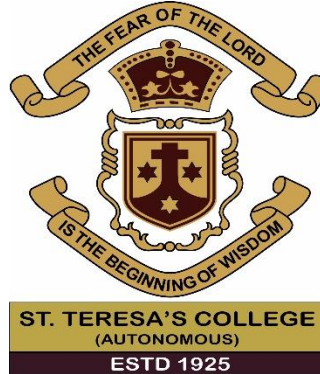


**INTERROGATING THE POLITICS OF THE BODY: A SELECT
STUDY OF THE RETELLINGS OF THE MERMAID MYTH**



*Project submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS
in English Language and Literature*

By

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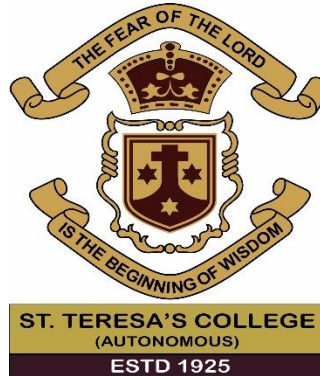
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I hereby declare that this project entitled “Interrogating the Politics of the Body: A Select Study of the Retellings of the Mermaid Myth” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Mrs. Athira Babu, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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March 2023

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Interrogating the Politics of the Body: A Select Study of the Retellings of the Mermaid Myth” by Anjali Binu is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Ernakulam

March 2023

Ms. Athira Babu

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**An Abstract of the Project entitled:
Interrogating the Politics of the Body: A Select Study of the Retellings of the
Mermaid Myth**

**By
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The concept of body politics refers to the rules and norms a society perpetuates in order to define and control an individual's life by the virtue of his or her body as its primary medium. The project entitled "Interrogating the Politics of the Body: A Select Study of the Retellings of the Mermaid Myth" aims to study and chart the politics involving body in fairy tale retellings, specifically focusing on the mermaid myth. The selected retellings for the purpose of the study are *Sea Witch* (2018) and *Sea Witch Rising* (2019).

The idea of body politics is thoroughly examined in Chapter 1, along with its background and the various ways it typically manifests itself in society. The brief evolution of the mermaid myth is traced in Chapter 2, which is followed by concise summaries and in-depth character analyses from the chosen retellings using the theoretical framework provided by the body politics thesis. The final chapter summarises the research and considers whether the characters from the chosen works challenge societal norms propagated through body politics by using their bodies as sites of resistance, or if they eventually give in and align themselves in accordance.

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Anjali Binu

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Introduction

Fairy-tale, myths and legends have always fascinated humanity since eons. In most of the cultures across the world all these together formulates the literature of the preliterate societies. Many of today's fairy tales have thus evolved from centuries-old stories that have appeared, with variations, in multiple cultures around the world. The range of reinterpretations and adaptations, and studies still made across, based on these tales even today all over the globe attests to the influence they still have upon the society. Traditionally the usual targeted audience of such extravagant tall tales were always considered to be the children. These tales were often riddled with a sense of hidden message and agenda. These tales mostly act in forms of allegory often masking the hidden agendas behind such narratives, which frequently can be determined to be the agenda of social conformity. Often in these stories certain characters who refuse to confirm to the destined societal paths assigned to them meet with tragic ends. One such tale is that of the little mermaid, where an individual or a mermaid turns herself into a human to pursue her love a human with the cost of her voice, and later paying with her life when she fails to win him over with her love. A classic example to teach the stubborn kids a lesson as to how not heeding to the advice of their elders can lead to tragedies. But looking at the same text from a different angle brings in another perspective, such as, this can be seen as the evolution of an individual who despite the setbacks, was confident enough to stand against the tide and paved her own path. However tragic her end may have been, her courage and strength to rebel against the existing order and establish an identity and agency of her own can be witnessed as different and unique in respect to the other female protagonist of well-known fairy tales and this can be stated to be the exact

reason why the tale has stood the test of the time and still manages to entice everyone with its magic.

Our bodies act as primary agents or the fundamental sites through which the society tries its best to bind us to follow its set of customized rules, norms and regulations, but there are times when these same rules and the same bodies can be turned into sites of rebellion and protest as exemplified by the legendary mermaid figure in the earlier mentioned story. The aim of the study is to further explore this theme using the retellings of the same above-mentioned classic tale as its medium and with the framework provided by the theory of body politics. The term *body politics* here refers to the practices and policies through which the powers of society regulate the human body, as well as the struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body. The focus of the paper will be analyse and examine whether the main characters of the retellings are able to subvert the power lines by utilizing their own bodies as sites of protest and resistance against the forces of conformity propagated by the society, thus creating their own identity and self agency.

The selected works for the purpose of the study are, *Sea Witch* (2018) by Sarah Henning and its sequel authored by the same writer, *The Sea Witch Rising* (2019). The works narrate the tale of Evie, a seemingly ordinary girl and her journey of transformation into becoming the legendary sea witch, and later the sea queen. Chapter 1 delineates on the theory of Body Politics and its specificity including its history and various forms and aspects. Chapter 2 indulges briefly on the fairy tale myth of the little mermaid and also includes a brief introduction and synopsis concerning the each of the selected works. Followed by an in depth character wise analysis from the chosen texts

employing the framework of the theory of body politics. The conclusion sums up the study and examines whether the characters from the selected works subverts the traditional notions of gender/body politics using their body as sites of resistance or else do they eventually align themselves accordingly under the influence of the original fairy tale myth.

Chapter 1

Understanding Body Politics

Body politics, refers to the norms and practices perpetuated by the society with the intention of controlling and regulating an individual's life using his or her body as its primary medium of discourse. These powers occur and perform across various levels be it in its highest level as observed in cases such as governmental laws or in the lowest and most basic personal levels such as found in the most intimate and interpersonal connections. The body acts as sites through which social constructions are marked onto human beings. The body is in itself politically inscribed and shaped accordingly by the practices and measures of containment and control.

In the western intellectual history, the origin of the idea of observing and identifying body as a site of societal power play and construction can be accredited to Karl Marx. According to the Marxian ideology a person is marked by his (or her) economic status or class, which in turn will affect his existence and experiences throughout his life by the virtue of his body. Another theorist who has explored the concept is Michel Foucault, according to him the body functions as the focal point through which the shape of the societal powers could be observed and analysed. The later development of the concept of body politics into a theory in its own right, in association with the movement of feminism can be attributed and traced back to Foucault's ideas regarding body and power relations. For the purpose of the present study, Foucault's theory on body and power relations and also the feminist perspective of body politics will be explored and further studied in detail in this chapter. Though Michel Foucault's theories on body and power weren't originally intended for the purpose of gender studies,

nonetheless many feminist scholars across the globe have been inspired by his writings. For the purpose of the present study the Foucauldian concepts such as biopower, biopolitics, modern power and resistance will be briefly delved into with the reference to his works - "The eye of power"(1980), *Discipline and Punish* (1977), *The History of Sexuality, vol. I* (1978), "The subject and power"(1982) and *Society must be defended* (1976). In his works, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), *The History of Sexuality* (1978), and *Society must be defended* (1976), Foucault explores the relation between body, politics and power. According to him biopower means those powers which are centred or based upon the body, where a human body is presumed or observed similar to the likes of a machine. Biopower is usually at work when a body is subjected to disciplining, when it's capabilities are analysed, when it's trained and optimized in a way for its effective integration into the systems of efficient and economic control. The phenomenon of biopower is characterized by a sort of "an anatomo-politics of the human body "(Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 90). Foucault saw biopower as a means through which the state organization managed its population in order to secure its control, welfare and productivity (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 141-147).

Biopolitics is power of force which always went hand in hand with the process of biopower. The term Biopolitics refers to the politics used in the process of taming human bodies in the western societies, usually propagated through daily life by such means which people often take for granted for example the use of language. Areas usually covered under biopolitics include "propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 139). The effectiveness of this form of power was ensured because it was practiced using the methods of social

techniques and human sciences, thus effecting the day-to-day life. What made Foucault's approach radically different when compared to the other disciplines and theories of the time was, unlike all the other approaches which treated human body as a machine Foucault's concepts of biopower and biopolitics enabled and "focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 139). However, Foucault's theory wasn't gender-specific, this assumed deficiency later in turn provoked for it's reworking and enriching through the hands of the feminist scholars, thus creating the germ of the theory of body politics.

Another concept which provides insight into the system and workings of the power relations is the Foucauldian idea of modern power. According to the Foucauldian theory, the concept of modern power is neither authoritarian nor conspiratorial and also never orchestrated but yet it manages to manipulate and produce, then normalize bodies into serving prevailing relations of social hierarchy. Analysing further, the modern power flow works through more dynamic and non-centralized forces when compared to the traditional modes. The traditional modes of power, that is mostly sovereign forms of power-- where power used to be controlled by a particular set of individuals or groups, or when people were said to have power or possess it. Hence Foucault states the modern forces are never random or arbitrary, in fact most of the time they successfully configure to assume particular historical forms. These forms achieve their dominance differently too rather than the conventionally followed method which where often used as pretences as degree or design from above instead these forces circulate through multiple 'processes, of different origin and scattered location', regulating the most intimate and minute

elements of the construction of space, time, desire, embodiment (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138).

