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# **CULTURAL NARRATIVES**

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## Representation of Diversity in The Little Mermaid (2023)

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### ABSTRACT

As a cultural product of one of the world's most influential media corporations, the film represents a significant departure from the Eurocentric depictions traditionally associated with Disney princesses. This research aims to identify inclusion and diversity in representing multiculturalism in the movie adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's work "The Little Mermaid". This study employs descriptive qualitative research to explore and analyze the representation of diversity and multiculturalism in the film adaptation of "The Little Mermaid 2023." Descriptive qualitative research is chosen for its ability to provide detailed descriptions and interpretations of cultural representations while using semiotic theory and film adaptation theory. The result shows that there are differences through the narrative element in both works, especially plot, settings, theme, character, and writing style. Through a semiotic lens, this inclusion of diversity can be seen from the casting of the characters namely, Ariel, Ariel's sisters, and The Queen. By utilizing the original text and adapting it to a live-action movie, Marshall has contributed to the discussion of multiculturalism to represent the lack of inclusion in diversity and representation derived from the original text through his decision to cast actors and actresses of diverse races while still maintaining the elements of the original text. Its representation of diversity has the potential to challenge entrenched stereotypes and inspire a new generation of media consumers to demand more inclusive storytelling. This research underscores the importance of critically examining how iconic narratives are adapted to address issues of representation.

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### INTRODUCTION

The representation of diversity and multiculturalism in contemporary society is a multifaceted and profoundly significant topic that resonates across various domains of human experience, from literature and art to politics, education, and beyond. At its core, this discourse encapsulates the recognition and celebration of the rich tapestry of human identities, experiences, and perspectives that characterize our globalized world today (Hall, 1992; Vertovec, 2007). In an era marked by unprecedented interconnectedness and migration, the concept of multiculturalism has evolved beyond the mere coexistence of different cultural groups within a society. It now embodies a commitment to understanding, respecting, and embracing the multitude of cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds that constitute our global community. This ethos of multiculturalism

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champions the idea that diversity is not only inevitable but also enriching, fostering innovation, creativity, and mutual understanding. Central to the representation of diversity is the notion of representation itself—how various groups and their lived experiences are portrayed, acknowledged, and empowered within societal narratives, media, and institutions.

Films are not merely a window to the world; they are a two-way street. It serves as a powerful form of mass media that both reflects the realities of this society and shapes them. This cultural art form, both silent and sound, uses moving images to tell stories and spark conversations. It's more than entertainment. They tap into the deepest of human desires to be visually stimulated and emotionally engaged. This makes films a highly desirable art form. By dissecting the events and narratives presented, viewers can dive deeper and gain insights that go far beyond the surface. The power of movies goes even further. Filmmakers can use their expertise to address important societal issues which include political movements, economic systems, human rights struggles, and even everyday life choices can be explored through the lens of film (Achmad, 2020).

Moreover, the observation from Nwonka (2020) finds that gender-positive diversity in the UK film industry can be influenced by intra-race homophily, perpetuating a culture of whiteness and racial exclusion. The representation of diversity in modern film adaptations is a complex issue that involves balancing authentic portrayals with commercial interests. Recent research highlights both progress and ongoing challenges in achieving meaningful diversity in films. The representation of diversity in modern film adaptations is evolving, with a clear demand for more authentic and meaningful portrayals. Anjirbag (2018) state that while there are positive steps being taken, challenges remain in avoiding tokenism and ensuring that diversity is not just a superficial addition but a substantive part of storytelling. The industry must continue to strive for deeper, more nuanced representations that reflect the complexities of diverse identities.

One of the production houses that always reflects social life is Disney. Disney films have been both criticized and praised for their approach to diversity. While some argue that Disney has made strides in representing diverse cultures, others point out persistent stereotypes and the need for more genuine portrayals (Jackson, 2014). Disney has faced criticism for its stereotypical portrayals of various racial and ethnic groups, such as African, Latino, Asian, and Native American characters. These portrayals have been seen as caricatures rather than authentic representations, perpetuating patterns of privilege and dominance (Lombarović, 2018). In other hand, in recent years, Disney has made strides towards more multicultural representations, featuring diverse characters such as the first African American princess in "The Princess and the Frog" and the Asian American boy in "Up". Thus, it is undeniable that Disney is one of the production houses that has always been about social life, especially the criticism and appreciation of film viewers for their approach to diversity.

