

The Monstrous Seduction of Mermaids Culturally.

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Unruly Bodies In Literature

01:090:297

Professor Elif Sendur



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The general characteristics of mermaids

Splashes of seawater hits your face. It is sundown, and your captain is guiding the ship through the grim waters. Behold, deep within a mysterfying a luring sound that fills your mind with disarray. Causing a cloudy control to steer your sight eastward. There is a young woman propped on the ocean surface. She appears to have been submerged in the water but is managing to stay afloat. Her ethereal beauty is like poison, slowly encroaching on your heart and causing love to blossom within your innards. You gradually walk the creaky deck in her direction. Her eyes are like shiny emerald gems waiting for you to get close enough to enjoy the bounty.

Each culture has its own representation of a mermaid or sea entity. There is frequently a feminine symbolism connected with mermaids, such as long hair/nails, a protruding chest, smooth skin, and an attraction to jewels. The divine feminine is continuously embodied by Mermaids.

Mermaid Folklore

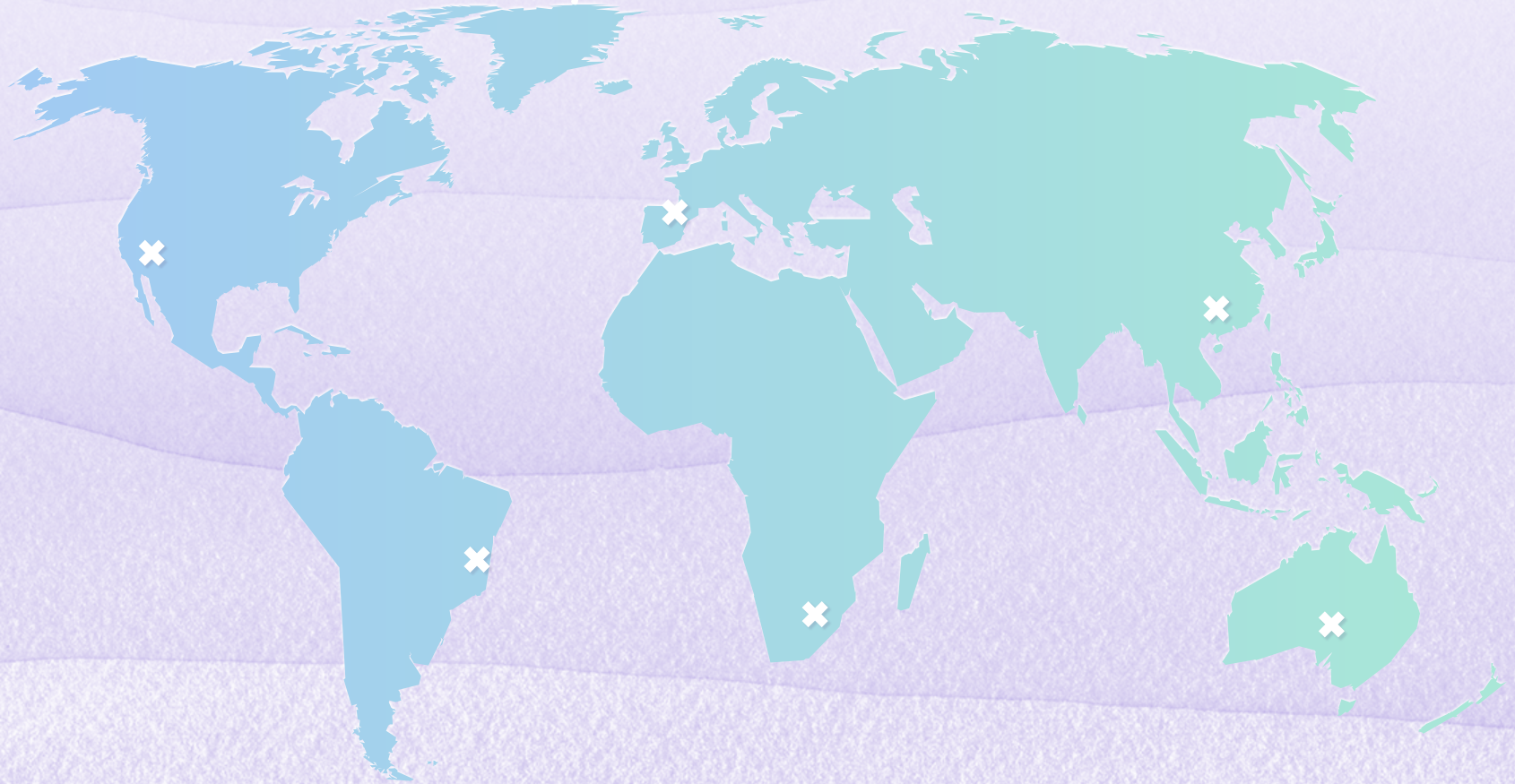
The most notable occurrence of mermaids in folklore is seen in the story of the goddess Atargatis, who, after accidentally slaying her human lover, plunged herself into the sea, sprouting a tail more suited to aquatic life. Mermaid folklore is shrouded in forlorn love and nefarious intentions. With the occasional blissful ending. Globally the depictions of mermaids differ greatly and are influenced by cultural beauty standards .



“ Silent dangers lurk in deep waters,
unnoticed by man. Waiting to entice
and drink from their eager seeds. Lured
by the enticing call of an innocent
woman. These men are no longer to be
found. They've have joined the
underground steep within raging sea.”

-Aniya D.

Mermaids Globally



Depiction of European mermaids



Syrenka in Warsaw, Poland



"Sirenne," in Louis Renard, Poissons, Ecrevisses et Crabes (Amsterdam: Reinier & Josué Ottens, 1719).

