptive concerns, just as formal tendencies toward narrative and binary construction arise from adapted patterns of mental organization. More importantly, however, all of the main features are linked by their implications about power—its development, acquisition, abuse, or control—and by the characteristic ambivalence borne of the fundamentally conflictive nature of human existence. Nevertheless, a reading or interpretation of Andersen's tale cannot be offered on the basis of

these themes alone. The literary fairytale, which probably began with the transcription of wonder tales for the middle class and aristocracy in the early Middle Ages, developed in step with modernization and enjoyed a rich variety of influences. By the late seventeenth century, French writers beginning with Madame d'Aulnoy began crafting their tales to the salon culture of the times, and it was thus changes in class structure and education that made possible the institutionalization of the literary fairytale over the course of the next century and a half.<sup>10</sup> Written by an author who was immersed both in oral folk culture and literary romanticism and who was encouraged to take imaginative license with what was becoming a firmly established written genre, "The Little Mermaid" departs dramatically from some conventions and themes of oral tale traditions, and in so doing counsels against too-hasty identification of specific psychic adaptations as the determinants of *meaning* in literary works.

Careful consideration of Andersen's tale reveals, in fact, that environmental conditions—socially and economically, the development of industrialization and the ensuing movement out of rural communities; culturally, the collapse of the enlightenment and the consequent development of literary romanticism—combined with the similar trajectory of Andersen's own "fairytale" life from humble rural origins to cosmopolitan fame crucially affect the meaning of the story, bringing to the fore not sexual power or threat but our characteristic ambivalence regarding others and communal belonging. In sum, in the service of the epigenetic rule of causal organization (i.e., narrativity), the ambivalence we feel toward others and its corollary, the experience of isolation, have been selected, so to speak, from the biopsychological substrate of the story by the environment of rapidly changing nineteenth-century post-agrarian Europe, and the literary memes that concretize this ambivalence are likewise selected over those that served a simpler world and its stories of robust action and optimistically reorganized social relations.

## II

Brett Cooke's recent essay on Rusalka, the mermaid figure in Hungarian opera, provides an instructive example of how environmental factors determine the significance of a specific symbol, constructing it culturally, as it were, from the ground of our adapted psychology. Identifying in Kvapil and Dvořák's mermaid operas the sexual constraint

of lower-class women as a central theme borne of the evolved psychic mechanisms underlying patriarchal behavior, Cooke maintains that the half-human status of the woman is a sign of degradation, and that, finally, it is just the patriarchal bias reproduced in multiple constraints on the mermaid that so fuels the human imagination.<sup>11</sup>

While surely a central adaptive concern over reproductive resources and an ensuing preoccupation with female power, signified in the reproductive fertility of maiden figures, motivates our interest in the mermaid, it is one thing to conclude, as I do, that for this reason the appearance of the apparently fertile young woman in any artwork is an emotional vector and another to assume that her deployment determines a *fixed meaning or meanings* in a realized work of art. In any given case, there may be synchronicity of the mechanism of emotional arousal and semantic content, as Cooke demonstrates in these operas, or there may not. But curiously, if we assume that such unconscious mechanisms (i.e., latent contents) provide a universal key to the interpretation of specific works, evolutionary literary criticism will become nothing more than a latter-day Freudianism, performing its ritual unveilings of psychic secrets in hunter-gatherer dress.

In fact, an overview of the mermaid and like mythical creatures supports the view that the adapted mind, which has an assortment of strategies for dealing with reality, does not give birth in consciousness to emblems echoing discrete concerns. Closer inspection shows that the mermaid and her kinfolk evoke a shifting constellation of concerns, not a fixed set of meanings, a finding in keeping, I believe, with E. O. Wilson's assertion that meaning is produced by the linking of neural networks in the process of scenario building.<sup>12</sup> The human mind, not a machine in any sense, operates kaleidoscopically, as under certain environmental conditions various fragments are cast onto the glass of consciousness—colorful triangles, stars, and shards, torsos and fishtails and strands of hair, mingle, drift, and coalesce, and through the revolutions of culture symbolic patterns periodically emerge. Thus, if the maidenliness of the mermaid derives from our interest in her imminent fruitfulness, and if her animal qualities reveal our strong interest in animals as a salient environmental factor capable of harming or helping us, it is nevertheless the *culture*, including especially in the consideration of literature the totality of the individual work, that establishes the *meaning* of any given manifestation of the mythical creature.

The distinction between underlying adaptive mechanisms and the



semantic content of cultural icons and artifacts resembles Carl Jung's definition of archetype and archetypal image in general outline—even if, in practice, Jung himself often went against his better insights and conflated the two.<sup>13</sup> In Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, which seems to be the intuitive precursor of evolutionary psychology, "archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. . . . A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience."<sup>14</sup> If, as Robert Storey argues, archetypal images emerge from chief experiential nodalities and are all marked by the ambivalence of competing interests, the maiden image would be thus marked: "she is the male's companion in her benevolent aspect; when, Circe-like, she binds him to watchful domesticity, she is *la belle dame sans merci*" (p. 79). Archetypally, in other words, the maiden is at least dual, and cultural circumstances may push representation in one or another direction or toward ambiguity, or may bring other themes to the fore that overshadow or mitigate the significance of the maiden image. *Meaning*, in short, is a product of the archetypal image and its context, not of the unconscious archetypes—not, in this case, of the maiden before she is represented. While the distinction between archetype and semantically laden content warns us of the protean nature of archetypal images, it is furthermore crucial to remember that the maiden is only one portion of the mermaid, whose animal nature incorporates other archetypal concerns.

The protean nature of symbols and their meanings is reinforced by a glimpse at the mermaid and her relatives throughout cultural history. At first blush the mermaid might seem to suggest a relatively consistent and local lore, a distinct set of characteristics: she is near-mortal and lives underwater, but comes to the surface from time to time; she has a scaly tail, and often blue eyes and blond hair; she is usually seen sitting on rocks, ledges, and reefs, but sometimes swimming off-shore she holds a comb and mirror, or sometimes a magical object—usually a cap, veil, or shawl; she is frequently capable of self-transformation, and she is fond of singing and dancing (the latter, obviously, in her transformed-to-human condition).<sup>15</sup> Myths about her include her desire for a soul, her powers of prophecy and wish-granting, her vengeance when thwarted, and her sojourns with mortal men when her magic object is taken. These sojourns, however long, are *always* temporary, as the mermaid inevitably retrieves her magical object and returns to the sea.

