

# Of Tails and Tempests: Feminine Sexuality and Shakespearean Children's Texts

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## Abstract

This paper reads a range of nineteenth-century texts for children that retell either Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or mermaid narratives, considering the models of feminine subjectivity and sexuality that they construct. It then moves on to two key contemporary texts — Disney's film adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* (Clements and Musker 1989) and Penni Russon's *Undine* (2004) — that combine the Shakespearean heroine with the mermaid, and reads them against the nineteenth-century models. Ultimately, the essay determines that, while these texts seem to perform a progressive appropriation of the two traditions, they actually combine the most conservative aspects of both *The Tempest* and mermaid stories to produce authoritative (and dangerously persuasive) ideals of passive feminine sexuality that confine girls within patriarchally-dictated familial positions. The new figure for adolescent female subjectivity, the mermaid-Miranda, becomes in turn a model of identification and aspiration for the implied juvenile consumer.

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The literary domestication of Shakespeare for children emerged simultaneously with the literary domestication of the fairy tale for children in English during the early nineteenth century. The title of my paper intentionally calls up Janet Bottoms's work on prose retellings of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* for children (Bottoms 1996; 2000; 2004), but also invokes the "absent-present" signs of the two figures of femininity on which I focus: the tail and the tempest that represent metonymically the mermaid and "the" Miranda within these traditions. In fairy tales, as Jack Zipes argues, the protagonist "is either given a task or assumes a task" that is related to some "interdiction or prohibition. The protagonist is assigned a task, and the task is a sign. That is, his or her character will be marked by the task that is his or her sign" (Zipes 1988, 10). Functioning as signs of the characters as types, the tempest and the tail also mark the task of feminine development on the part of those characters: If mermaids have long represented the competition between sexuality and spirituality within the feminine, Mirandas have represented the competition between autonomy and familial obligation. My interest here is in how, during the

last two decades, these traditions have merged to produce a new "mermaid-Miranda" figure in children's texts that knowingly refer to the figure's double origin through intertextual gestures and in how these children's texts articulate the "mermaid-Miranda"'s adolescent femininity in terms of sexuality. When signs become tasks, the implied reader is embedded in a model of "reading" that conveys obligation; in such cases, intratextual sign-task models can readily become extratextual ideals of behavior to emulate. In this way, the mermaid-Miranda becomes a model for young girls.<sup>1</sup>

### The Mermaid-Miranda Figure

The ambiguities legible in both the mermaid- and Miranda-figures are potentially challenging to patriarchal culture in that the mermaid traditionally represents a model of autonomous and devouring feminine sexuality, and Miranda's use-value for social cohesion is only as great as her willingness to adhere to the roles of daughter and wife that are offered to her. As the nineteenth-century project of domesticating mermaids and Mirandas developed, they moved from signifying the task of a male protagonist's sexual/social development into being subjects themselves. However, in the move from the margins to the center — or from ocean to land — that ambiguity has been systematically erased, producing points of identification for the contemporary juvenile female reader that are emphatically chaste or asexual, except within the confines of heteronormative marriage. The contemporary mermaid-Miranda's "task" is to resolve her sexuality into either absence or regulated presence. By extension, the implied girl reader is socialized into a self-regulating identity that is subordinated to patriarchal models of sexuality, models that Shakespeare himself then seems to authorize. This normative function is in keeping with the didacticism endemic to children's literature as a genre:

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture's past (what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture's centrally important traditions), and aspirations about the present and future. (Stephens 1992, 3)<sup>2</sup>

My interest in how mermaid-Mirandas have been deployed in contemporary children's texts emerges from a larger project on Shakespeare for Children. While investigating a broad range of children's texts, I noticed particular similarities between Penni Russon's *Undine* (2004) and Disney's film adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* (Clements and Musker 1989). Whereas a range of children's texts deploy *The Tempest* in a conservative manner to authorize patriarchal discourses of

subjectivity, Disney and Russon alone conflate their Miranda character with the mermaid in order to do so.<sup>3</sup> My immediate questions are how and why these two models of feminine identity had merged and to what end the new mermaid-Miranda was being used.

The mermaid is, of course, a peculiarly ambiguous figure of the sexualized female body, signifying at once excess and containment. Emerging from a cultural history in which she emblemized fertility and seduction (and later prostitution), the mermaid is arguably a sanitized version of the monstrous feminine.<sup>4</sup> It was initially surprising to me that recent texts also deployed the mermaid, but as I looked backwards through the history of mermaid-Miranda texts for juvenile readers in search of a genealogy for Disney and Russon, I realized that they belonged to a long tradition in which a sexualized feminine subjectivity that could, if allowed to remain marginal, pose a serious challenge to patriarchal normativity is subsequently confined and sanitized. Given these contradictions, it is unsurprising that nineteenth-century writers began producing mermaids for children, especially girl readers, who themselves were made the sites of contradictory codings of sexuality and chastity, knowledge and innocence, the future virginal-maternal.