Another important element observed in these prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity is that these are maintained neither using physical restraints nor any coercion, but through individual self-surveillance and self correction of norms (which later served as the germ or crux for feminist perspectives of the Foucauldian concept). Thus, as Foucault writes, "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself"(Foucault, "eye of power" 155). These conclusions later led to the Foucault's theories on panopticon and panopticism. While panopticon refers to the phenomena of all seeing surveilling gaze perpetuated by the society, whereas panopticism attributes to the process of internal surveillance an individual generates in himself/herself as consequence of been subjected to the panopticon vision. Another important idea of relevance for the purpose of the study is Foucault's belief in the concept of resistance. Foucault emphasised, that the power relations will never be seamless, but will always be spawning new forms of culture and subjectivity, new openings for potential resistance to emerge. Where there is power, Foucault stressed, there is also resistance (Foucault, "the subject and power" 1982).

In much of the western philosophical and intellectual history the human body was simply considered as another biological object among others, but what made humans stand apart was considered to be their ability or faculty of rationality. Such a dichotomy existing between body and mind was often used to correlate and justify the dichotomy

created and perpetuated between male and female. Women were always considered more biological than corporeal beings when compared to men, thus according to the western philosophical thought the female was considered and regarded to be always enmeshed in her bodily existence in a way that made attainment of her rationality questionable. Hence, it's unsurprising that women feminists in the history dealt with such embodiment with suspicion and found ways to protest and resist against it - which has been believed to be the beginnings of the movement of body politics in feminist history. Since the detailed study of the movement is beyond the scope of the present study, only the concepts relevant for the present purpose will be briefly delved upon.

It was with the publication of *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone De Beauvoir, that feminist theories achieved it's landmark, finally the issue revolving around the relation between the body and the self came to be much noticed and was brought on focus and centre stage for the first time. Beauvoir came to be regarded as an originator of the sex/gender dichotomy, which later became an inevitable element to feminist theorizing during the 1970s. Beauvoir's famous claim that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", was consistently quoted (Beauvoir, 295), and became the backbone of feminist resistance back then. Similar to the concept and power of Foucault's inspecting gaze, Beauvoir too identified ways through which a young girl or later even as an adult, women were subjected to experience her own body as a consequence of the process of internalizing the views of it under the judgment of gaze by others. She notes, "Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words pretty and ugly; she soon knows that to be pleased is to be pretty as a picture; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the

mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales" (Beauvoir 304).

This process of internalization was in fact noticed by the early feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft onwards have drawn attention to the ways in which society prescribes norms in relation to which its subjects should regulate their own bodies and those of others. Such disciplinary practices often not only lead to the production of appropriately gendered bodies, but also acted as catalysts to the formation of other aspects of bodily identities which then become subject to social normalization. From the 1990s, feminist have been drawing attention to the workings of power relations through such disciplinary practices with reference to the framework created by works of Foucault. Foucauldian insights regarding disciplinary practices of the body can be applied to the disciplining of the gendered, and most especially with regards to the female, body. Often these accounts stress the way in which women themselves actively discipline their own bodies not only in order to avoid social punishments, but also to derive certain kinds of pleasure. Two key features of such accounts: one, stress on how the material shape of bodies is modified by such practices. The second points out that such modifications are a consequence of bodies carrying social meanings and functions, such as sexual desirability, or availability, or respectability, or participation in social groupings etc.

Similar to Beauvoir, the American academician and gender theorist Judith Butler focuses on the 'performative' nature of gender identities. Butler believes the appropriation of normalizing practices of gender not only leads to the formation of ideals but also acts as the process through which gender differentiation comes into existence in the first place. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler rejects essentialism, she doesn't agree that gender differences are caused due to the biological differences of the two sexes. She

questions the methodology of discourse utilized while analysing gender differences, and questions people's tendency to think about gendered identities and differences as closely related to the notion of biological sex. In her views, the distinctness between the two sexes is constructed, and not naturally occurring. She emphasizes how these are in fact embedded in every day's practices such as the use of language and how after a number of uncountable times of repetition of these behaviours, they become and start to "appear" natural. Thus, the distinction between the male and the female is successfully manipulated and constructed and created. These gendered performances are often the ones which people act out themselves and which others act out in accordance. Such performances are acted out in accordance with their specific social scripts prescribing ideals which are usually unrealizable, but which none the less provide the framework for our activities. These dominant ideals tend to reinforce the power of certain groups; e.g., men and heterosexuals, over others. The others or minorities such as women, gay people, trans and gender non-conforming people, those with differently abled bodies, or bodies differently shaped from the dominant ideal, are treated and considered as socially as outsiders, "the abject" or the inferiors, and they are often subjected to social punishments.

Hence to sum up the selected theories used for creating the structural framework of body politics intended to be used pertaining to the present study include: Michel Foucault's theories on biopower and biopolitics, the concept of modern power and the relative theories of panopticon and panopticism. Another theoretical concept included in the structure of the study is Judith Butler's theory on performativity. But unlike Butler's original argument which was more centered on the aspect of gender, here the focus of the study will be more based on the political nature of social performativity and how

individuals are often compelled to perform according to the prevailing social norms perpetuated by their society.

Chapter 2

Mapping the Politics of the Body in the Retellings of the Mermaid Myth

Since the paper aims to delve into the retellings of the age-old mermaid myth, it's important to gain some insight about the same. The term 'mermaid', according to folklore, refers to marine creatures with the upper body part of a woman and from lower waist onwards that of a fish. Mermaid lore can be found in the folk lore of many different cultures across the world including Asia, Europe and Africa. Depending upon the lore, these magical beings are either seen as harbingers of destruction and disasters like flood, storm etc. or as benevolent beings with much compassion, such as the myth of mermaids saving the drowning sailors from death. Most of the depictions also include their characteristics of being bestowed with abundant beauty and highly seductive voices - the origins of these qualities are often associated with the Sirens of Greek mythology. These half human, half bird like creatures have been argued to have undergone a transformation in picturization from being half bird like to half fish like during the Christian era, thus leading to the arguable origins of the mermaid myth. One of the other important features often characterized in the fable is their lack of immortal soul unlike humans, though they have much higher lifespan when compared to humans. Mermaids thus have fascinated human beings from ages; hence they also act as one of centre for the plethora of human creativity across ages and disciplines, one of the ever most popular examples been the depiction of the little mermaid in Disney's motion picture portrayals. Since the present study is concerned specifically with the discipline of literature, the focus will be on the mermaid myth and its associative creations in literature.

Arguably the most, well known and influential creation associated with the

mermaid myth in the field of literature is that of the fairy-tale fable of "*The Little Mermaid*" by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, first published in the year 1837. As mentioned, Andersen's work can be considered as the trendsetting pioneer which has influenced a flood of creativity in its wake since its publication, as evident with its numerous translations and its clear influence in texts such as H.G Wells's *The Sea Lady* and Oscar Wilde's *The Fisherman and His Soul*. Since the concerned works selected for the purpose of the study follows the similar trajectory of been influenced by Andersen's text, it would be beneficial to be briefly delve into the summary of Anderson's tale before advancing further for the purpose of the study.

Andersen's tale as the title suggests follows the story of the little mermaid who resides under the sea in a kingdom with her Mer-King father, a loving grandmother and five elder sisters. As per the tradition among the mer-people a mermaid is allowed her first glimpse of the surface world on the eve of her fifteenth birthday. After listening to the tales about the surface world by her elder siblings the little mermaid longingly waits for her turn and chance to come for her maiden voyage to the surface. When her turn comes, she immediately spots a ship where the celebrations of a birthday party is going on board. When the same ship gets hits by a ferocious storm, she saves one of the drowning men - a prince with whom she hopelessly falls in love with. She brings the unconscious prince to a shore near a temple, where she awaits with him until a young woman and her maidens come across him. To her dismay the prince never sees or realizes that it was the mermaid who saved him from his watery death.

She becomes forlorn and depressed, and asks her grandmother about humans. Her grandmother reveals that though humans have a comparatively shorter lifespan than the

mermaid's usual three hundred years, they have the blessing of an eternal soul which will live on, on heaven after their deaths, unlike the mermaids who after their death are reduced to mere sea foam and ceases to exist entirely. The mermaid who becomes desperate and enamoured with her longing for the prince and the idea of eternal soul, visits the lair of the infamous sea witch in the hopes of a solution to her longing for a human life. The witch readily gives her a potion, by drinking which the mermaid will obtain two human legs in exchange for her mesmerizing voice renowned in the world. But the sea witch warns the mermaid about the side effects of such a magical transformation, which comes holding it's own risks, perils and conditions, such as the transformation itself will feel like a sword being stabbed into the mermaid's body. Though she'll lose her enchanting voice the mermaid will be able to dance in the most enticing way like no human ever did, but on the downside, she'll constantly feel like she's stepping on sharp knives. One of the deepest perils of the spell is that once the mermaid becomes a human, she can never return to the sea again. Also, she'll only obtain a part of eternal soul only if the prince will love her with a true heart as then some of his own soul will flow on to her, otherwise she'll be reduced to mere sea foam at the dawn of the first day after he marries someone else.