Mermaid lore is additionally related to stories of seal-folk, most commonly recounted in Scandinavia and the parts of the British Isles where the Norse landed in the Early Christian Era and Middle Ages. It is not surprising that seafaring peoples would associate seals, with their sensitive, anthropoid faces, with human beings, and among Western Celts and Scandinavians a variety of beliefs make this connection. Seals figure as fallen angels condemned to live in the sea but capable of assuming human shape on land; as humans under a spell; as the souls of those who have drowned at sea; as humans that have sinned; and as the descendents of humans who have committed suicide at sea. Significantly, all of this lore, which took shape under Christianity, reflects its pronounced dualism and its attendant beliefs in sin and redemption and the immortality of the soul. This influence, apparently absent from the operas Cooke analyzes, figures centrally in Andersen's tale and in the medieval Danish ballads that he knew so well.

The mermaid's genealogy, moreover, extends well beyond this constellation of myths, for her fish tail marks her kinship with all water deities and spirits. Five thousand years ago, the Babylonians worshipped the fish-tailed god Ea/Oannes (sometimes depicted as human with a fish cloak, instead of fish-tailed), and myths of fish-tailed gods and water-dragons with prophetic and self-transformative powers are part of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese culture. In India, the lesser water nymphs and fairies loved singing and dancing and were prone to luring and seducing men, thus sharing some of the characteristics of the modern mermaid. Some other mythological sea beings and deities, such as Poseidon and the sirens, were not originally associated with water and piscine anatomy (the sirens were originally birds), indicating that divine power and womanly allure became combined with the power and promise of the sea when ancient cultures undertook maritime war and trade.

The mermaid, then, in whom many believed up through the eighteenth century, is a scaled-down descendant of these powerful water deities, a being midway between the supernatural and the human, and midway again between the human and the animal. Indeed, perhaps the emergence of the mermaid proper in European lore in tandem with the spread of Christianity attests to her essential belatedness—she is, in other words, a sign of disintegrating folk beliefs held for a number of centuries in tension with Christian mythology. If this inference is correct, then the northern European mermaid was always marked with the outsidersness that Andersen would so productively exploit. By the

mid-nineteenth century, while on the one hand Matthew Arnold and perhaps Andersen himself consciously adopted merfolk as emblems of lost belief and experiential unity, on the other the mermaid had at once become literally manifest and attendantly deformed and shrunken, as fakes, often manufactured with monkey's torsos—apparently the Japanese were expert in their production—graced the circus and sideshow tents.

Both the mermaid proper and other related mythical beings have two common attributes: they are associated with water, and they are either part human or capable of temporary transformation to a human state. Studies in habitat selection indicate that water is positively correlated with emotional pleasure, its appearance in the landscape thus evoking a response that operates toward selective advantage.<sup>16</sup> In nearly all origin myths, creation comes from water, and many cultures have specific rituals and beliefs about its healing properties. Thus, our physiological attunement to the environment attracts us unconsciously to water, of which we are largely constituted and for which we have a great need. Bodies of water also contain and attract potential sources of nourishment, animals that live in and around them for the purposes of their own survival. While a flat plane in the environment produces emotional neutrality and even boredom, water as a sign of these potential advantages as well as an equal number of dangers provokes strong interest but, again, ambivalence. For it is also a potential place of death—a source of water-borne disease, the home of lethal and hidden creatures, the site of drowning, the origin of our identity and nonentity. Bodies of water are thus emotionally charged in the human psyche, and the mythical creatures who reside in them become variously inflected with their power, with their potent blend of threat and allure.

Jung asserts that in dreams water is the most common symbol for the unconscious and, if I understand him, his reasoning connects psychology with physiology: "water is earthy and tangible, it is also the fluid of the instinct-driven body . . . The unconscious is the psyche that reaches down from the daylight of mentally and morally lucid consciousness into the nervous system that for ages has been known as the 'sympathetic.' This does not govern perception and muscular activity like the cerebrospinal system, and thus control the environment; but, though functioning without sense organs, it maintains the balance of life and, through the mysterious paths of sympathetic excitation, not only gives us knowledge of the innermost life of other beings but also has an inner effect upon them."<sup>17</sup> If in dreams water is a sign of the unconscious,

Jung's logic suggests that this is so only because of the isomorphism between the psyche and the body, whose fluidity connects it to the natural world. An image of resources, danger, mystery, and death, a universal and uniting element from which we are nevertheless ontologically distinct, water, like the maiden who embodies reproduction and therefore a wonderful and terrible power, is surely an omnipresent strange attractor of the human psyche.

And the sea, where the mermaids of maritime nations dwell, has special qualities: "Dwellers by the sea cannot fail to be impressed by the sight of its ceaseless ebb and flow, and are apt, on the principles of that rude philosophy of sympathy and resemblance which here engages our attention, to trace a subtle relation, a secret harmony, between its tides and the life of man, of animals, and of plants."<sup>18</sup> Unlike most inland waters, the sea is dynamic, apparently dictating with its ebb and flow, its own seeming life, the life of man, and so in Scandinavian mythology the waves themselves are divine. For inhabitants of seafaring cultures, the natural interest in and ambivalence toward water is exaggerated by environmental circumstance, and hence association with water carries a higher emotional charge (whether positive or negative) and melds in a psychologically coherent fashion with the maiden, who herself represents unity and life-giving reproduction or, alternatively, destruction.

If maidenliness and association with water, then, represent two glinting shards on the kaleidoscope's glass, both in themselves freighted with powerful yet shifting emotional charges, as they slide together they cohere in a being of mixed nature, half-animal and half-human, and in so doing come to embody yet another fundamental preoccupation with the relationship between the human and the natural. Like the dualistic depiction of the maiden, the human-natural dichotomy reflects the epigenetic rule of binary division or dyadic structure. Probably based in the self-other distinction and underlying much of human epistemology, cultural organization, and symbolism, binary thinking pervades human life yet functions ironically in dynamic relationship with the emotional ambivalences and cognitive ambiguities it was perhaps intended to resolve.<sup>19</sup> Since the origins of culture 10,000 years ago, humans have more and more "successfully" actualized the division between the human and the natural; but the awareness that this division fragments experience and, if accepted too fully, proves maladaptive because it is ultimately illusory, informs all our negotiations of this particularly problematic binary.

