

Anna Mik (University of Warsaw, Poland)

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They Liked the Way She Moved.

The Case Study of *King Neptune* (1932) by Walt Disney Productions

“Silly Symphonies” by Walt Disney Productions was a series of 75 short animated films produced in 1929-39. Many of them served as an experimental platform, where various technical solutions were tested to provide for “bigger” projects. Based on the slapstick convention, they often lacked a deeper meaning or valuable content, however, among those truly “silly” stories, some exceptions can be found.

One of them is *King Neptune*, a short from 1932. In this animation, we encounter the titled King Neptune, an old and ribald man, ruling his underwater kingdom. His subjects are various sea creatures, among which the mermaids can be found. They are depicted as frisky and carefree young half-girls, half-fishes, who like to play with their king. They pinch the old man, who enjoys their attentions in a disturbing manner. The next scene, however, is even more troubling, as pirates, who interrupt the idyll, kidnap one of the girls and try to rape her. The antique depiction of the mermaid is here reversed - not the mythical creatures, but men are dangerous and brutal.

In this case study, I will analyse the depiction of young girls in the disguise of antique mermaids, how they are presented in the Disney animation, and how this might affect young viewers. In particular I want to stress the way those creatures are animated and how the creators exploit their movement: somewhere in between seduction of the grown woman and playfulness of the little girl, lies the Disney mermaid.



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