In 2023, Disney released an adaptation of Hans Andersen's "The Little Mermaid", directed by Rob Marshall, and it is breaking ground with its commitment to multiculturalism. The film's casting broke boundaries by casting Halle Bailey, a black actress as Ariel. This resonated deeply with audiences who rarely see themselves reflected in leading roles. The

film further goes beyond on-screen representation by re-imagining Atlantis, the underwater kingdom. The Caribbean influence permeates the music, creating a vibrant and rhythmic soundscape. The fashion choices for the natives likely reflect this cultural shift as well, potentially incorporating bold colors and flowing fabrics. There were even hints that the film's folklore and mythology may have been subtly adapted to incorporate elements of the Caribbean. This multicultural approach aims to create a more inclusive experience for audiences from different backgrounds. Seeing Ariel in black, as an example, allows young viewers to connect with the character on a deeper level, fostering a sense of "if she can do it, so can I." It sparked important conversations about representation in film and challenged traditional portrayals of characters like Ariel. Apart from whether the execution of the film is flawless or not, it undeniably opens the door for future projects to incorporate diverse narratives and aesthetics more naturally.

Research on the adaptation of Hans Andersen's Little Mermaid has been conducted by several researchers in several different topics. Research on racism in the adaptation of Hans Andersen's Little Mermaid is discussed in two studies. Richardson (2024) dan Jayanti *et al.* (2024) explained that The Little Mermaid created a dichotomy between white land life and multiethnic Mer life, coding white land life as superior to multiethnic Mer life. Two other studies discussed that The Little Mermaid story contains elements of gender freedom, especially the discussion of transgender. Spencer (2013) and Gerber (2017) stated that "The Little Mermaid" is a story about performing transgender identity, with parallels to transgender identity development and themes of mind-body dissonance, familial tension, and self-censorship. Terdapat juga penelitian yang memfokuskan pada perbandingan cerita pada karya adaptasi dan aslinya yaitu penelitian Putri (2023) dan Tampus *et al* (2022).

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection of multiculturalism and narrative adaptation through a semiotic lens, applied specifically to The Little Mermaid (2023). While previous studies have explored The Little Mermaid as a text of cultural significance, many have primarily examined its fidelity to Andersen's original tale or its broader appeal within the realm of Disney adaptations. This study diverges by examining the live-action adaptation as a cultural artifact that deliberately reinterprets traditional narratives to resonate with contemporary global audiences. By analyzing the film's casting choices, setting alterations, and narrative shifts, this research highlights how the adaptation contributes to the ongoing discourse on diversity and representation in mainstream media. It complements existing literature by framing these changes not as deviations but as deliberate artistic decisions that reflect and challenge cultural paradigms.

## METHOD

This study employs descriptive qualitative research to explore and analyze the representation of diversity and multiculturalism in the film adaptation of "The Little Mermaid 2023." Descriptive qualitative research is chosen for its ability to provide detailed descriptions and interpretations of cultural representations while employing semiotic theory to analyze the examination of signs, symbols, and meanings embedded in the film. signs, symbols, and meanings will be taken from film footage that represents diversity and

multiculturalism. This research aims to describe and analyze the visual and narrative representations of diversity in "The Little Mermaid 2023" through semiotic elements. Roland Barthes is recognized as a prominent structuralist who utilized Saussure's linguistic and semiological models (Octaviani, 2021). Barthes incorporated Saussure's idea of the relationship between the signifier (symbol or sign) and the signified (concept or meaning), proposing that meaning is created through this relationship rather than being inherent in objects or words. He distinguished between denotation (literal or descriptive meaning) and connotation (symbolic or interpretive meaning) in semiotic analysis, facilitating a deeper comprehension of how signs convey meaning. Barthes significantly advanced semiotic theory and played a crucial role in applying semiotic concepts to cultural and literary analysis.