Despite the precarious effects of such a spell, the mermaid goes ahead with her plan. She swims up to shore, transforms and is eventually found by the prince. They soon become companions and it becomes clear that the prince really is mesmerized by her beauty and grace despite her being a mute. Soon, the king and the queen arranges for the prince's wedding with the princess of the neighbouring kingdom. The prince is upset over such a development as he wishes only to marry the girl from the temple as his future wife

as he believes she rescued him from the storm. Though to his delight and mermaid's despair, the princess turns out to be the same girl from the temple, as it revealed she was staying at the temple and pursuing education at the time of prince's accident. The prince at once declares his love for her and the royal wedding is soon announced.

The royal wedding takes place aboard a wedding ship where the prince-princess joy is contrasted with the sorrow and despair of the mermaid who awaits her impending death at the dawn. But just before dawn her sisters surface and brings her a dagger they got from the sea witch in exchange of their luminous hairs. If the mermaid stabs the dagger on the prince and let the blood flow onto her toes before the sunrise, she'll be once again return back to her natural state of being a mermaid and thus can be saved from the doom. However, the mermaid is unable to bring herself to kill the sleeping prince beside his new bride, thus in the end she throws away the dagger and jumps to the sea just as her body starts to dissolve into sea foam. Yet to her surprise, she feels sunshine upon her and becomes an earthbound spirit roaming in the atmosphere, a daughter of the air. Her new sisters inform her that she was blessed due to her selfless nature as well as due to her honest and intense desire to attain an immortal soul. Thus, in the end she's given a chance to earn her own soul. If she continues to serve and do good deeds for the humankind up to the next three hundred years, she'll be granted a chance to rise up to the heaven one day.

The selected retellings chosen for the purpose of the study is the sea witch series by Sarah Henning which consists of two novels *Sea Witch* (2018) and *Sea Witch Rising* (2019). To make the function of the present study much easier and more attainable, it will be useful to delve briefly into the summaries of each of the chosen text and then follow it

with a character wise analysis of the text using the theoretical framework of body politics. *Sea Witch* (2018) by Sarah Henning, narrates the tale of three childhood friends - Evie, Nik and Anna from different social hierarchies, Evie or Evelyn, the royal fisherman's daughter, Nik or Niklas, the crown prince of their small kingdom of Havnestad and Anna, a friherrinde or a baroness. The work begins with a prologue narrating the incident of Evie getting fatally hurt while saving her best friend Nik from a fall. She gets saved when her mother performs an ancient and powerful magical spell through which she exchanges and sacrifices her own life to save her daughter's. At the present the readers are introduced to Evie and Nik in their teens, the readers are also informed about Anna passing away. Anna was apparently lost at sea four years ago. It's also hinted that Evie has grown up to be a secret witch just like her mother and aunt. Evie and Nik are busy celebrating Nik's sixteenth birthday, at this point another major character is introduced Iker, prince of the neighbouring kingdom of Rigeby Bay, Nik's royal cousin and Evie's potential love interest.

In an unexpected turn of events Nik is thrown overboard from his schooner due to a sudden storm. Evie later finds an unconscious Nik near the shore with the girl looking like her deceased friend Anna beside him. Startled by Evie's sudden appearance the girl flees but not before Evie faintly notices her tail fin. A few days after Nik's near-death incident, a girl resembling Anna introduces herself as Annemette and befriends Evie, who initially believes her false claim of being a farmhand but later when her Tante Hansa draws suspicion upon her credentials, she reveals that she's a witch just like them. Later Annemette reveals to Evie that she's in fact a mermaid, the same one who saved Nik from his watery death. She claims to have fallen in love with him at the first sight and have

come by changing herself into a human by staking her life to find her true love. She also reveals she only has four days as human to succeed and attain Nik's true love otherwise she'll be turned to mere sea foam as mermaids don't have real soul and hence, they can't cry real tears. Evie and Annemette make an exchange, a promise to not reveal each others secrets.

The rest of the narrative involves Annemette with Evie's help trying various means to pursue Nik into falling in love with her. Towards the end Evie realizes two things, first Iker despite his high claims will never truly was or will be loyal and faithful to her, second, Nik will definitely not propose his love for Annemette or will fall in love with her within the allotted short span. Desperate, Evie breaks her earlier promise and reveals to Nik and Iker about Annemette's true identity, which in turn makes Annemette so angry that she reveals Evie to be a witch. Iker then issues the order for arresting and executing both the girls, who in turn run towards the sea. Evie firmly believes her magic can save Annemette, she's desperate as she doesn't want to lose Annemette to the sea like she lost her beloved Anna. Thus, she decides to ask Annemette's life to Urda in a magical exchange for the one which she already took, Anna's.

When Nik tries to intersect, Evie chastises him for not giving his heart to Annemette, Nik tearfully reveals his heart always belonged to her, since the time when they were children. Evie admits it was the same in her heart too but she was too afraid to admit the fact even to herself as she didn't wish their friendship and bond to spoil, as they were never meant to be. Evie tells Nik that she loves him but pushes him away in order to distract and flee from the soldiers. She and Annemette then swim to the sandbar where Evie asks Urda to give her Annemette instead of the life she took Anna's. Then to much

of her horror Evie realizes the true face of Annemette who indeed as her heart had suggested was in fact her dear old friend Anna. But now was just a blood thirsty monster whose only intention was to get her revenge, as Anna always held Evie and Nik and also Iker to an extent to be responsible for her death. She overpowers and drowns Evie in the cove along with her father's corpse, whom Annemette had earlier killed.

Annemette then returns to the shore, manages to fatally strike Nik and inadvertently also kill the king by a strike intended for Iker. In between this the readers realize Evie's hasn't passed away she in fact swims to the surface with the remnants of her strength to warn Nik about Anna but she's too late. Hansa tries to treat the critically wounded Nik but it's no use. In the meantime, Anna slowly starts to transform to a real human as she can now cry real tears. Asking her aunt to bind Anna, Evie performs the same old ancient and dark magical spell on Nik which her mother did for her, thus saving his life by sacrificing hers. She then with the remnants of her strength drags Anna (who by then has turned completely human thus an ordinary human with no magic in her blood as she was before been turned into a mermaid) to a watery death. As Evie awaits her death lying at the bottom of the sea floor, the octopus who came to settle at the cove due to her abundance spell, starts to feed on her wounds. With her last breath she asks it to go away and live it's life, this command accidentally and involuntarily due to the reminder of the magic in the atmosphere works as a transformative spell, binds the life and body of the octopus with the near dead Evie's. Thus, she becomes the legendary sea witch a creature the world has never seen with eight luminous tentacles which serves like a throne for her.

The novel ends with an epilogue fifty years after, when another mermaid comes

before Evie with a timid yet brave request to demand an audience with the sea witch, the mermaid wants to be a human in order pursue her love for another boy prince Nik the previous Nik's grandson whom she recently saved from a storm. Evie performs the same magical spell as earlier though she alters it so as not to sacrifice a life instead a different sort of sacrifice is made instead, that is, the beautiful voice of the mermaid. Though the conditions remain the same for the mermaid as in the earlier spell. When the mermaid leaves, Evie spells the remainder of the voices to the near by polyps, created from the bodies of Anna and the drowned soldiers. Thus, Anna begins to speak through the voice of the mermaid, the novel ends with both Evie and Anna agreeing that the girl will probably won't succeed in her mission. Thus, Evie anticipating the visit from the mermaid's family for a solution, begins to sharp a coral blade knife.

Focusing on the analysis of prominent characters one by one - Evie or Evelyn is initially the best friend of the young prince Nik or Niklas of the Havnestad Kingdom, the daughter of the royal fisherman and a secret witch, eventually she becomes the renowned sea witch and by the end of the second book of the series she becomes the sea queen. The novel commences with the event of Nik's birthday, from the beginning it becomes evident that Evie is treated as the alien outsider amongst the society, especially in this instance the higher strata the elites, as exemplified through her interactions with komtesse (or Countess) Malvina (and later Nik's mother Queen Charlotte), who considers Evie to be beneath her. Here as Foucault's theory on modern power suggests more than any form of external force just an inspecting gaze is powerful enough to make Evie consciously aware of her inferior social position among the elites and behave accordingly. The concepts of biopolitics and biopower too comes into play in these instances. Describing

the nature of biopower Foucault comments in his text *Society Must Be Defended* (1976), "it was a type of power that presupposed a closely meshed grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign"(Foucault, 36). For example, just like the modern power structure often utilizes and exploits its citizens biopower through biopolitics, here Evie too can be stated to be similarly utilized and exploited.

