

Anna Mik (University of Warsaw, Poland)

*Abstract for the presentation at the international conference “Children and Youth on the Move” organised by the Children’s History Society on June 21-23, 2018, at the University of Greenwich, London, UK*

## **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.



This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016-2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