Myths and tales of animal transformation are one means of psycho-

logically reconnecting what culture has worked hard to separate. In European fairytale, although the hero or heroine him/herself is human, the transformation of animals into humans and vice versa is ubiquitous, and generally represents, according to Max Luthi, the tendency of this genre to create an idealized whole by binding the human and natural worlds to one another.<sup>20</sup> Hedwig von Beit additionally suggests that transformation represents a mythic/holistic mode of primitive consciousness that was still to some degree prevalent during the development of the European fairytale in the Middle Ages. Even so, transformation, rather than being a pervasive feature of reality in the fairytale, is associated with curses and enchantment and therefore serves a more specialized function than in primitive culture. This specialized use of transformation signals a diminished belief in magic since primitive times and, correspondingly, a relative shift of attention to the profane world.<sup>21</sup>

In folklore, merfolk and seal-folk are frequently endowed with powers of transformation, and in this such stories bear witness to the psychic *recognition* that human and animal are part of a larger whole and, paradoxically but not illogically, the psychic *need* to knit the two into a more cohesive whole than the evidence of our senses indicates. Merfolk, indeed, being half-human, need not be capable of transformation to symbolize our ambivalent feelings for the natural world. Indeed, as a creature with a mixed ontology rather than metamorphic capabilities, the mermaid is an apt symbol of the individual who feels alien in either world, an obvious characteristic of Andersen's heroine in the tale to which I now turn.

### III

This is how Andersen's story goes: The mermaid, the youngest of six daughters of the widower-Sea King, longs to go to the surface of the water and see the human world, a privilege allowed only at the age of fifteen. When she finally makes her first visit to the surface, she ends up saving the prince from a violent storm. Her fascination with the human world increased by this visit, she questions her grandmother and learns that humans have an immortal soul. In a deal with the sea witch, she trades her voice for legs and goes to live on land, becoming a favorite but not a lover of the prince, who does not know that she saved his life. She makes a second deal with the sea witch, requiring her to kill the prince on her wedding night; but when she can't do this she jumps into

the sea and turns to sea foam, joining the little daughters of the air as they traverse the skies, performing good deeds and perhaps gaining immortal souls after several hundred years.<sup>22</sup>

Andersen's mermaid came to life in 1837, at a time when folk beliefs were on the wane, and it is thus not surprising that she lacks many, even most, of the characteristics of her mythological sea-sisters. She is not a siren, prophetess, or temptress; she has no special powers, including (woe betide her) powers of self-transformation. Indeed, if our attraction to the latent implications of mermaid figures is a product of our predisposition to attend to selectively advantageous but also dangerous potency, the character manifest in Andersen's tale is, by contrast, decidedly powerless and unfortunately harmless. She is depicted mostly in negative terms, for while she is not human she is defined by her desire to be so. She is consequently *other* and apart from the world to which she "naturally" belongs, the deep sea. However, the specific character of her otherness identifies her not, like the traditional mermaid, with the nonhuman mysteries of the universe, but paradoxically with human needs and desires. The story traces an important stage in her development, from child to maiden, and while she is morally good and innocent, her initiation into adulthood is marked by thoughtfulness and suffering, as she becomes progressively aware of the depths of her desires and the difficulty of fulfilling them. By contrast, the other characters in Andersen's story are one-dimensional types standard in the fairytale genre, so that, ironically, it is the mermaid's atypicality, combined with her relative complexity of character, that identifies her as the locus of humanity in the story.

Folk beliefs and traditions were all vitally alive in Odense at the turn of the nineteenth century and, although Andersen's father, a poor cobbler, was also a freethinker and man of some education, his mother was superstitious and nearly illiterate, as were her acquaintances.<sup>23</sup> When, at the age of fourteen, Andersen left Odense to seek his fame in the Danish Royal Theatre, a mission requiring him to take a boat between the islands of Funen and Zealand, his mother consoled herself that he would fly back to Odense as soon as he saw water. He didn't. Craigie relates tales of river men, one apparently inhabiting the waters of Odense, who take to themselves a child a year. Andersen's mother, who had tried to ward off her son's childhood illness with a mole's heart tied about his neck, could not have anticipated that the boy's desire for fame and fortune was evidently greater than his fear of the river man.

Danish ballads tell tales of merfolk of varying character, and with

these Andersen was no doubt familiar. “Agnes [Agnete] and the Merman” was the basis of Andersen’s verse drama *Agnete*, written in 1835, two years before “The Little Mermaid.” This ballad tells of a human woman who willingly goes off with a merman, living with him for over eight years and bearing him seven sons. One day, she hears the church bells and asks her spouse for permission to go up to the church, which he grants. She then refuses to return; when the merman asks her to think of the children, especially the baby, she responds: “I think not of the grown ones, nor yet of the small/Of the baby in the cradle I’ll think least of all.”<sup>24</sup> So much for the mother-infant bond when the immortal soul is at stake—sociobiologically speaking, it is the presumed *unnaturalness* of her choice that constitutes the ballad’s emotional power. In Matthew Arnold’s version of this poem slightly more than a decade after Andersen’s play, Margaret, the mother, is not without her sorrow, gazing out to the sea and searching for “the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaid/And the gleam of her golden hair.”<sup>25</sup> The source for “Agnes and the Merman” was a Slavic ballad that portrayed nature (personified in the merman) as a treacherous wooer, but through its adaptations to German and then to Danish it underwent a marked shift in attitude toward the merfolk, embodying in its sympathy for the merman’s loss and powerlessness a nostalgia for waning folk beliefs in a culture in which Christian values had come to dominate. And Arnold’s mid-century poem, adding another level of sociocultural understanding to the primal experience of loss, self-consciously reduplicates the elegiac and nostalgic mood of the original, for the grief of the “faithless” Margaret mirrors that of the abandoned sea-kings, and the medieval narrative itself, while literally depicting the loss of primitive beliefs, simultaneously symbolizes the nineteenth century’s crisis of *Christian* faith.