The domestication of Miranda follows a comparable logical trajectory, for if Prospero was the nineteenth century's "ideally wise and protective father" (Bottoms 2004, 10), Miranda became the nineteenth century's ideally chaste, but potentially sexual daughter. The storm that gives the play its name is, like the mermaid's tail, both present and absent: it has a seeming reality, yet can have no effect beyond Prospero's intention. So too, must the sexuality of Miranda (and the adolescent girl) be present, but inactive outside socio-familial structures. The play-text itself circulates Miranda's sexuality (or lack thereof) as a category of value: Caliban's alleged attempted rape is the "reason" for his treatment, and Ferdinand's early question to Miranda — "if [she] be maid or no" (Shakespeare 1999, 1.2.428) — connects to his later conditional proposal of marriage:

... O, if a virgin,  
And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you  
The Queen of Naples. (Shakespeare 1999, 1.2.448-50)

Similarly, the extended discussion between Prospero and Ferdinand about the importance of maintaining Miranda's virginity until marriage in Act 4, scene 1 — a discussion that takes place while Miranda stands present but silent — demonstrates a sustained interest in Miranda's sexual status.

A feminist critique of this aspect of the play leads, perhaps inevitably, to a view of Miranda as an object of exchange or token of value, Prospero's "gift and [Ferdinand's] own acquisition / Worthily purchased" (Shakespeare 1999, 4.1.13-14): Miranda's subjectivity and

agency are subordinated to her sexual status. Jyotsna Singh points out that although "Miranda has a position of colonial superiority over Caliban, she nonetheless has a marginal role within a kinship system in which all three males are bonded through their competing claims on her" (Singh 2003, 213). The issue has also been conflated with questions of familial-political identity: "Miranda, the Anglo-European daughter, offers us a feminine trope of colonialism, for her lack of selfhood in *The Tempest* exposes the subjection of daughters to their biological or cultural Fathers before they come of age" (Zabus 2002, 105). I certainly believe that *The Tempest* can be read as a narrative of the female child's emergence into the adult world, a separation from parental dominance that is crucially constructed as an entry into matrimonial bliss or as a passage from one masculine authoritative gaze to another. (A reasonably common argument against this reading is that Miranda acts against her father's wishes in speaking to, and assisting, Ferdinand during the wood-carrying scene [Shakespeare 1999, 1.3], but I would note that the interaction is anticipated, approved of, and observed by Prospero, thereby limiting our sense of Miranda's rebelliousness. Further, while Miranda's independent speech appears to signal autonomy, she also engages in self-censorship.) It is hardly surprising, then, that Ann Thompson asks, "What kind of pleasure can a woman and a feminist take in this text beyond the rather grim one of mapping its various patterns of exploitation? Must a feminist reading necessarily be a negative one?" (Thompson 1998, 242).

"Positive feminist" interventions into this debate have depended heavily on constructing Miranda as a specifically adolescent feminine subject. Jessica Slights, for instance, argues that Miranda "is presented as an imaginative and headstrong young woman who shows no signs of acquiescing unthinkingly to her father's wishes" (Slights 2001, 367), and Sharon Hamilton offers a similarly romanticized (and infantilized) view of Miranda:

*The Tempest* is Miranda's coming of age ritual. It begins with the revelation of her true identity and ends with her betrothal. . . . Prospero is one of the earliest examples in literature of father as single parent. He protects Miranda, both from knowledge that would make her unhappy and from physical and emotional danger. He lavishes affection on her [and] respects her individuality. (Hamilton 2003, 24)

Emphasizing Miranda's status as an adolescent daughter, these critics accept one of the foundational assumptions of children's literature: that adolescents, even as they appear to embody resistance, can (and indeed should) be molded by adult authority figures. If the only positive feminist critical response to *The Tempest* depends on conflating the feminine and the juvenile, as I am suggesting, creative performances of this conflation in fact undermine a feminist project by subordinating their Miranda to Prospero's "natural" authority. Children's texts that characterize Miranda as

"daughterly" demonstrate the extent to which this filial model applies as well beyond the texts' boundaries: as Miranda is to Prospero, so the young female reader is (or should be) to Shakespeare. This is certainly true in the case of early adaptations of *The Tempest* for young girls.

### *The Tempest For Girls*

"Shakespeare for Children" in English essentially began in 1807, with the publication of Henrietta Maria Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* and Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. The latter is of interest here because the Lambs, rather than edit the play-texts, sought to retell in short prose pieces the "story" of twenty Shakespeare plays. The *Tales'* introduction famously identified their intended audience as "young ladies" (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 17), and the advertisement for the second edition (1809) noted that their style was "not so precisely adapted for the amusement of mere children, as for an acceptable and improving present to young ladies advancing to the state of womanhood" (cited in Bottoms 2000, 15).