Characters like Malvina who represents the nobility don't even think to be courteous or to utter a mere thank you when Evie does them a service like for example bringing candles for Malvina's cake from below the deck. The nobility and the elites believe it to be their natural right to use the free services of the peasantry class, the shades of Marxian concept of a person's body and personal identity been marked on the basis of his or her social standing is also visible. Evie even jokes about her condition - "You can't fall far in society if you're not part of it to begin with"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 2) . Another aspect which becomes visible is Evie's evident attraction towards Nik's royal cousin Prince Iker of Rigeby Bay. One of the main reasons for Evie's attraction to Iker can be due to his familiarity and craftsmanship similar to that of an people from her social background, unlike Nik who mostly occupies the traditional cultural space of a conventional prince. Iker entices her mostly due to his ability in creating a sense of similarity by the virtue of his expert skills of as an experienced sailor and fisherman. For Evie such actions are grounded and derived from her social backdrop, hence she falls for him. When Iker kisses her for the first time, despite savouring the moment Evie knows better but yet she wishes - "A place where class, title- none of that matters. Somewhere that surely doesn't exist outside of this instant"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 27).

She knows despite all the show and pomp of inclusivity, invitation and her brief

span of occupation among the social elites is only due to Nik's influence. Evie knows it in her heart that at the end of the day she's just a fishermen's lonely daughter. Evie's fear of being recognized as a witch, can be connected to Foucault's concept of panopticon and panopticism. Focusing on the effects on panopticon Foucault comments in his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) - "The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power" (Foucault, 202). For example, in the text, the instance when Evie uses a small spell to brighten the luminescence of her fluttering candle while searching for the birthday candles and matches. She's extremely cautious - "Women burned for far less under Øldenburgs of yesteryear. My relatives burned for far less"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 15), due to the panopticon, she becomes a subsequent victim of the process of panopticism, thus initiating an internal surveillance of her own.

The concept of Butler's theory of performance can also be seen here as Evie is socially manipulated to put on a performance as an ideal law-abiding citizen, while hiding her real identity of that of a witch. Another instance where this fear of recognition again manifests itself is during the occasion of the Sankt Hans Aften, the starting day of the infamous Lithasblot festival. The main attraction involves a ceremony celebrated in the memory of getting the land ride of the supposed plague earlier caused by witches and witchcraft, it includes a symbolic purification ritual of throwing and burning little doll witches as a allegorical representation of the process of actually burning the witches on stakes. Evie notices the hypocrisy perpetuated by the royals and elites, especially as seen through the example of her Tante Hansa, whose called the "healer of the kings", the aristocrats simply turn a blind eye to magic when it suits their purpose, on the other days

they condemn and forsake it with the punishment of death by burning. In the above-mentioned scenario capturing the hypocritical treatment of witches by the nobility, the tangents of the Foucauldian concepts of biopower and biopolitics are again observable.

The subsequent chapters further reveal Evie's helpless situation. The peasantry and commoners hate her for her close association and access to those of royalty despite being one amongst them. Evie is constantly looked down upon after her mother's sudden death and also after Anna's accidental drowning. Even when Nik rescues her from drowning and brings her back onto the shore no one is happy that she's safe, they only taunt her more as the undeserving fishermen's daughter got saved while the baroness drowned. This judgemental gaze becomes such a torture for the already guilt tormented Evie that she refuses to come out of her home, at the end of the episode Nik had to actually ship away with her to Rigeby Bay for a week to help her recuperate her physical but more importantly mental strength. Once again, the text indicates to the concepts of modern power and panopticon vision, where the differing individuals are treated with no mercy by the inspecting gaze, to such an extent that they become their own guards in order to maintain a sense of assimilation as the theory of panopticism suggests.

Evie's loneliness and desolation also contributes and makes it easier for Annemette or Anna to exploit and manipulate her by posing herself as a benevolent force, she convincingly offers the love, sympathy and sisterhood Evie desperately was hoping and searching for. Evie being a secret witch also doesn't help her, as already mentioned she's forever cautious (panopticism), she can't even claim the credit or acclaim for trying to help and save the same society which rejected her by spelling abundance at the harbour each day. This secretiveness too is exploited by Annemette all too easily as Evie always

wanted someone to recognize, realize and accept and acknowledge the real her instead of the masquerade (a mask of performance) she was putting on to please the society.

As Judith Butler comments in her text regarding the performative nature of gender - "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 179). Similarly, regardless of the gender aspect, Evie too was putting on a performance for the virtue of society. She has forever denied or to say more precisely was never given a chance to showcase and nurture the real or magical part of her in front of the world, society or even her best friend Nik. She knows once she openly claims her real identity, not even Nik will be able to accept her, such an action will only condemn her life and also of her family's. Here Annemette seemingly accepts her for the way she is, for the first time she has a friend who can see and accept her for who she really is, hence this leads to her own destruction in the end.

Her precarious social position is symbolically exemplified when Evie is attacked during the log race as part of the annual game celebration of lithasblot festival. Previously Evie had successfully bypassed Nik, when even Iker seems to be losing to her, someone from the audience attacks and makes her fall - "when someone in the crowd decides a prince can't lose yet again, and a branch whizzes through the air, catching me across the neck" (Henning, *Sea Witch* 172). Her position also makes her vulnerable against social and sexual predators like Iker who takes it as their right to exploit girls like Evie, according to Iker he likes Evie especially because - "I know that you, of all people,

see how this works."(Henning, *Sea Witch* 284). Here Iker symbolically represents the cruel face of the modern state of power which exploits biopower of its citizens using biopolitics, for example Iker manipulating Evie into becoming his personal play thing. Also, this power play in turn propagates the controlling panopticon vision of surveillance, which then ultimately encourages the citizens or individuals to the process of panopticism or self surveillance, like for example as the above mentioned statement indicated Iker hopes Evie to understand his vile intentions, his surveillance like gaze yet expects her to play along as he like a modern power state believes such exploitation of girls like Evie of the peasantry class as his birth right. This results in her generating a self surveillance, so that she might not get fooled by Iker's tactics again.

Towards the end it doesn't take Iker a second to issue guards to capture Evie once he hears the accusations of her being a witch, he condemns her already deciding her guilt. That's when Evie for the first time while fleeing truly accepts who she is, she's ready to abandon her kingdom, family even her Nik to go into a life with Annemette embracing her true self as a witch. The depth of the effects of her social conditioning is revealed when she for the first time realizes and acknowledges her real feelings for Nik - "I've loved him as long as he has loved me. I've just spent so much of my life..., pretending it wasn't true. So that we wouldn't be hurt.... at the hands of class and expectations" (Henning, *Sea Witch* 307). She was neglecting her true self and was putting up a performance for the benefit of assimilating into the society, becoming her own resistor and guard. In the end even after her humanely demise, after she metamorphosis as the legendary sea witch, Evie is still doomed and imprisoned as an outlaw in her cove. Even in the sequel text *Sea Witch Rising* (2019) she's denied freedom by the tyrannical sea king

and manipulated by Anna's polyp. It's only towards the end when Evie's presented with the sea crown - to be the sea queen, she finally gains the deserved respect and acceptance from the society, here the mer society in this instance.

Another important character from the series is Nik or Niklas, the crown prince of Havnestad and Evie's best friend since childhood, they grow closer after the death of intimate and mutual childhood friend Anna's death. The narrative opens with Nik's sixteenth birthday, similar like in Evie's case, the readers are soon informed regarding Nik's social predicaments. Nik too is revealed to bonded by his duty to perform as a prince. He has been trained and conditioned to be civil and cordial to everyone even to those like Malvina who view his as a prosperous future prospect and as a position of power than a real individual. Reflecting on Butler's comment regarding the performative nature of gender as something bounded by social acts "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts"(Butler, 179), similarly throughout the text, readers realize essentially Nik is always bound by his duty to perform or put up a performance of royalty for the benefit of society.

The only person with whom he doesn't need to pretend and keep up his royal facade is his friend Evie. Evie and Nik became friends or were allowed to, only because her Tante Hansa had treated and helped the royal family many times. As Foucault remarks on the nature of power "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 202). Thus, it becomes evident - not even royals are beyond the

play and hierarchy of power, in fact the text proves that the laws are much stricter for a person like Nik.