Mermaids in European Culture

Mermaids have an established spot in European cultures and folklore. While their appearance may differ from region to region, the commonality usually centers around a hybrid of human and aquatic lifeform. These mermaids are sometimes referred to as “sirens”, for their luring songs that led sailors to their demise. The overall characterization of these creatures is one of charm with the underlying threat of danger. More often than not, mermaids are seen more as a departure of humanity, even though they share human features.

The significance of these mythical creatures is demonstrated through the adoption of “syrenka” as the embodiment of Warsaw, Poland. The legend goes that she tampered with the nets of fishermen in the Baltic Sea, causing them to become frustrated as they lost their catch. However, her siren song appeased them. Now, she is the guardian of the city and can be found depicted in several forms like statues and emblems.

Asian depictions of mermaids



Depiction of a Japanese Ningyo
By Kawahara Keiga 川原慶賀 (ca.
1786-1860)



Suvannamaccha and Hanuman at Wat Phra
Kaew, Bangkok



Indian Mermaid depiction
Author Unknown

Asians Mermaids

Within Asian history mermaids have transformed in nature from monstrous fish with human characteristics to the embodiment of divine feminine symbolism. To examine this Phenomena, a look at the Japanese Ningyo is prevalent. The creature is said to be mischievous in nature and play games with humans passing by their lakes. Various depictions of the Ningyo, do not possess physical attributes that were beautiful by human perspective. On the opposite sides of the beauty spectrum is Suvannamaccha. An mermaid princess who is depicted with jewels adorning her body and long flowing hair.

Mermaids in Latin America/Caribbean



Virgen de Regla by Ronny Medina



– Benoît de Sainte-Maure, 'Ulysse séduit par les sirènes', from the Roman de Troie (Venice or Padua ca. 1340– 1350).

Mermaids in Latin America/Caribbean

The European colonizers that made their way to Latin America and the Caribbean held the idea of *sirenas* being seductive while also emphasizing the duality of their nature: being both fish and human. Contrary to the negative connotations of the sirens established by the Europeans, Latin American mermaids are viewed more as maternal figures. Rather than their use as warnings of sin in medieval times, mermaids were placed alongside positive Christian imagery in Latin America.

Mermaids in Latin America/Caribbean

Afro-Latin mermaids borrow heavily from the imagery of Orisha, spirits of the Yoruba religion stemming from West Africa. The goddess Yemayá is a spirit of the oceans, often depicted in the form of a mermaid. The merging of the African and European religions in Latin America lends to Yemayá also being likened to a Catholic saint, depicted as a virgin queen. This characterization further elucidates the viewpoint of the mermaid being less sexually deviant and more maternal or pure.



A depiction of Yemaya by Maria Giulia Alemanno

Mermaids in Latin America/Caribbean

The figures of Lasirèn (Haiti), Lamante (Martinique), and Santa Marta la Dominadora (Dominican Republic) all share the imagery of Mami Wata, a West African deity often associated with water and serpents. Mami Wata is a figure of female empowerment, including female sexuality, bringing wealth to them.

La Siren



Delice (Delisme), *La Sirene and Damballa* (2009). courtesy of Indigo Arts, Philadelphia. Mireille Sirene Image

The Divine Feminine and Mermaid Entities

Flowing Locks of hair, Smooth skin that glistens under the moonlight and big eyes that resemble the night skies. The theme of the Mermaid's physicality and existence is an embodiment of beauty and sacred feminine energy. The divine feminine is theoretically described as "the acknowledgement that "God" or a higher power has now specific gender. "

The Monstrous Aspects of Mermaids and the Characterization of Alluring Seductress



Mermaids, while in some cases, are considered beautiful, it cannot be overlooked that their hybrid nature adds to their characterization as monstrous. The transcending of the human form to resemble more animal features like fish tails or serpent tails represents the body as a space of contest between humanity and monstrosity. This ultimately affects whether or not mermaids are perceived as beautiful or not in a particular culture. Additionally, this perception of mermaids reflects a culture's view of women and sexuality as a whole.

Continued

Mermaids being monsters relies largely on the overall cultural view on the sexuality of women, which manifests itself in the physical form. Traditional European views cast a negative light on the seductive nature of mermaids, frowning on female sexuality and framing it as the downfall of man. However, this seduction is reclaimed and used as a beacon of hope for some women of color who view the mermaid positively, namely in the Caribbean. In trend, the more feminine depictions of mermaids are in cultures that want to emphasize the dangers of female sexuality.

Siren Vs Mermaid

Upon the human gaze both creatures hauntingly beautiful. Sirens and mermaids are two separate mythological creatures whose mythologies regularly collide. The mythology of Sirens originated in Greece. "The sirens were three sea-nymphs who inhabited the island of Anthemoessa in the Mediterranean Sea. The daughters of the primordial river-god Achelous or of the sea-spirit Phorcus (the father of Scylla), and Terpsichore, Melpomene, or Gaia, their names are most commonly given as Parthenope, Ligeia, and Leucosia "(The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters).



A depiction of siren in homer's odyssey

Mermaid Art

During my examination of mermaids and their intriguing history. I was presented with various depictions of merfolk in different regions and civilizations. Audiences have been attracted to their lore for centuries causing their image to be utilized in cinema, literature, and commercialized products.



The Little Mermaid Live action (2020)



Starbucks mermaid representation



Mermaid Hair

Citation

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What are some perceived Depiction of Mermaids You Believed?

Take some time to think of what you believed mermaids to be like. Did you see any of that imagery in this Zine? What would happen if you had a chance to be a mermaid or Sea entity? Would you dive right in. Or hold onto your human body.

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