Like “Agnes and the Merman,” “The Mermaid’s Spaeing [Prophecy-ing]” Christianizes an earlier folk story, also ameliorating the transition in belief systems through a sympathetic depiction of the mermaid. Held captive by a king, the mermaid is granted her freedom by the queen after foretelling her future, which includes the prophecy that the queen will die in childbirth with her third son. But as the mermaid swims away, she tells the queen not to weep, for “The gates of Heaven stand open for thee” (*BDB*, p. 113). Here again merfolk are disempowered and spiritually inferior beings, their exclusion from Heaven foreshadowing their certain extinction. Nevertheless, they are a far cry from the type of the mermaid promoted by the Christian church and

the bestiaries, which depict the mermaid as an emblem of the sins of the flesh and thus play a central historical role in shifting her toward the femme fatale image Cooke identifies with Rusalka. But though other Danish ballads show merfolk of devious and dangerous character, there are no traces of this type in Andersen's mermaid. In contrast, her temperament owes much to these characteristically nostalgic Danish ballads, which depict unfulfilled and poignantly inferior beings powerless to change their state, dwellers outside a world now more powerful than their own.

In addition to folk beliefs and traditions that, in effect, *were* Andersen's environment from an early age, he was influenced by literary romanticism, chiefly Danish and German. Bernhard Severin Ingemann, described as the Danish Sir Walter Scott, was a friend and mentor of Andersen, as well as a direct influence on his novels and poetry. Ingemann wrote a story of merfolk at one point, unfortunately not available in English translation. Additionally, Andersen scholars point to Friedrich, Baron de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine, or the Water-Spirit*, as a source.<sup>26</sup> Motte Fouqué's story serves as a thematic influence on Andersen, but the sensibility behind this tale about a water-spirit who desires an immortal soul is quite different from Andersen's. Undine, the changeling child of a poor fisherman and his wife, is wild and impetuous, though also delightful and innocent. She marries the knight Huldbrand who wanders into the forest, and who eventually takes her home to his castle; but gradually, Huldbrand falls out of love, replacing Undine with princess Bertalda who, it turns out, is the actual daughter of the fisherfolk. Undine returns to her watery element, but is unwittingly released above ground again when a stone is removed from a fountain, and Huldbrand ends up drowning in her embrace, although Undine does not intend to kill him. The woods are full of frightening, shape-changing and evil spirits, most particularly Undine's uncle, and thus nature, represented in the person of Undine, the other spirits, and the landscape, is presented in a starkly dichotomous fashion—at once innocent and pure (Undine and the promontory where the fisherman lives), evil, unpredictable, and antithetical to man (the woods and its spirits). Rather than choosing between the extremes suggested by maiden and natural world or resolving these extremes in images of moderation, Motte Fouqué depicts the extremes as integral qualities of Undine and her world, and the result is an unwitting *femme fatale*, dangerous to herself and others. The demonic side of nature and the prevalent elements of chivalric romance in this story are alien to



Andersen's tale, from which the traces of such a distinctively German romanticism—all that *Sturm und Drang* and pageantry of the past—are absent.

That Andersen would choose to adopt the mermaid as an emblem of outsider status coheres with a biographical perspective. Indeed, as Jackie Wullschlager's important new biography makes clear, it would be difficult to imagine a set of circumstances more systematically apt to produce a constitutional outsider than those that governed Andersen's life. Denmark's first proletarian writer, Andersen received encouragement and support from a variety of sources beginning in childhood, but the difficulty of his progress was a constant reminder of the gulf between who he was and who he wanted to be. When he began serious schooling, he was almost twenty years old, and the other boys in his class were half his age. He was a gangly boy, an ugly duckling with an unusual combination of personality traits; naïve, sensitive, effeminate, and vain (from a young age, he constantly performed for people, at his own initiative), he was essentially good-natured and caring. As a child, he was doted on by his poor parents, but he had no playmates. As an adult, he was rejected repeatedly as a lover by both men and women, and never fully accepted by the middle class that had made his artistic and worldly success possible. Ironically, the massive contraction of Denmark's realm in the first sixty years of the nineteenth century resulted in a national mood of withdrawal and retreat, a mood perfectly in sympathy with the outsider theme of many of Andersen's stories.

In sum, folk tradition, literary education, and biographical circumstance together inspired Andersen to write a mermaid tale and to stamp his depiction of this figure with distinctive meanings. If through the merger of three sets of archetypal concerns, prototypically signified by maiden, animal, and water, the mermaid becomes, under modern cultural and personal circumstances in which self-other relations have become increasingly difficult, profoundly charged with our essential ambivalence, it is perhaps this ambivalence itself that Andersen most evokes as he merges it successfully with his own preoccupations. The little mermaid's psychology—her inwardness, isolation, and longing for a way of life and being other than that which is "natural" to her—is Andersen's, and the visual image of the mermaid literalizes her otherness from both the human and the natural worlds. But so too in this preoccupation with the outsider and, moreover, in the perception that a vexed relationship between individual and group is characteristically human, biography converges with the historical movement of

romanticism, even while these environmental and subjective psychological factors capitalize, as it were, on an essential ambivalence embedded in our adapted psychology. We are, as Byron says, alike unfit to sink or soar—or at least as modern men and women living in too-complicated times that's what we think we are; Andersen's identification with Byron and other English, Danish, and German romantic authors and his emulation of their themes, including the romantic fascination with folk culture and the supernatural, provided additional impetus for his adoption of the mermaid as fated outsider, connected profoundly to several realms but nevertheless belonging to none.

#### IV

Andersen's tales were not, like those of the Brothers Grimm which revived the taste for folk stories, renditions of folk stories, but original creations derived from the folk genre. Although some of his tales, including "The Little Mermaid," were not intended for children, for the most part these tales were written to be read aloud by adults to children. As such, they blend oral with writerly qualities and complicate the narratives so as to appeal to a mixed audience. Recognized as a major writer in Denmark especially for his use of a colloquial yet flexible language in stories that contain some subtlety of meaning, Andersen introduced adult themes and modern ambiguities into tales essentially childlike in their simplicity, naïveté, and humor.