Throughout the text Nik is very much duty bound, for example as per the traditions Nik must actively take over the reins of handling the lithasblot festival after coming of age, as Evie remarks his recent near-death drowning can't be taken as a excuse. The same was true even after Anna's death, while Evie was at least allowed the freedom to resist and stay at her home, Nik had to come out and face the world, he had to put on the act of being a perfect duty-bound prince. The readers understand his true plight when he confesses to Evie about his helplessness, as he had recently turned of age, his mother expects him to start seeing and courting suitable prospects for his future wife and the future queen, something he doesn't wish to do, yet compelled to oblige. Nik too despite being the people's prince isn't spared from the judgmental gaze of the society - the panopticon vision. As Foucault remarks " the Panopticon presents a cruel, ingenious cage"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 205), reflecting on this idea, it becomes especially evident in the text when Nik is judged for successfully saving Evie from drowning but wasn't able to save Anna- “ -that he'd saved the fisherman's spawn instead of a friherrinde. He was a hero, but in dark rooms and hushed conversation, he was a traitor to his class as well"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 192).

Unlike the other aristocrats in the novel who considers others beneath them, Nik believes in equality as observed in the instances where he tries to save Evie and Anna from drowning. Though he hears the voices of his training in the form of his parents' voices instructing him to not be a hero or his life is above all others, he doesn't pay attention to any of them. For him, Evie's and Anna's life are as valuable as his own, and

despite knowing that he himself has a mighty chance of being drowned, he tries his best to rescue them both. Equally visible is his discomfort with Evie's closeness to Iker, despite this can be taken as partly due to his own undisclosed and unrequited love for her, but at the same time his genuine fear for Evie is highly observable. As a prince Nik knows Iker can have his own way with others without anyone daring to question him. Yet Nik does stand up to Iker once when he feels Iker crossed the line when he starts to accuse and insult Annemette. The only point in the story where Nik wholly takes charge and utilizes the power of his elite societal position is when he condemns and punishes the person who attacked Evie during the log race.

Though it's only towards the end Nik explicitly states and confesses his love for Evie, the readers do get hints about it throughout the narrative. Nik especially after Anna's death tries his best to make Evie feel included wherever they go, yet he too knows the people are just being civil due to his position. This becomes especially evident when he hears them snickering behind their back during the first visit at the market place after Anna's accidental death. Nik like the readers is very well aware he'll be never allowed to pursue Evie as his possible future partner, yet he does fight with his parents to try and maintain at least the close bond of their nurturing friendship from breaking. He breaks the royal cords, thus breaking the boundaries instilled by panopticon gaze and also ends by breaking the self imposed panopticism or self surveillance when he decides to take Evie across to Rigeby Bay without a second thought. This can be observed as an act of resistance, as Foucault mentions to "form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 219). Nik takes Evie away cause both of them but especially Evie wanted to be spared from the judgmental gaze of the society.

When his parents especially his mother Queen Charlotte who always disapproved of her son's friendship with the fishermen's daughter, tries to punish him by arranging to keep the two friends separated, the otherwise obedient and subdued Nik loudly protests. It's only after he promises to maintain just a relation of friendship, he's allowed continue to meet her. Also, unlike Iker who abandons Evie just because of Anna's declaration of her being a witch, Nik till the end tries to protect her within his limited position of power. In the end, though the readers learn that Nik lived a long and fulfilling life as a ruler, he remained a broken-hearted man throughout his life after losing his true love.

Another prominent character in the text is Iker, the crown prince of Rigeby Bay, the royal cousin of Nik and Evie's love interest. Iker in one sense epitomizes hypocrisy of the elite class, who seemingly and conveniently dismisses the traditional structure of norms when it suits them yet ultimately confirms to the same. It's this hypocrisy plus his personal charms that helps him to excellently manipulate (like the streams of modern power) even a girl like Evie who has always been aware about the workings of power structures. Iker similar to his aunt symbolically represents the worst forms of exploitative powers as mentioned in the theories of biopower and biopolitics. As Foucault remarks in his work *Society Must Be Defended* (1976) these powers have the right to dictate “to make live” and “let die” (Foucault, 237). Thus, Iker occupies a position of power in the world offered in the narrative, where he feels it as his natural right to treat others the way he wants, with no one daring to question his authority.

One of the reasons as mentioned earlier Evie falls for Iker is due to the way he carries himself like for example he's well versed with the ways of fisher folks. Unlike Nik who's known for his refined manners, Iker's mostly blunt in his approach he defies the

traditional stereotypes as Nik observes Iker is never known for being on time. Despite her cautions Evie still finds herself falling for him, her heart is broken twice, at first when Iker comfortably forgets her when he has to dance as the prince during the opening of the ball with a girl from nobility. Second, Iker doesn't even check to verify Anna's acquisition of Evie being a witch, instead he orders the guards to immediately arrest and execute her. In Iker's eyes treating Evie and the other girls as his personal playthings is justified, for him these are passing romances or fancies, a future king is bound by the laws, traditions, customs and his duties towards his citizens at the end of the day. Iker even has the audacity to comment Evie of all people should know the way how things work. He expects Evie to know her place, the elements of modern power and its subsequent panopticon vision are visible yet again. Despite all the power play which leads Evie to adopt a sense of panopticism or self surveillance, Iker expects Evie to play along or perform according to the norms to entertain him.

But Iker himself can't be blamed for all his miss deeds, most of it can be attributed the way he was conditioned and brought up with. This becomes clearly evident in the scene where he sees both Anna and Evie drowning from afar. Though the humanity and innocence still present in him wants to run to their rescue, the training in his veins kicks in and orders him to stop and resist-" The visitor's feet told him to run. To help. Neither girl had surfaced- it had been too long. He took five steps and halted. His father in his ear this time..."Do not be a hero, Iker, you are already a prince"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 127).

Iker only runs to rescue when he sees his own cousin, his own blood Nik seems to be in danger, in fact Iker recusing actually prevents Nik in a way to rescue Anna, thus leading to her drowning. Iker is thus trained to perform according to the social

conventions since his childhood. As Butler observes in the preface 1999 of her work *Gender trouble* (1990), "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body"(Butler, XV). Thus, Iker identity, his performance everything is essentially structured, manipulated through reiteration of actions. He's trained to perform and follow the norms according to the social position he occupies in the society. Thus, Iker does conform to his socially assigned identity as the prince and begins to see the lives of others as beneath him, symbolically begins to occupy the position to propagate modern power, biopolitics and exploit others using biopower. His real nature comes upfront only when he feels his family's power is threatened by a risk, for example he's highly suspicious of Annemette and her credentials, according to him something's predatory the way she interacts with Nik, yet he fails to understand he himself treats people like Evie the same way. In the end, we learn that Iker was lost at sea during a whaling expedition.

One of the major characters from the series is Anna alias Annemette, born as friherrinde Anna and then later reborn as the mermaid Annemette and then before her permanent mortal demise again as Anna. Anna is again seen in polyp form in the sequel then again in spirit form as Annemette before she's ultimately freed. Anna's is the archetypal figure of the mermaid myth here. Though she's the main antagonist, the readers do feel some sort of sympathy for her. Anna is portrayed as a sweet and kind girl before her drowning and transformation into Annemette, despite being an aristocrat she loved Evie like a sister and always tried to include her in very activity she and Nik did. Yet all these changes pertaining to her being misled by her sense of revenge. The drowning couldn't have happened hadn't Anna felt jealous towards Evie, she wanted Evie

to tell her a solution to make Nik look admiringly towards her like he did with Evie. She hates Nik for failing to save her but more for choosing and saving Evie first. Anna also sees Iker as the culprit who prevented Nik from reaching and rescuing her. The crux of the reason for her doom was her sense of entitlement was feeling hurt and threatened by Evie's larger influence on Nik, despite Anna being the more socially suitable companion, Nik always preferred Evie more. Anna's social performance was feeling threatened by Evie's lack of self-inflicted guarding or panopticism.

Further Anna doesn't only seek revenge from the humans who failed her but also from her mer family and society for thrusting a new identity upon her. Though they did it with good intentions for saving her life, transforming Anna then baptizing her as Annemette, was actually denying her a past and a existence of her own. By the virtue of such an action, they're expecting her to transform and perform accordingly to her new identity. As Butler notes the crafty ways identities are usually created, "the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness"(Butler, 178). Her fury against the mer family is mainly due to their denial of her past existence and her identity as Anna, instead they thrust upon her the magical manipulated and created Annemette. By changing her name and reforming her, they were snatching away her real identity, her sense of self, even her human soul, she can't forgive any of that - "He'd lied. They'd all lied. Told her she was one of them. Kept her in the dark"(Henning, *Sea Witch* 258).

By then Anna decides if the people around her deny her identity, her agency as a self existing entity, then she'll regain her self in her own way thus leading to her doom. In short, Anna didn't want to conform or be another victim of biopolitics, and the all-encompassing vision of panopticon, she didn't want to perform according to the tunes of

the society, since she doesn't subscribe to the process of self assimilation through panopticism, she's seen as a threat and thus eventually eliminated. By the time she regains her consciousness and memories from her past life as Anna, she's no longer the sweet Anna or innocent Annemette, it can also being seen unlike the real Anna who still believed her friend Evie could be included, Annamette recognizes and realizes the norms of the world, hence decides to manipulate them for her revenge, for example:

Annemette's decision to kill Evie's father instead of Iker is only due to her knowing that Iker will be able to take advantage and ruin Evie more if he still lived. In the sequel too, Anna's polyp form manipulates Evie with the ideas of freedom and a sense of self, yet the same goes true for Anna's situation, the sea king too manipulates her with the self same promises to do his dirty work. Though they're enemies it's only Evie who acknowledges and values Anna's identity and opinions as a self existing entity of it's own right, similarly it's in fact Evie who later provides Anna with a chance to get her identity back, by providing her Alia's voice as a medium. The sea king later snatches away this agency too, and at the end Evie finally releases and frees Anna's spirit along with others like Alia's.