Before analysing the diversity and multiculturalism in the film trailer, the researcher first analysed the comparison of the narrative elements in the film. Hans Andersen 's Little Mermaid story with its adaptation The Little Mermaid is directed by Rob Marshall. The researcher focused the comparison of film adaptations on plot, character, setting, point of view, writing style, and theme. As Desmond and Hawkes (2005) said that adaptation is seen as a dialogue between the original text and the new film version, and exploring the unfolding debate between fidelity to the source material and creative transformations that can reinterpret and enhance the story. After finding this comparison, the researcher focuses on the representation of diversity and multiculturalism in the film adaptation of "The Little Mermaid 2023 and concludes why there are differences in these two works

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This research begins by comparing Hans Andersen 's Little Mermaid story with its adaptation The Little Mermaid is directed by Rob Marshall. The researcher focused on the narrative elements of the two stories, namely plot, character, setting, point of view, writing style, and theme, which focused on the main character Ariel. The results of the comparison can be seen in Table 1 below;

*Table 1 Narrative elements between Hans Christian Andersen's The Little Mermaid and the 2023 film adaptation*

Aspect	Hans Christian Andersen	Film The Little Mermaid (2023)	Key Notes
<b>Plot</b>	Focuses on Ariel's tragic sacrifice for unrequited love.	Emphasizes a happy ending with Ariel successfully marrying Eric.	The film adopts an optimistic narrative suited to modern audiences.
<b>Characters</b>	Ariel: white-skinned, blue-eyed; sisters are unnamed.	Ariel: portrayed by Halle Bailey (Black actress); diverse sisters.	Diversity is reflected through a multicultural cast and backstories.
<b>Setting</b>	Underwater world, human realm, and the sea witch's lair.	Adds new scenes like the market and Ariel's room in the castle.	Additional settings enrich visuals and enhance cultural adaptation.
<b>Point of View</b>	Narrative focuses on Ariel's thoughts and feelings.	Retains Ariel's perspective with added visual elements.	No significant changes to the core narrative focus.



Aspect	Hans Christian Andersen	Film The Little Mermaid (2023)	Key Notes
<b>Writing Style</b>	Formal, descriptive, with 19th-century literary style.	Modern language with simplified dialogue for today's audience.	The film's style is tailored for better accessibility to modern viewers.
<b>Theme</b>	Love, sacrifice, and tragic consequences.	Love, dreams, and courage to pursue happiness.	The film adopts a lighter tone, removing the original tragic elements.

## Discussion

### Narrative Elements

#### Plot

**Similarities:** The adaptation of "The Little Mermaid" maintains several key scenes from the original text, preserving the essence of the story while incorporating musical elements to enhance the narrative. One notable similarity is the scene where Prince Eric is aboard a large ship with sailors celebrating his birthday. In both the original text and the adaptation, this festive occasion is depicted vividly, with the adaptation adding a musical dimension. The sailors are shown singing and dancing, creating a lively atmosphere that captivates Ariel as she admires the prince for the first time. This musical celebration highlights the joy and camaraderie among the sailors and provides a charming introduction to Prince Eric's character. *The sailors were dancing on deck, but when the prince came out of the cabin, more than a hundred rockets rose in the air, making it as bright as day. (page 6; Andersen 1837).*

Following this joyful scene, the plot quickly shifts to a moment of threat. In both the original text and the adaptation, the ship encounters a violent storm, putting everyone on board in grave danger. Ariel watches in horror as the ship is battered by the storm, endangering the sailors and the prince. *A dreadful storm was approaching; once more the sails were reefed, and the great ship pursued her flying course over the raging sea. (page 6; Andersen 1837)*

The adaptation faithfully recreates this dramatic moment, showcasing Ariel's bravery and compassion. She rescues Prince Eric from the wreckage, swimming through the tumultuous waters to bring him safely to shore by morning. This rescue scene is pivotal in both versions, underscoring Ariel's heroism and the beginning of her deep connection with Prince Eric. By retaining these key scenes, the adaptation pays homage to the original text while adding its unique touch through music and visual storytelling. The celebration on the ship and the subsequent storm not only advance the plot but also establish the emotional stakes and the budding relationship between Ariel and Prince Eric.