In spite of this, Andersen never set out to establish himself as a writer of tales, much less a children's writer. When he began writing tales in his mid-thirties, he had already spent about ten years writing plays, poetry, and novels, and his immediate goal was probably to make a little extra money during the Christmas season—an appropriate goal, since he really did need money. In his ambitiously literary works, Andersen was drawn to the literary preoccupations of romanticism and to sophisticated literary forms. He was given to obsessive retelling of his own life, and critics claim that his novels and plays especially suffer from weaknesses in plotting. This suggests that the structural simplicity of folktales served as a felicitous constraint upon and framework for the writer's romantic themes and emotional nature. Whatever liberties Andersen took with fairytale and fable, their basic structures were rudimentary to him and, in remaining faithful to a few basic elements of structure and style, he successfully controlled his tendency toward excess.

In keeping with his romantic proclivities, Andersen's major divergence from the generic fairytale norms is a shift from external to internal action. Through the author's emphasis on the mermaid's isolation, initiation into suffering, and potential spirituality, her development becomes the main focus of "The Little Mermaid," even while this inward process is often conveyed through description rather than through an abstract account of her feelings. In contrast to the standard causal operations of traditional fairytale, the actions the mermaid takes, like seeking the help of the sea witch and drinking her potion, are apparently ineffectual as steps in the fulfillment of a long-term goal. However, in a further complication, this is only apparently the case, since the mermaid does not know throughout much of the story what her goal actually is. Causality, then, is complex and ambiguous in the story, consistent with the modern sensibility behind it and in contrast to the established pattern of fairytale plot.

As Luthi explains, the prototypical pattern of fairytale development has been described variously as a movement from a lack to its liquidation, from disequilibrium to equilibrium, and from need to fulfillment of need (*FAF*). The framing tensions of these stories are those of lack-to-remedy, and the conclusions of fairytales focus on rewards and elevations in rank and power. Such a definition does not distinguish fairytales appreciably from other narrative genres, though the fairytale enacts this movement with great narrative economy, usually introducing the characters and situation in a brief sentence or two. Typically, the fairytale pursues equilibrium by placing the hero on the road and requiring him to perform tasks that help him achieve his goal. He usually does not return home; however, one-dimensional character that he is, he feels no longing or loss for his home or for those associated with it.

"The Little Mermaid" does not adhere to the clear, linear causality and quick, progressive pacing typical of oral fairytale, its deviations in the pattern of action-to-achievement indicating a fundamentally different view of human agency, which is complicated not only by external constraints but by psychological conflicts of motive and desire. In marked contrast to the economy of the generic norm, which succinctly introduces the hero and the situation, Andersen's tale, beginning with two paragraphs describing the depth of the sea and the sea king's castle, works to establish mood. In this beautiful place, "the water is as blue as the petals of the loveliest cornflower and as clear as the purest glass," fish take the place of birds and the roof of the sea king's castle opens

and closes to the motions of the water (*LM*, p.34). Far from being a lyrical exercise, the concrete realization of place in these opening paragraphs retrospectively contributes to the reader/listener's experience of loss, for it is this home that the mermaid will leave behind. Whereas the paradigmatic fairytale focuses on the rewards attendant upon the successful completion of difficult tasks and of a corollary progress toward higher social status, Andersen's tale is preoccupied with the psychic and emotional costs of individual growth.

Andersen's leisurely method of establishing situation continues in the ensuing paragraphs. The third paragraph introduces the mermaid and her family, and identifies the little mermaid as the main character. But there is so far no drama or tension. After two further paragraphs of description, Andersen develops the little mermaid's character through a comparison of her garden with those of her sisters: "the youngest made hers perfectly round like the sun and had only flowers that shone red as the sun itself. She was a strange child, quiet and pensive, and while the other sisters decorated their gardens with all kinds of odd things they had taken from wrecked ships, the only thing she would allow in hers, besides the rosy-red flowers that looked like the sun on high, was a beautiful marble statue. It was of a handsome boy carved out of pure white stone that in a shipwreck had been sunk to the bottom of the sea" (p. 35). With this passage six paragraphs into the story, Andersen definitively identifies the mermaid as alien to the world she inhabits. Unlike her sisters—and, incidentally, the heroine of the recent Disney film—she is not interested in forks, broken crockery, and beads, the paraphernalia and trinkets of human life, but in the condition of being human itself, depicted symbolically in the statue, an idealized image of a young man. And unlike the heroes and heroines of true fairytale, she is not actually human but yearns to be so, her fascination with the sun and its light embodying her aspirations to both the physical and spiritual condition of humankind. As Bredsdorff points out, the human world matters in this story only because of its significance to the mermaid.<sup>27</sup> Put another way, Andersen defamiliarizes the human world by revealing it to us from the mermaid's perspective and thus asking us to think about what it means to be human; ambivalent belongers and periodic outsiders to the human project all, readers and listeners are invited to sympathize with this beautiful and charming misfit. Just as the statue is ideal to her so, in some respects, she is to us: akin to romantic conceptions of the child and the noble savage, she

links the human back to the presumed purity and innocence of nature and inexperience, even as these qualities render her powerless.

Given her powerlessness, it is fitting that *waiting* constitutes a central aspect of the mermaid's development, and in the first part of the tale she waits primarily for her fifteenth birthday, the day when, like her sisters before her, she will be able to visit the ocean's surface. When she does finally visit the surface, she gains an immediate agency whose potential to realize her desires is nonetheless immediately frustrated. Saving the prince from drowning during a violent storm, she must then watch as a young girl from a nearby convent—coincidentally the princess he later marries—leans over and awakens the prince. Once again, the significant action is interior, for the mermaid returns to her home at the bottom of the sea, her sense of longing for the human world augmented and given material shape as the prince, who cannot live beneath the waves, supercedes the sunken statue. When she tells her sisters of her feelings for him, they lead her to his castle. Now watching combines with waiting as the mermaid, behind rocks and amidst sea foam, is gradually initiated into the meaning of mature desire, the longing for an object that seems forever remote.