The next retelling on the list is the second novel of the sea witch series, the sequel to the *Sea Witch* (2018), *Sea Witch Rising* (2019) by the same author Sarah Henning. The narrative commences with the incident of a mermaid Alia approaching Evie with the request to transforming her into a human in order for her to pursue her human love a prince Niklas, the grandson of the previous Nik of Evie. Aiding Alia, leads to Evie gaining the wrath of the sea king, since along with Alia some of his magical powers left him and moved on to the surface from the sea. In retribution he punishes her with a powerful spell, leaving her barely alive. Later Alia's twin sister Runa arrives at Evie's lair

demanding a solution for returning her sister, she explains that Alia will never be able to gain Niklas's love as he's already stated to marry someone else in two days.

Runa then manages to assist Evie into regaining her power through her ability to cultivate the magical ríkifjor flowers - the magical serum of which heals Evie. In turn Evie provides her a deal, the solution she wanted a coral knife in exchange for the her and her sisters hairs. Downside of the antidote, Alia will always remain a human. Runa knowing that Alia will never agree to a solution involving Niklas's murder, yet she convinces Evie to change her into human too, in order to pursue Alia. But unlike Alia's, Runa's deal is different since she's not going in search of true love, so the terms are also different. Runa too has four days, and after Alia kills Niklas, his blood should flow to her feet too just like Alia's, she must also retrieve the knife and the previous Nik's ring from the prince's possession and deliver it to the sea witch, failing to do any of this she'll forever remain a human.

Runa soon goes to the surface and gains entry to the castle by claiming to have come in search for her mute friend Alia. At the point the readers are also introduced to some other characters like Will/William who's a cousin of the bride to be of Niklas, Sofie the bride of Niklas and her handmaiden Agnata etc. Alia, as expected, is much reluctant with the Runa's plan of killing Niklas. The readers are also informed that Alia wants to be a witch when she turns into a human and wants to help in restoring the balance between the magic of the land and sea. The balance has been disturbed due to the sea king's actions, as well as the centuries long persecution of the witches on land. The readers also gain insight that the story has its background in 1914, with the commence of WW1. Though Denmark and its kingdoms like Havnestad are neutral, the terrible war had

affected its economy thus forcing Niklas to marry Sofie for the financial stability of his kingdom. Sofie too isn't very happy with the match, her father representing his German roots wants the kingdom to build U-boats, a sort of deadly submarine for serving the war effort. At the wedding night, Runa and Alia makes to the king's chambers and struggle with their decision of killing him, in the end it's Runa instead of Alia who ends up murdering Niklas and Sofie awakes screaming and thus awaking the whole castle.

In short everything goes awry, Alia and Runa run for their lives, in between the hustle Runa loses the coral knife, which later Evie retrieves. They also realize their impending doom as they failed to act in terms according to the spell. Alia later leads Runa towards the path where she heard a witch named Katherine lived. Once the new dawn arrives since Alia wasn't able to fulfill the terms of the magical contract, she dissolves into sea foam, and later joins the polyp collection in Evie's cave. A desolate Runa is approached by Will who reveals himself to be a wizard capable of only sprouting Daisy. He takes her to Katherine's, which he claims to be a safe house for the witches, where they're secretly planning and trying to destroy the deadly U-boats thus preventing it sales to add to destructions caused by the war efforts.

At Katherine's Runa is initially rejected since Katherine senses her to be a mermaid but later she gets accepted when they realize she has the power and knowledge which none of them have. Sofie too is revealed to be a witch (like her deceased elder sister) and since they failed to report after king's murder Sofie and Will too are added to suspected list in the murder of the king. Later Agnata too joins them, she claims to have escaped from the castle guards. Runa decides to teach them to harness and use their abilities of magic, since the U-boats are also deadly to her people under the sea. Runa

who was still trying and who later finds a way to return to her mermaid form, eventually gives up her plans to return when she realizes she can do more good in her human form than helping her father to enlarge his ego. She also grows close to Will and begins to appreciate her life as a human.

In the meantime, the sea king plans on attacking the surface world since he wants to harness and steal the remaining magic of the land too. Anna's polyp acts as his agent, manipulates Evie with dreams of escaping the cove and of once again becoming human. Meanwhile the Sea king manipulates his subjects, making false claims of human mines killing Alia and fatally wounding Runa. When Evie and his mother, the Queen mother Ragnhildr tries to stop him, the sea king murders his own mother and compels Evie to spell her polyps into soldiers and release Alia and Annemette too. He's then about to kill Evie, when at that moment Runa at last delivers her the ring the symbol of love which existed between her and Nik, with it she gains enough strength and power to fight back, which frightens the sea king to leave her.

With her renewed power Evie successfully manages to cast the spell which enables her to release herself from the cove prison. She then openly challenges and defeats the sea king to save the merpeople and the world above. In the end, Evie is presented with the crown and she becomes the Sea Queen. Evie also finally releases the spirits of the soldiers, Alia and Annemette. In Runa's end, she and her new friends successfully manages to destroy the six U-boats which were about to be commissioned for the war efforts. In the concluding chapter Runa stumbles upon Evie's hidden lair which she had during her time as a young girl. The novel ends with Runa deciding and promising to make Alia and Evie proud by reviving, stabilizing and spreading the power

of magic on land for doing good deeds to serve humanity.

One of the important characters from the sequel is Alia whose one among the sea king's daughters, Runa's twin sister, Niklas's potential love interest. Alia fits almost perfectly within the archetypal figure of the mermaid from Anderson's tale. Unlike her sisters who seem to be comfortable with their identities as mermaids, Alia longs for the human world and her human love prince Niklas - the facts attested by Runa's narrative. As Evie comments the sea king was infamous for notoriously treating his daughters like pawns for gaining alliances, by defying biological identity Alia's is here rejecting the assumed identity thrust upon by the society and her father's regime.

Alia proves Foucault idea of resistance as explained in his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976) - "Where there is power, there is resistance"(Foucault, 95). Though she loses her brilliant voice she gains her own agency and the ability to follow her own dreams. Though Runa claims to be much more mature and daring among the twins, Alia in a sense is much braver as she chooses to risk everything, resist the conditioning and the identity entrusted and expected of her, and chooses her own path. By claiming her own voice and agency against her biological identity, she's resisting her assigned performance. Alia doesn't go by the rules inflicted or threatened upon by the panopticon gaze. As Foucault remarks the "Panopticon is a royal menagerie"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 203) and Alia thus refuses to be one of her father's dumb and civil animal.

Though Alia realizes she'll never be able to go back to being a mermaid, she sees it as an opportunity to do more good and create a new existence and identity for her. Unlike her other sisters especially Runa, Alia early on realizes her father's power hungry nature. She realizes even if she goes back she'll only help him to acquire more power to

control and terrorize others, while by staying on land and training herself with other witches she'll be able to fight back and restore the balance of the magic disturbed by her father's greed. Reflecting on the disciplinary nature of biopower Foucault comments "it centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault, *Society Defended* 249). Thus, Alia can be seen here as resisting and refusing to be reduced to a mere tool for her father to utilize, she fights against her father's tyranny of exploiting others biopower through biopolitics.

Alia also contrary to Runa's assessments considers Niklas as a fellow victim of social expectations, she realizes his predicament and his inability to shatter the chains of duty that binds him to his citizens. In the end, even when Alia's spirit is freed from her polyp form and her voice restored by her father, she doesn't compel and obey him against her wishes. She supports Evie and let the citizens know the true face of her father. When he accuses her for the crime of betraying their kind and leaving for humans, she proudly shouts back that - "I left for myself"(Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 368). In the end, she requests Evie to free her finally, and Evie just like she acted as the catalyst for Alia's earlier freedom, this time too act as her catalyst for eternal liberation.

The most important character from the sequel is Runa, the sea king youngest daughter, Alia's twin sister and Will's love interest. Essentially the main protagonist of the novel, Runa too fits into the category of mermaid changing herself into a human to pursue love, but unlike others Runa's love was for her sister, as Alia's spirit says - "Runa left for me"(Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 368). Contrary to Alia who seems to be much more peaceful with her decisions, Runa still struggles to come in terms with most of her

choices throughout the text. At the beginning, Runa too like a victim is conditioned to such an extent that she hates her sister for abandoning or in better words for choosing herself and her freedom against the norms. To a major portion of the text, she still struggles to understand or come in terms with Alia's decision of leaving her identity as a mermaid behind.