**Dissimilarities (Change):** In the original text of "The Little Mermaid," Ariel and her siblings are allowed to visit the surface of the ocean once they reach the age of fifteen. This coming-of-age milestone is a significant aspect of their mermaid culture, symbolizing their transition into maturity and their first real glimpse into the human world. However, in the movie adaptation, this particular plot point is altered. Ariel's specific age and birthday are not mentioned or emphasized as they are in the original narrative. The film's choice to bypass these details provides more creative freedom in exploring Ariel's interactions with the human world and her evolving relationship with Prince Eric, making the story more dynamic and flexible in its storytelling approach. *"Well, now, you are grown up," said the old dowager, her grandmother; "so you must let me adorn you like your other sisters;" and she placed a wreath of white lilies in her hair, and every flower leaf was half a pearl. (page 5; Andersen 1837)*

The scene of Ariel's first coming out of the water for her fifteenth birthday was changed to the event of Coral Moon, where Ariel and her sisters are supposed to meet with her father, the Sea King in the movie referred to as Triton. In the movie, Ariel comes up to the surface for the first time after arguing with her father, she watches a big ship above the water with Prince Eric and the sailors celebrating his birthday.

**Dissimilarities (Drop):** One of the main aspects of the plot involving Ariel's deal with the sea witch, known as Ursula in the adaptation, is significantly altered in the film. In the original text, the sea witch offers Ariel a chance to become human, but with dire consequences. If the Prince marries another, Ariel risks having her heart broken and eventually turning into sea foam. Ariel agrees to this perilous deal, leaving her family behind as her grandmother and sisters mourn her absence. The narrative takes a dark turn when the prince marries another princess. Ariel's sisters, desperate to save her, strike a deal with the sea witch, instructing Ariel to kill the prince to reclaim her life in the sea. Ariel, however, refuses to commit the heinous act and, as a result, transforms into sea foam. *She cast one more lingering, half-fainting glance at the prince, and then threw herself from the ship into the sea, and thought her body was dissolving into foam (page 18; Andersen 1837)*

This original plot, filled with sacrifice and tragic outcomes, is notably absent in the film adaptation. Instead, the movie opts for a more conventional happy ending. Ariel marries Prince Eric and retains her human form, dropping the darker, more complex elements of the original text. This change not only simplifies the narrative but also aligns with the more optimistic tone often favored in modern adaptations.

### Characters

**Similarities:** The adaptation of "The Little Mermaid" carefully preserves several key characteristics from the original story, particularly regarding Ariel and her fascination with the surface world. In the original text, Ariel's grandmother plays a significant role in nurturing Ariel's curiosity about the human world above the sea. The grandmother shares enchanting tales and valuable knowledge about the surface, feeding Ariel's imagination and desire to explore beyond her underwater home. In the adaptation, Ariel's fascination with the surface world is just as prominent, though the grandmother figure is notably absent. Instead, Ariel's yearning to discover what lies above is portrayed through her own explorations and personal collection of human artifacts. Her curiosity is vividly depicted in scenes where she marvels at various objects from the surface, showcasing her deep-seated desire to understand and experience the world beyond the ocean. *Nothing gave her so much pleasure as to hear about the world above the sea. (page 2; Andersen 1837)*

Ariel's interactions with her sisters remain true to the original text. In both versions, her sisters exhibit a clear preference for their underwater life and show little interest in the surface world. This contrast emphasizes Ariel's uniqueness and sets her apart as the only one among her siblings who dreams of a different life. Her sisters' reluctance to embrace the unknown further underscores Ariel's bravery and determination to pursue her dreams, even when it means venturing into uncharted territory alone.

**Dissimilarities (Change):** Several significant changes were made to the appearances of the characters in the adaptation. These alterations are most prominently seen in the main character, Ariel. In the original text, Ariel is described as having light rosy skin with blue eyes, which conforms to a traditional European aesthetic. However, the adaptation cast Halle Bailey, an African-American actress, in the role of Ariel. *They were six beautiful children; but*

*the youngest was the prettiest of them all; her skin was as clear and delicate as a rose-leaf, and her eyes as blue as the deepest sea; (page 1; Andersen 1837)*

Aside from Ariel, changes were also made to the appearances and characterization of her sisters. In Andersen's original text, Ariel's sisters are introduced only briefly and are referred to by their birth order—first-born, second-born, third-born, fourth-born, fifth-born, and sixth-born. Andersen's description of Ariel's sisters includes a mention of their "white hands," suggesting a uniform appearance that aligns with the traditional European imagery of mermaids.