The statue and the young prince, while signifying heterosexual desire and possible union, furthermore symbolizes the potential for the expansion of experience and fulfillment of being, and thus Andersen's tale also resembles romantic literature in presenting sexual desire and union as a metaphor for self-completion. Though the Disney film and probably many of the early twentieth-century versions and hatchet-job "translations" of this story make the prince the final locus of the mermaid's desire, he is hardly so in Andersen's original tale. Spurred on by her growing love of humans, the mermaid asks her grandmother if they ever die. The grandmother, explaining that humans have an immortal soul, relates how "they rise up to unknown, beautiful places that we shall never see" (p. 45). Hearing this, the little mermaid no longer feels content to live her three hundred years in the sea, preoccupied as she is with the prince and the wish to "possess, like him, an immortal soul" (p. 46), and it is at this point that she seeks the help of the sea witch. In sum, whereas the traditional fairytale establishes character, conflict, and sought-after object in the first moments of the story, it is not until nearly halfway through "The Little Mermaid" that the central character understands the objects she desires and can therefore work actively toward her goal.

The ambiguity of her desires, the emphasis on thoughtfulness and longing—conveyed partially through direct statement, but largely through description—and the generally inward nature of the tale, all on the one hand hallmarks of romanticism, on the other stand in direct contrast to paradigmatic features of fairytale: its one-dimensional depiction of acting, not thinking, characters; its tendency to establish lack, and thus goal, immediately; and, consistent with these first two features, its logical, economical working-out of plot toward a successful attainment of the desired goal. However seemingly static in comparison to the traditional fairytale, “The Little Mermaid” is not without its action, constituted by the gradual realization of desires whose fulfillment is vital for self-completion, and the story’s ambiguities add developmental and psychological dimension to a basically realistic depiction of the fairytale heroine/hero (her mermaid ontology notwithstanding). The traditional fairytale isolates individuals and situations for economy and clarity, but it does not dwell on the *experience* of being alone, lonely, or other, of being an unfulfilled outsider. By contrast, in addition to “The Little Mermaid,” several of Andersen’s best-known stories, including “The Little Match Girl” and “The Ugly Duckling,” are centrally concerned with this theme. In the shift from external to internal action and thus to the focus on isolation and loneliness, the psychological by-products of living in a democratized, developed world, Andersen demonstrates that he was not simply enamored of the trappings of romanticism but fully possessed of a romantic sensibility. Within a biocultural or Darwinian context, therefore, our innate ambivalence about belonging to social groups strongly informs literary themes and meanings when, on the one hand, as Storey points out, our relationships become depersonalized and span distances and, on the other, as culture, becoming increasingly heterogeneous and secular, no longer provides the unifying experiences and consolations it once did (*MHA*, pp. 57-62).

Just as the tale is realistic in its portrayal of the mermaid’s initiation into longing and desire, it is consistent in its subtle emphasis on the inevitability of loss and suffering. When the mermaid says, “Oh, if only I were fifteen! . . . I know that I shall love the world up there and the human beings who live and dwell in it” (p. 39), the naïve words are tinged with irony, for every adult knows that where the mermaid looks for fulfillment will in fact bring an increase in desire. Like all children, she doesn’t understand the nature of desire, nor does she understand that everything has costs. She must suffer the loss of her voice, traded to

the sea witch for the magic potion that gives her legs; after this, she must suffer the pain of walking and dancing on legs she was never meant to have. She misses her family and the sea. When she is living in the prince's castle, she goes down in the evening and sits on the steps leading into the sea, dipping her legs in the water, assuaging both physical and mental pain—an outsider still, even if now from the other side.<sup>28</sup>

If the typical fairytale ends with an unequivocal increase in rank and power, "The Little Mermaid" tempers such optimism with ambiguity and a sense of potentiality in keeping with the tone of the story. After refusing to kill the prince on his wedding night, a method contrived by the witch at the bidding of her sisters in the hope of returning the little mermaid to the undersea world, the little mermaid plunges into the sea, turning to sea foam, but then rises up unexpectedly to meet the daughters of the air. These beings lack immortal souls but can attain them through three hundred years of good deeds. Given her basic goodness, it seems certain that the mermaid will acquire an immortal soul, but this is still different than actually having one at the end of the story (and, on one level, it can be said that her innate goodness hasn't done her much good in the story proper). Nevertheless, the magical powers of the witch are put in their place, as her instructions about how the mermaid can save herself are clearly subordinated to a greater supernatural force.

As indicated thus far, "The Little Mermaid" diverges significantly from many staples of the fairytale genre, but these shifts notwithstanding, many stylistic features of fairytale are retained. For example, modified though it is, the basic pattern of lack-to-liquidation remains, just as elements of the fabulous and magical combine within a basically realistic perspective. The character constellation and patterns of repetition and variation, too, are recognizable as those of fairytale. In short, the conventions of fairytale, familiar to Andersen's contemporaneous audience because of their cultural currency but based nonetheless on innate tendencies toward linearity, binarization, and the like provide a strong formal and thematic base for Andersen's variations without determining meaning. If, for instance, the clear linear organization of traditional fairytale, in which self-contained episodes mark distinct phases in the movement toward resolution, derives from the epigenetic rule of causal organization and the attendant preference to organize narratively, their instantiation in "The Little Mermaid" hardly results in a story of simple and straightforward quest, unproblematic in its

episodes and causes. We respond to causal organization on an emotional and unconscious level, so the semblance of it is almost always indispensable. Simply put, formal features that derive from our preference to think causality successfully attract attention, *whether or not the tale under consideration then proceeds in a clear causal fashion*. In this case, our conscious understanding of the story, of its meanings, more often than not works *against* the perception of determinate causes and logical progression.

The story is similarly exemplary in its character constellation—a father, a grandmother, six daughters, a witch, a prince, and a princess—but just as Andersen complicates the action and central themes of fairytale, so he adds complexity to the character types, usually derived from the splitting of the archetypal nodalities into binary configurations. Fairytale regularly concerns the accession of the powerless to power, since its heroes and heroines are youngest children and unwanted stepchildren, and the little mermaid, the youngest daughter, fits in this main character paradigm. That the sea king is widowed, and that the good grandmother and witch contrast with one another, are all staples of the genre. Yet the splitting of the old woman into wise woman and witch, while seeming to following the stark psychology often reproduced thematically and morally in traditional fairytale, proves to be a superficial device. In Andersen's tale, the witch fulfills her part of the bargain, even giving the mermaid a second chance when the sisters come to plead for her life. Even though the creatures surrounding her are grotesque, she is not evil; unlike Ursula, the Disney witch, she never attempts to double-cross the little mermaid. Likewise, the prince, whose delusion about who saved him from drowning is never corrected (he thinks it is the princess he marries), is a morally ambiguous character who, acknowledging the loyalty and devotion of the dumb, transformed mermaid, makes of her a kind of favorite pet while adamantly seeking the young woman he mistakenly assumes has saved his life.