Though Runa is aware of her father's tyrannical ways of biopolitics or bio-terrorism, she still commits to perform her role according to the expected social norms. Referring to the performative and manipulative nature of social identities Butler remarks "repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation"(Butler, 178). Hence Runa despite of understanding the mechanisms behind the surveilling panopticon gaze yet herself commits to confirm through panopticism. Thus, taking note of the intimidating and delusional nature of the forces of panopticism, Foucault comments "panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 222), as observed even in Runa's scenario. It's only later Runa realizes the depth of her social conditioning and decides wholeheartedly to rebel herself from her father tyrannical rules. Runa at a point still wishes to go back and later she does realize that she has a chance yet she's hesitant. She hurriedly decides to go back when her sisters inform her that their father is planning to attack the people on land, to drain the last drop of magic from land, thus creating an irreversible imbalance affecting not only the people, but also defying the laws of nature.

As an individual Runa knows her father considers her the most important piece as she alone among his daughters has the power to plant the magical Ríkifjor flowers, the

nectar of which gives him the ability to hoard and harness more magical power. She realizes she may be able to stop the impending war if she goes back on surface and also stop the depleting effects of it from affecting her mer society. Yet she realizes, sooner or later due to his ever-lasting hunger and ambition for power her father will still continue with the idea of war some other day, the only thing such a decision will ensure is her enslavement by him- "Chained to the tower, not to be trusted with any hint of freedom...No adventure. No life beyond duty. And who does it help besides him?" (Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 272).

As Foucault remarks "Panopticon was also a laboratory"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 203), Runa realizes by returning she will only be further entrapped and treated like a lab animal, only to be tortured, experimented and exploited according to the whims of her authoritarian father. She knows by going back she'll only aid and continue to confirm and perform for his legacy of exploiting. As Foucault rightly remarks in his work "resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 95). Thus, Runa by rejecting to go back she resists and fight back against her conventional duty to perform as her father's daughter and a princess, instead she's wrought a new identity for herself. In the end, she decides to follow the path laid before her by her sister Alia, she teaches the land witches, vows to work hard towards restoring the magical balance between land and sea, and serve and save both humanity as well as the mer people from the ongoing human war WW1 along with other witches. Runa in the end gains her own identity and agency, she also begins to truly understand and respect the strong women like Alia and Evie in her life who showed and inspired her to attain a voice of her own, she closes her narrative by pledging to make them all proud.

Another character of interest is Will or William Jensen, a cousin of Sofie, who later becomes a royal cousin to Niklas through Sofie's marriage and by the end is Runa's boyfriend and the only wizard the readers encounter in the series. From the introduction of his character, it becomes apparent Will is someone who's struggling to compromise between his two identities. Though the readers aren't explicitly made aware of Will's history and background, it becomes clear that he obviously wasn't born into aristocracy. Will's succession into aristocracy through his cousin's marriage indicate to the changing social system within the world of novel, now even commoners had a chance to elevate themselves up the social ladder which was mostly unthinkable during Evie's period. The narrative also indicates the background to be around WWI a time of great social, economic upheaval.

What makes Will differ from other characters is he's always sure of his place and standing, though he knows he's supposed to behave like a gentleman now due to the changing social scenario, he confesses to Runa he's still the same farm boy on his heart - "I'm still the same boy with chicken shit on his boots" (Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 175). Will is another victim of social expectations, to live up to which he denies the real part of himself and puts up a show - "People with titles always want a show. They don't want the farm boy from Aarhus who awakes before dawn to feed the chickens, they want the boy who cleans up nicely and bows and chuckles at all the right times"(Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 174-175). Hence, he develops a sense of panopticism or self surveillance in order to assimilate into the new vision of panopticon. Reflecting on the dynamics existing between the modern power structures and panopticism, according to Foucault "panopticism enables it to operate"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 223), it here stands

for the exercise of power. Thus, Will becomes another victim of the societal power play.

Will differs from other characters cause he's much more comfortable with his traditional identity in fact he enjoys his performance as a farm boy and finds it difficult to adjust and conform to the new vision and gaze by panopticon system of society. Remarking about the all-encompassing effects of the panopticon gaze, Foucault comments "at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 249). Thus, as indicated by Foucault comments, Will struggles throughout the narrative to perform or wholly subscribe panopticon vision propagated by the society.

Will tries to convince the people around him to change and think about the betterment for humanity including to his uncle and friend Niklas from selling the U-boats. When he realizes he can't change anyone, he wholeheartedly embraces the magical side of himself something he had struggled his whole life with and decides to learn and fight as a wizard, tapping into the power of his magic to do something good for society, for example by destroying the U-boats. The readers realize his true predicament when he discloses to Runa that he can never go back to his family and former life as a farm boy. His family just like the society will reject him, condemn him as a freak for accepting and embracing his real identity as a wizard - "There's nothing quite as dangerous as a child who thinks he knows better than his parents and acts on those instincts" (Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 235). Towards the end, Will comes fully in terms with his identity, as Butler comments regarding attaining a self agency "the preexisting subject has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully determined by that culture and discourse"(Butler, 182). Similarly in the end Will gains a self agency when he truly

embraces his natural magical ability and the identity of being a wizard. In the end he decides to fight along with Runa to continue their mission of serving the world by stopping the war efforts with the power of their magic.

The next character of interest is Sofie officially known by her title as a countess or komtesse is the bride. Later for a brief period of time she becomes the wife of Niklas, and later his widow. She's also Will's cousin and Agnata's mistress and also a witch. From her introduction itself it becomes clear that Sofie just like Nik isn't very keen of the impending marriage. Sofie is very well aware of her being treated as a mere pawn by her father just like the sea king treats his daughters (exploiting biopower using biopolitics), she even sympathizes with Alia and Runa at the time of them being disguised as baronesses - "fathers like ours retain and expand their power by promising away their little girls"(Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 96).

Yet due to her social conditioning she indirectly threatens Alia against continuing her close association with Niklas, thus threading the path laid down to her by the society. Thus, as Foucault remarks regarding the conniving nature of the panopticon vision induced by the modern power structures to exploit the citizens through biopower using biopolitics and instilling a sense of panopticism - " Panopticon....must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 205). Thus, though Sofie hates the decision regarding her marriage, she still intends to play the part as her father and title demands of her due to the power of training and conditioning under the panopticon surveillance. Yet Sofie clearly struggles to come in terms with this decision in the morning of her wedding. Thus, Sofie is literally imposed and forced by the panopticon

view into performing her expected meek role as another victim of panopticism. As Foucault notes "Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men"(Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 204), likewise Sofie becomes a literal prey for her father's authoritarian panopticon vision. Hence to fulfill her the social expectations she goes through a loveless marriage as clearly visible to Runa and Alia by the way Niklas and Sofie lying in the bed turning opposite sides. Sofie only learns to resist the manipulation and defend herself by embracing her identity as a witch only after Niklas death.

She becomes furious when she learns her father had readily abandoned her when she's declared as one of the suspects in Niklas's murder. Through Sofie the readers are also informed about the predicament of her elder sister. Her sister was denounced and hunted down by the society for accepting her gift of magic, she was accused as a witch, her maltreatment led to such an extent that she committed suicide to escape from the tortures inflicted upon her. In his work *The History of Sexuality* (1976) observing the essential nature of resistance Foucault comments "resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities"(Foucault, 96). Hence Sofie too start resisting and questioning the authoritative commandments of the society after her sister's incident. She starts to resist the all controlling panopticon vision and resist to perform and resists from creating a sense of panopticism. In the end, similar to Will, Sofie gains self agency and independence when she accepts her magical gift and her identity of being a witch.

One another character who comes to the narrative in close association with Sofie is her maid Agnata. Agnata a first glance is a shallow person who lacks morals and originality in thinking, she mimics and follows Sofie's every action as commandments

and later betrays their group many times or accordingly to ensure her own safety. Though she can be dismissed as a mere untrustworthy nuisance, there's some truth in Agnata words when she claims she doesn't have a social standing or immunity the way others like Sofie have. As Marx notes in his legendary *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) "Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another"(Marx, 27). Taking evidence from Marx's statement, Agnata as a social inferior is hence doubly marginalized, by virtue of her body been marked as a medium of social norms. Thus, she's marginalized and discriminated both as a woman/girl and due to her class as a peasant/maid, hence the most socially vulnerable in the group. She does what it takes her to escape from the clutches of unjustified punishment as she has none of the diplomatic immunity her class superior friends have. Agnata later redeems herself when she helps Runa, Sofie and Will in countering the sea king's attack.