*Then her sisters came up on the waves, and gazed at her mournfully, wringing their white hands (page 16; Andersen 1837).* The adaptation, however, diversifies these characters by giving them distinct names and casting actresses of different races to portray them. Ariel's sisters are named Tamika, Perla, Caspia, Indira, Mala, and Karina in the adaptation, adding individuality and personality to each character. This decision not only differentiates them from the original text but also reflects a more contemporary and inclusive approach to casting. The adaptation's choice to give names to Ariel's sisters, rather than referring to them by their birth order, adds depth and dimension to their characters.

### Setting

The researchers found that while the adaptation retains many of the original settings from the text, such as the sea, the palace, and the sea witch's lair, it also introduces several new locations. These additions enrich the narrative and provide a fresh perspective on the familiar story. For instance, the market scene adds a layer of realism and depth to the setting, reflecting the bustling life above the sea and Ariel's curiosity about the human world. Ariel's room in the prince's castle offers an intimate glimpse into her adaptation to human life, showcasing her personal space and the integration of her undersea treasures into her new environment. Lastly, the river scene, where Ariel and the Prince share a moment together in the boat, creates a romantic and serene backdrop that contrasts with the grandeur of the palace and the danger of the sea witch's lair. These changes not only enhance the visual storytelling but also provide additional context and development for the characters, making the adaptation a richer and more immersive experience.

### Point of View

The story is largely given from Ariel's perspective, focusing on her feelings about the human world. *She grew more and more fond of human beings, and wished more and more to be able to wander about with those whose world seemed to be so much larger than her own. (page 8-9; Andersen 1837)*

This scene shows Ariel's deep interest and curiosity about the human world. The movie adapted the scene of Ariel being deeply interested in the human world by keeping human items and being interested in becoming human.

### Writing Style

**Similarities:** Both the original text and the movie adaptation maintain a fairytale-like story, focusing on the fantastic genres of the underwater world and the human world.

*The little mermaid swam out farther from the shore and placed herself between some high rocks that rose out of the water; then she covered her head and neck with the foam of the sea so that her little face might not be seen, and watched to see what would become of the poor prince (page 7; Andersen 1837)*



The above quote shows a fairytale-like story because a mermaid hiding between high rocks by covering her head and neck with sea foam is a unique thing if it really happens in the real world.

**Dissimilarities:** In the film adaptation, the language and dialog are more modern to appeal to today's audience, while Anderson's story uses an archaic literary style.

*FAR out in the ocean, where the water is as blue as the prettiest cornflower, and as clear as crystal, it is very, very deep; so deep, indeed, that no cable could fathom it: many church steeples, piled one upon another, would not reach from the ground beneath to the surface of the water above (page 1; Andersen 1837)*

The quote above illustrates how Andersen uses more formal and archaic language, in contrast to the simpler and more modern language and dialog used in the film adaptation.

### Theme

**Similarities:** Whether in the text story or the movie adaptation, both use the themes of love, sacrifice, and curiosity. *Nothing gave her so much pleasure as to hear about the world above the sea (page 2; Andersen 1837).* The above quote shows Ariel's curiosity about the human world, which is the main theme in the story.

*"But if you take away my voice," said the little mermaid, "what is left for me?" "Your beautiful form, your graceful walk, and your expressive eyes; surely with these you can enchain a man's heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Put out your little tongue that I may cut it off as my payment; then you shall have the powerful draught." "It shall be," said the little mermaid (page 12; Andersen 1837)* The quote above illustrates the theme of the sacrifices made by Ariel in order to gain the prince's love and to meet him.

**Dissimilarities:** Andersen has a tragic theme, focusing on the consequences of the decisions and sacrifices that mermaids make. The movie adaptation has a more hopeful and romantic theme, focusing on Ariel's dreams and her desire to live with the prince.

*Before the sun rises you must plunge it (knife) into the heart of the prince; when the warm blood falls upon your feet they will grow together again, and form into a fish's tail, and you will be once more a mermaid, and return to us to live out your three hundred years before you die and change into the salt sea foam (page 17; Andersen 1837)*

The quote above shows the tragic consequences of Ariel's choices and the great sacrifice she had to make because she felt betrayed by the prince, which emphasizes the tragic theme in Anderson's text.

### Multicultural Representations

Using Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, the researchers have gathered samples from the movie "The Little Mermaid" directed by Rob Marshall to discover how diversity and multiculturalism are portrayed. These representations include the appearances of characters, namely Ariel, her sisters, and Prince Eric's mother or the Queen.