Andersen's revisioning of the fairytale character constellation again constitutes a modernizing of the genre that coincides with the transition from oral to written form and with the impact of a psychologizing culture on notions of moral worth. This as well as the other traditional aspects of fairytale enables Andersen to have it both ways, for while the superficial simplicity of plot and character combined with a reality infused with magic appeal to the child's unity of experience, they also appeal to the adult who has lost that unity both developmentally and culturally.



Moreover, Andersen's use of repeated and varied actions, presented in isolation from one another, also matches paradigmatic expectations. This is most notable early in the tale, when each sister has her first opportunity to visit the surface on her fifteen birthday. Andersen presents the visits sequentially, relating the varied observations of the several sisters, and staying true to fairytale structure by isolating each episode from the others. But just as Andersen complicates the character constellation of fairytale with moral ambiguities, so he shifts the emphasis of repeated action away from its traditional function of moving the narrative toward its final goal and subsumes it under the overriding concern for the little mermaid's growing enchantment with the human world. What is important in each of these episodes is what the sister *sees*, not what she *does*, for each of the five brings back a new perspective on the world above the water, and each of these pictures feeds the little mermaid's imagination and longing. Possibly, the familiar pattern of repeated action gives the *effect* of greater forward movement in the story than is actually the case at this point, before the mermaid consciously understands her own desires. Thus the active pattern of fairytale counterbalances the potential stasis of an interior story.

In the final analysis, Andersen's "Little Mermaid" draws on cultural symbols and forms that derive from innate and universal preoccupations and ways of organizing, and in so doing employs elements that arouse reader/listener emotion and thus motivate interest. For the writer himself, in addition, the ascetic form of folktale placed a felicitous constraint on his emotional and highly expressive nature and enabled him as well to profit from the romantic resurgence of interest in folk culture, which had given impetus to the publication and rapid translation of the Brothers Grimm, and thus established an international audience for such tales.<sup>29</sup> But the *meaning* of the tale is another matter. Gazing through the lens of his romantic sensibility, his own essential loneliness and awkwardness and frustrated creativity, Andersen coaxes the colorful and glinting shards into a pattern reminiscent of the little mermaid's garden, delicate and fantastic yet resonant with themes of desire, loss, loneliness, and transcendence. All of these, it seems to me, are related to the twin modern preoccupations of self-completion and communal belonging, and thus derive from our fundamental ambivalence about those others beyond the self, an ambivalence that has become more pronounced with sociocultural complexity. Even as the mermaid herself rises joyously to meet the

daughters of the air in the story's conclusion, the adult listener/reader experiences a distinct poignancy, even perhaps a feeling of unfairness, on the mermaid's behalf.

Thus enchanting us while soliciting our sympathy for the outsider, "The Little Mermaid" is an artful reworking of an elementary folk form for the modern sensibility. As Jack Zipes puts it in his tongue-in-cheek comment, "The genuine quality of all folk and fairy tales . . . depends very much on their original contamination" (p. 869). In Andersen's tale, the spiritualization of the story, in one sense so representative of nineteenth-century culture, draws on the sense of the wonderful and marvelous that has always been central to the wonder and fairytale traditions. Though the elimination of the mermaid's desire for immortality from the recent Disney film might suggest that the original story is hopelessly dated for contemporary audiences, in the long run the human themes of the story give it a lasting significance that the fundamentally superficial film lacks. Fashioning its version to the norms of the predominant genre, Consumer Romance, Disney peels away, like a desiccated rind, unfulfilled desire, loss and suffering, loneliness and pain (Eidsvik in Haase, p. 198).<sup>30</sup> Although the simplifications of superficial culture, mitigated by other forms of experience and imaginative engagement, can hardly do us or our children much damage, it is the alignment of natural propensity with contemporaneous conditions, "contaminated" by original sensibility, that leaves us, in Andersen's tale, with something meaningful and lasting.

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1. David Sloan Wilson, review of *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of Mind in Evolution and Human Behavior* 4 (1999): 279–87.
2. See Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture," in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, ed. Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

3. Michael Ruse, "The View From Somewhere: A Critical Defense of Evolutionary Epistemology," in *Issues in Evolutionary Epistemology*, ed. Kai Hahlweg and C. A. Hooker (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 198.

4. Philosophy and psychology are today rife with scholars who study narrative thinking, the basis of which is the causal rule. See, for instance, Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Dan Lloyd, *Simple Minds* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Jean Matter Mandler, *Stories, Scripts, and Scenes: Aspects of Schema Theory* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1984); and Roger C. Schank, *Tell Me a Story: A New Look at Real and Artificial Memory* (New York: Scribner's, 1990). For a discussion of how these contemporary insights contribute to a new alternative to traditional debates within epistemology, see my essay, "Making Knowledge: Bioepistemology and the Foundations of Literary Theory," *Mosaic* 32 (1999): 131–47.

5. For a discussion of how aesthetic value cannot be established on the basis of satisfying biopsychological predispositions, see my essay "Do Cognitive Predispositions Predict or Determine Literary Value Judgments? Narrativity, Plot, and Aesthetics," in *Biopoetics: Evolutionary Explorations in the Arts*, ed. Brett Cooke and Frederick Turner (Lexington: International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, 1999), p. 242.

