

The Little Mermaid, Ponyo, and the Flowing Ethics of Care

Virginia Held and Nel Noddings theorize the ethics of care as a feminist principle. Mary Jeanette Moran has successfully applied their theories to children's literature to demonstrate how principles such as being the one-caring, being the one cared-for, self-care, and cooperative identity formation have feminist implications in children's literature.

This paper applies these theories to three variants of "The Little Mermaid": Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" (1837), Disney's film *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and Miyazaki's film *Ponyo* (2008). Although Acthas argued that Andersen's original tale is less sexist than Disney's rendition, *Ponyo* proves to be a specifically feminist text, especially when viewed through the lens of a feminist ethics of care. Ponyo and Sosuke are one-caring for each other; Sosuke's mother cares for them both; and Ponyo shifts her subjectivity through a cooperative model (rather than a competitive model of self vs. other). Moreover, the film's ecofeminist principles, articulated most clearly by Ponyo's parents, demonstrate how ecofeminism is also built on a premise of feminist ethics of care. Fujimoto, Ponyo's father, is particularly sensitive to the need for the earth's seas and oceans to remain balanced for the Earth itself to be balanced.

In conclusion, the overall argument examines the interplay among various feminist theories relying on Miyazaki's vast, oceanic film as an example.

Works cited

Held, Virginia. *The Ethics of Care*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2006.

Moran, Mary Jeanette. "Making a Difference: Ethical Recognition through Otherness in Madeleine L'Engle's Fiction." *Ethics and Children's Literature*. Ed. Claudia Mills. Ashgate, 2014. 75-88.

---. "The Mother Was the Mother, Even When She Wasn't: Maternal Care Ethics and Children's Fantasy." *Mothers in Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Eds. Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats. UP of Mississippi, 2016. 182-97.

---. "Use Your Head, Judy Girl': Relationships, Writing, and an Ethic of Care in the Judy Bolton Mysteries." *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 27.1 (2009): 22-32.

Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 2nd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia UP, 1985.

Trites, Roberta Seelinger. "Disney's Sub/Version of Andersen's *Little Mermaid*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 18.4 (1991): 145-52.