Nik or Niklas is one another character from the sequel, he's the grandson of Evie's Nik, he becomes the king when his brothers and father drown during a storm created shipwreck, he too would have drowned hadn't Alia rescued him. His sudden ascendancy into monarchy compels him into performing or living up to the vision of the society. Just like his grandfather he too becomes another helpless victim of panopticism inflicting by the modern power's panopticon view. As Butler remarks "The power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression"(Butler, 148), reflecting on the same, setting aside the reference of sexual oppression in Butler's framework the narrative does provides evidence of Niklas oppressed status. One of major factor substantiating this point is the fact that, the

narrative never really provides Niklas with a voice, the readers only learn about him always from the perspective of other characters. Thus, Niklas clearly is denied a self agency. Since he isn't provided with a voice of his own, he readily gets manipulated by other people's language and narrative.

Similarly, Niklas, till his untimely demise at the hands of Runa, is forced to dance to the tune of others or the expected to fulfill the social duties enforced upon him. Like Sofie, Niklas too doesn't seem very keen with the idea of his impending marriage. Like Runa and Sofie the readers might too judge Niklas harshly at the beginning cause the narrative makes it explicit that he's truly attracted to Alia yet goes onto marry Sofie for the wealth, power and connections associated with her family. Niklas supposed favouring of the construction and sell of deadly U-boats for the war efforts despite the kingdoms of Denmark been neutral, also makes him unpopular.

But later there are ample reasons to believe, he too was just another victim of social expectations, as a monarch he was supposed to ensure the economic wellbeing of his subjects. From Alia's and later Will's narratives it becomes apparent that the war efforts have led the kingdom almost to bankruptcy. A shore lined kingdom like Havnestad depended its economy mainly on fishing, due to the on-going war, sea mines etc. the fishing season was disrupted. That's when Sofie's father baron Gerhard comes to him with the proposal of seemingly lucrative business of building and selling U-boats to support the war efforts. Due to his age and inexperience, it becomes easy for a pro German supporter like Sofie's father to manipulate the naive and vulnerable king Niklas. Niklas sees it as a way out for the economic crisis in his kingdom and its citizens.

As Foucault notes "Panopticon will be able to judge at a glance"(Foucault,

Discipline and Punish 204), likewise fearing harsh judgment from the society and being inexperienced as ruler with huge responsibility Niklas easily falls for the manipulative panopticon vision of Gerhard. Thus, he decides to sacrifice his own personal interests and wishes, in favour of ensuring the economic security of his subjects. After his untimely death, the kingdom is left to chaos and as the readers observe the baron insensitively still goes onto ensure the sale of constructed U-boats. For him Niklas was just a means to his end, just like his treatment of his own daughter Sofie. In the beginning even Runa misunderstands Niklas, sees him as her enemy, it's only later through Alia she's made aware of the real constraints upon him.

The last character subjected to analysis from the sea witch series is the sea king who plays a major role in the series. Initially a minor character, he goes on to be the chief antagonist in the sequel. He in fact epitomizes the exploitative and brutal nature of modern power state which ruthlessly uses biopolitics to exploit the biopower of its citizens. For his society and kingdom, the sea king literally represents the panopticon vision, as Foucault wisely remarks contemplating on the range of such power "The Panopticon, and for analysing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained from them. The Panopticon may even provide an apparatus for supervising its own mechanisms." (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 204).

As deduced from Foucault's comments the sea king likewise decides the fate of those around him. For example the sea king is the initiator of creating the magic of transformation between humans and mermaids. Though his actions at the beginning that is the transformation of his first queen Mette and later Annemette can be seen as acts done due to good intention and kindness, he never realizes that by changing and

renaming them he's actually denying them of their past and their real identities. The mer family in fact never informs Annamette about her past due to the fear that she might just like the previous queen would have wanted to go back and be a human. Though the queen does return to the king eventually it's only cause by the time she too had fallen in love with the him. But unlike the queen Annemette never was given a real chance, instead the king along with his family kept her past her real identity, thus denying her actual identity. In the sequel, the sea king has turned into a monstrous egoist man ever hungry for power, he treats his daughters as mere trophies and pawns in his power play. As Evie comments - "He notoriously treats his daughters like pawns in a game, using their beauty and their talents when convenient"(Henning, *Sea Witch Rising* 6).

Alia's and Runa's loss effects him personally not because he's a grieving father longing for his estranged daughters to return, but because Alia and Runa held powers. Especially Runa, who was known for her talent of making the rikifjor flowers grow, the magical flowers, known for its powerful nectar, the serum helps the drinker to harness, gain and control more magical power. For him as Runa later realizes she's only a means of attaining more power. The sea king is also portrayed as a efficient manipulator, his subjects blindly trust his accusations (concept of modern power) about humans being responsible for Alia's death and the sea mine detonations.

He despises Evie and later murders his own mother because they dare to defy and question his command and authority. He especially hates Evie as her magic isn't something which he can ever possess as it's a mixture of both land and sea magic, thus not obtainable and controllable under him. Thus, he uses brute strength and blackmail by threatening to kill his own mother as a way to make Evie obey. In Foucault's words "In

the biopower system, in other words, killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race" (Foucault, *Society Defended* 256). Similarly for the sea king, all others are dispensable for his quest of power, be it his daughters or his citizens (biopolitics). He kills his own citizens and puts the blame on humans so that the remaining faction no matter the casualties will help him gain and destroy the remaining magic on land. In the end, his own lies and manipulation comes to bite on him, when his own family, his own daughters denounce him and take away and exposes the fake mask of benevolence he had put on so far. Thus he literally kills himself mostly due to magical poisoning as Evie, Alia, Runa and Ragn comments he consumes and hoards more than he could ever handle, he works against the nature, begins to think himself as the ultimate master, hence leading to his downfall and eventually destruction and death.

Conclusion

From the present study it becomes visibly evident how often individuals are compelled to make choices against their hearts, fearing the great panopticon vision perpetuated by the society. Subsequently fearing alienation as consequence of possible transgression against the societal norms, they start developing a sense of panopticism and become their own surveilling guards, thus leading a passive existence throughout their lives. The study examines a bunch of characters within the framework of body politics from the selected two retellings which forms part of a series involving the mermaid myth. The aim of the study was to verify whether the characters from the selected works subverts the traditional notions of gender/ body politics using their body as sites of resistance or else do they eventually align themselves accordingly under the influence of the original fairy tale myth.

Taking the analysis from chapter 2 into consideration, the inquiry does prove that unlike the characters present in the original mermaid myth, the prominent characters from the retellings does subvert the traditional norms involving body politics. These characters do use their bodies as sites of resistance and protest. Though Annemette represents the first archetypal figure of mermaid the readers encounter in the series, she is destroyed by her choices similar to the original myth of Anderson's tale. But her destruction was caused only due to her sense of revenge. Likewise, the character of Alia who resembles the archetypal mermaid to her core follows a similar trajectory. Though contrary to Annemette, Alia similar to the figure of the original mermaid myth, is peaceful with the judgement of her death. The analysis also sheds light into plight of characters from the elite circle who seems to be in fact much more entrapped and vulnerable under the

prejudicial gaze of the panopticon. Thus compelled to live out a passive existence with no real agency of their own as exemplified by the characters of Nik, his grandson Niklas, Alia and Runa's elder sisters etc. While some other elite characters from the text symbolically represents the hierarchical cruel power of the modern state, who consider it to be their bequest to exploit their social inferiors through biopower using bio-political means. Examples of such characters include the sea king, queen Charlotte, Iker etc.

The characters who truly embody the spirit of rebellion and protest using their body as a means is Evie and Runa. Evie initially despite knowing that the whole kingdom despises her for her association with prince Nik, continues to carry on with her bond of friendship with Nik as a sign of protest against the disapproving gazes of the society. Subsequently, even when she metamorphosis into the sea witch she doesn't allow the sea king to bully her into submission. She magically fights against him for her freedom, defeats him and ultimately in the end becomes the sea queen by citizens choice. Runa is initially presented as another victim of panopticism. Though she originally transforms from a mermaid into human for the sake of rescuing her sister, the experience essentially changes her. She begins to realize and resist against her social conditioning. In the end, by refusing to going back and confirm to her conventional role, Runa develops into an individual with her own agency and voice, thus choosing her own path into the destiny. Similar course of action can be observed in the cases of characters like Will, Sofie, Agnata.

Thus the study proves an individual's body can be a medium for both the forces. The body can be exploited by the powers of societal forces to deny a person self agency but at the same time a person can create and protest for self agency by the virtue of the

self-same body. Hence unlike the original mythical fairy tales which warned and instilled fear into the minds of its young readers against societal transgressions and its fatal consequences, these new retellings of the age-old myths present before the young minds a narrative which encourages them to dare and question the dominant narrative. Contrary to earlier narratives, with its aim to manufacture meek and submissive citizens, the new narrative successfully exposes and urges them to question each form of undercurrent power play. In fact, the production of the retellings of such age-old myths itself attests to the fact that people no longer meekly accept to play along the docile and submissive traditional roles expected of them. These forms of literature itself symbolically voices the raising protest and rebellion against the controlling power play of the societal machinery by the virtue of its subverted narrative.

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