6. For a seminal argument that art satisfies the need for pattern, see Rudolph Arnheim, *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). For an equally ground-breaking argument contemporaneous with Arnheim's that contends to the contrary, that art breaks up normative cognitive patterns, see Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts* (Philadelphia: Chilton Press, 1965). More recent discussions following Peckham include: James Ralph Papp, "Parodic Humor, Cognitive Scripts, and Neural Compromise," Literature and Human Nature, MLA Convention, Toronto, Canada, 1993; Eric Rabkin, "Imagination and Survival: The Case of Fantastic Literature," in Cooke and Turner, pp. 293–314 (n. 5); and my own "Play, Mutation, and Reality Acceptance: Toward a Theory of Literary Experience," in *After Poststructuralism: Interdisciplinarity and Literary Theory*, ed. Nancy Easterlin and Barbara Riebling (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 105–25. For discussions of art and novelty, see Lee Cronk, "Gethenian Nature, Human Nature, and the Nature of Reproduction: A Fantastic Flight Through Ethnographic Hyperspace," in Cooke and Turner, pp. 205–18; and Joseph D. Miller, "The 'Novel' Novel: A Sociobiological Analysis of the Novelty Drive as Expressed Through Science Fiction," in Cooke and Turner, pp. 315–34. For a discussion of human motives and their relationship to the contents of literature, see Joseph Carroll, "The Deep Structure of Literary Representations," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 20 (1999): 159–71. For a discussion of the bonding function of stories in social groups, see Eric Rabkin, "Vegetable, Animal, Human: The Perils and Powers of Transgressing Sociobiological Boundaries in Narrative," in *Sociobiology and the Arts*, ed. Jean Baptiste Bedaux and Brett Cooke (Atlanta: Editions Rodopi-Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 83–98.

7. Dissanayake's thesis that art is a propensity for making special is developed further in each of her three books on the subject: *What Is Art For?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); *Homo Aestheticus: Where the Arts Come From and Why* (New York: Free Press, 1992); and *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). For an overview of the development of Dissanayake's thesis

throughout the three books, see Nancy Easterlin, "Big Guys, Babies, and Beauty," *PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE* 25 (2001): 155–65.

8. For a description of the range of empirical constraint to which current literary critical activities are subject, see Joseph Carroll, "Theory," Anti-Theory, and Empirical Criticism," in Cooke and Turner, pp. 139–54; for a neurophysiological approach to reader response, see David S. Miall, "Anticipation and feeling in literary response: A neurophysiological perspective," *Poetics* 23 (1995): 275–98; for a study of the correlations between Machiavellian personality types and story content, see D. S. Wilson, David C. Near, and Ralph R. Miller, "Individual Differences in Machiavellianism as a Mix of Cooperative and Exploitative Strategies," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 19 (1998): 203–12.

9. For an extended discussion of the importance of speculative thinking in evolutionary literary criticism, see my essay "Voyages in the Verbal Universe: The Role of Speculation in Darwinian Literary Criticism," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 2 (2001): 59–73.

10. For a discussion of the development of fairytale, see Jack Zipes, "Cross-Cultural Connections and the Contamination of the Classical Fairy Tale," in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 845–69.

11. Brett Cooke, "Constraining the Other in Kvapil and Dvořák's *Rusalka*," in *The Fantastic Other: Interface of Perspectives*, ed. George E. Slusser and Jaume Olivella (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1998), pp. 121–42.

12. Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

13. Noting the tendency in previous myth studies and linguistics to collapse meaning into structure, Claude Lévi-Strauss points to "Jung's idea that a given mythological pattern—the so-called archetype—possesses a certain meaning" as a prime example of this error. Yet at times Jung is adamant that the (unconscious) archetype alone is without content. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 101–15.

14. Quoted in Robert Storey, *Mimesis and the Human Animal: On the Biogenetic Foundations of Literary Representation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 78.

15. See Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh, *Sea Enchantress: The Tale of the Mermaid and Her Kin* (New York: Citadel, 1965); Horace Beck, *Folklore and the Sea* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); William A. Craigie, *Scandinavian Folklore: Illustrations of the Traditional Beliefs of Northern Peoples* (1896; Detroit: Singing Tree, 1970); and F. Morvan, *Legends of the Sea*, trans. David Macrae (New York: Crescent, n.d.).

16. Gordon H. Orians, "Habitat Selection: General Theory and Applications to Human Behavior," *The Evolution of Human Social Behavior*, ed. Joan S. Lockard (New York: Elsevier, 1980), pp. 49–66.

17. Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2nd ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 19–21.

18. James Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (New York: Mentor/New American, 1959), p. 59.

19. For discussions of the predisposition toward binary thinking, see Storey; E. O. Wilson's *Consilience*, p. 153–54; and Easterlin, *MK*, pp. 143–45.
20. Max Luthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man*, trans. John Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
21. For an analysis of the meaning of animal transformation, see Hedwig von Beit, "Concerning the Problem of Animal Transformation in the Fairy Tale," *Yearbook of Comparative Criticism* (1968): 48–71.
22. Hans Christian Andersen, *Tales and Stories by Hans Christian Andersen*, ed. Patricia L. Conroy and Sven Rossel (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).
23. Comments on Andersen's life draw on Jackie Wullshlager's new, comprehensive biography, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller* (New York: Knopf, 2001), as well as Signe Toksvig's *The Life of Hans Christian Andersen* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934).
24. Axel Olrik, *A Book of Danish Ballads*, trans. E. M. Smith-Dampier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), p. 116.
25. Matthew Arnold, "The Forsaken Mermaid," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 2, ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (1849; New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), pp. 1349–52, l. 105–06.
26. Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, *Undine and Other Tales* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1867).
27. Elias Bredsdorff, *Hans Christian Andersen: The Story of His Life and Work, 1805–1875* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 314.
28. Rather than focusing on Andersen's evident identification with the mermaid and, hence, his depiction of her as a locus of sympathy, English-language interpretations of the tale emphasize, as Cooke does in his *Rusalka* analysis, the dangers of sexual experience and the virtue of female self-abnegation. Several find the tale misogynist in its treatment of these themes, but such readings disregard the intensity of Andersen's identification with the character as an outsider, especially evident if one takes into account biographical facts like his ambiguous sexuality, his notable sexual inhibitions, and his beautiful singing voice, which he lost at puberty. Wullshlager's assessment that Andersen is holding the mermaid up as a model of female self-denial is contradicted by her awareness that Andersen's (male) life and work are shot through with sexual revulsion and denial; see, for instance, pp. 170–76, p. 383. See also Sheldon Cashdan, *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairytales* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 163–71, and Marina Warner's discussion of this tale in the context of related lore and literature, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairytales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), pp. 387–408.
29. Cay Dollerup, "Translation as a Creative Force in Literature: The Birth of the European Bourgeois Fairy-Tale," *Modern Language Review* 90 (1995): 94–101.
30. See Donald P. Haase, "Gold into Straw: Fairy Tale Movies for Children and the Culture Industry," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 12 (1988): 193–207.