#### Ariel

In Hans Christian Andersen's original text, Ariel is depicted with white skin and blue eyes, reflecting the cultural norms and standards prevalent at the time of its writing. However, in the adaptation of "The Little Mermaid," the casting of Halle Bailey, an African-American actress see Figure 1, in the role of Ariel marks a deliberate departure from this traditional depiction.



*Figure 1 Halle Bailey as Ariel*

Through semiotic theory, the representation of Ariel portrayed by Halle Bailey becomes a signifier of contemporary diversity and inclusivity in media and storytelling. By reimagining Ariel with a different racial identity, the adaptation not only challenges conventional interpretations but also reflects a broader societal shift towards embracing diverse representations in popular culture. This reinterpretation of Ariel's character through casting underscores the adaptation's intent to resonate with and reflect the multicultural audience of today, thereby infusing new meanings and interpretations into the beloved fairy tale narrative.

#### *Ariel's sisters*

As discussed before, Ariel's sisters are only introduced briefly by Andersen. They were nameless characters that were only referred to by order of birth and described as having "white hands". The adaptation, however, diversifies these characters by giving them distinct names and casting actresses of different races to portray them see Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4. Ariel's sisters are named Tamika, Perla, Caspia, Indira, Mala, and Karina in the adaptation, adding individuality and personality to each character. This decision not only differentiates them from the original text but also reflects a more contemporary and inclusive approach to casting. By presenting Ariel's sisters with diverse appearances, the adaptation embraces a multicultural representation that resonates with today's audiences.



*Figure 2 Ariel's Sisters (Tamika and Perla)*



Figure 3 Ariel's Sisters (Caspia and Indira)



Figure 4 Ariel's Sisters (Mala and Karina)

This inclusive casting choice enriches the narrative by providing a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, which can lead to a more dynamic and engaging storyline. The unique identities of Ariel's sisters contribute to the overall richness of the film, offering new opportunities for character interactions and development that were absent in the original text. The adaptation's choice to diversify Ariel's sisters and give them distinct names represents a significant and positive evolution from the original text. It demonstrates how classic stories can be updated to reflect modern values and societal changes, ensuring that they remain engaging and accessible to new generations of audiences.

### *The Queen*

In the original text by Andersen, the appearance of the Queen is left undescribed, with only passing reference to Prince Eric's parents as the King and Queen. In a significant departure from this, the adaptation introduces diversity by casting a black actress in the role of the Queen, see Figure 5.



Figure 5 The Queen

This deliberate choice not only expands representation but also enriches the narrative by presenting a more inclusive portrayal of royalty within the story. By reimagining the Queen's

character with a black actress, the adaptation not only pays homage to the original text's royal lineage but also aligns with contemporary values of diversity and representation in cinema.

## CONCLUSION

Literature and the arts have long served as powerful vehicles for exploring and promoting multiculturalism. Writers, artists, filmmakers, and musicians draw from their own cultural backgrounds and experiences to create narratives and artworks that resonate universally while authentically reflecting the nuances and complexities of diverse identities. Movie adaptations are able to contribute to ensuring equitable visibility and recognition for historically marginalized voices, challenging dominant narratives that have often privileged certain perspectives while silencing others. Through the close adaptation of "The Little Mermaid", Rob Marshall has contributed to representing these marginalized groups through his decision to cast actors and actresses of diverse races while still maintaining the original text.

The recognition and inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes are essential for fostering social cohesion and ensuring equitable opportunities for all citizens. Multiculturalism is not merely a curriculum component but a pedagogical approach that encourages critical thinking, empathy, and respect for cultural differences. By utilizing the original text and adapting it to a live-action movie, Marshall has contributed to the discussion of multiculturalism to represent the lack of inclusion in diversity and representation derived from the original text.

This research provides a deeper understanding of how *The Little Mermaid* (2023) addresses the historical absence of diverse representation in popular media. It builds on theoretical frameworks such as Roland Barthes's semiotics and John Desmond's adaptation theory to investigate the inclusion of multicultural elements, such as the casting of Halle Bailey as Ariel and the depiction of a racially diverse Atlantica. This approach broadens the discussion beyond surface-level critiques, offering insights into how the adaptation dialogues with current societal expectations. Furthermore, it illustrates how traditional stories can be reimaged to empower marginalized audiences, thereby fostering greater inclusivity in cinematic storytelling.

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