As does the First Folio (1623), the Lambs open their collection with *The Tempest*. Bottoms notes that "Mary Lamb presents a paternalist Prospero whose power is used for benevolent ends . . . [and] it is clearly Prospero's perspective that is privileged by the narrator, silencing the views of both Ariel and Caliban on their enforced servitude" (Bottoms 1996, 82-83). Crucially, although Bottoms has argued elsewhere that the Lambs "focussed their stories on the women whenever possible" (Bottoms 2004, 4), Miranda remains absent, however, from both her first argument and the opening of the Lamb text. I agree with Bottoms that "nor should we forget [that] Miranda, also, may have a point of view to be discovered in her words and her silences" (Bottoms 2000, 23), but merely noting this does not ameliorate a lack of discussing her suppression. An 1878 editor of the *Tales*, Alfred Ainger, noted (perhaps unconsciously) the suppression of Miranda's voice when he praised this version for its treatment of:

the long and intricate narrative of Prospero in the first act — broken by grief and anger, sentences begun and left unfinished as recollection after recollection wells up and overflows its predecessor — [that] is shortened and resolved into a harmony more intelligible to a child, so that the original, when it comes to be read, will be freed of most of its difficulties. (Ainger 1878, par. 6)

Such "shortening" and "resolving" depends on the elimination of Prospero's checks on Miranda as audience and renders Prospero's subjective narrative as objective narration, immediately lending it authority for the reader (see also Wolfson 1990, 28-29). The "difficulties" from which the text

is freed presumably include Miranda's sexuality as the following quotation suggests through its tone and narrative strategy:

This Caliban, Prospero found him in the woods, a strange misshapen thing, far less human in form than ape; he took him home to his cell, and taught him to speak; and Prospero would have been very kind to him, but the bad nature which Caliban inherited from his mother Sycorax, would not let him learn anything good or useful: therefore he was employed like a slave. (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 19)

This passage usefully demonstrates the effect of rendering subjective speech as objective prose, thereby naturalizing its discourse of slavery, but also erasing Caliban as a sexualized being. While this section of Lamb's story clearly takes its content from *The Tempest*, 1.2.320-75, the passage eliminates all tangible evidence of Caliban's "bad nature," specifically his attempted rape of Miranda. Not only is Miranda's sexuality coded as valuable because of its passivity, but there is no active model of sexuality (for either gender) present in the play. Instead, as Jean Marsden notes, "the [Lamb] tale becomes the story of Miranda and Ferdinand's developing love" (Marsden 1989, 53).

Indeed, the Lamb version of *The Tempest* constructs the romance between Miranda and Ferdinand as a "love-at-first-sight" experience that is legibly sexual, but simultaneously suppresses the play's dialogue about Miranda's maidenhood (as virginity) and emphasizes instead the language of divinity:

Miranda, who thought all men had grave faces and grey beards like her father, was delighted with the appearance of this beautiful young prince; and Ferdinand, seeing such a lovely lady in this desert place, and from the strange sounds he had heard expecting nothing but wonders, thought he was upon an enchanted island, and that Miranda was the goddess of the place, and as such he began to address her.

She timidly answered, she was no goddess, but a simple maid, and was going to give him an account of herself, when Prospero interrupted her. (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 23)

Once again, the Lamb text replaces subjective speech with seemingly objective narration, but further, this passage prepares the reader for Miranda's plea to her father on behalf of Ferdinand: "This is the second man I ever saw, and to me he seems a true one" (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 23). This statement clearly contradicts Miranda's line in the play-text, which states, "This / Is the third man that e'er I saw, the first / That e'er I sighed for" (Shakespeare 1999, 1.2.445-47). The erasure of sexuality is obvious, but the change also erases Caliban's status as a "man" in Miranda's eyes

(in keeping with the erasure of Caliban's attempted rape), even as Prospero retains his chiding rejoinder: "You think there are no more such fine men, having seen only him and Caliban" (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 23). Prospero, as a good father, presumably is not only able, but also entitled, to recognize Caliban as a sexual threat to Miranda, even if the child reader cannot or should not.

Condensation of plot, which contributes to the "fairy tale" aspect of Lamb's retelling, may have been invited by the play itself, if Loughrey and Taylor are correct in their suggestion that *The Tempest's* "characters, [who] though never losing individuality, tend towards the simplified archetypes of romance — the pure young virgin, Miranda; her Prince Charming, Ferdinand" (Loughrey and Taylor 1982, 116). This slippage between romance and fairy tale may explain not only the register of Lamb's narration, but also a tendency throughout the nineteenth century to envision Miranda as "simple, apt to wonder, guileless, and because guileless, of easy belief, compassionate and tender" (Richardson 1797, 346) — in other words, as the ideal daughter. In the Lamb version, Miranda seems little more than the embodied marker of a détente between Milan and Naples.

In neither Shakespeare's play nor the Lamb adaptation is the marriage or romance plot an end in itself. The political expediency of the marriage is emphasized by the discovery of "Ferdinand and Miranda, playing at chess" (Shakespeare 1999, stage direction at 5.1.171). I would suggest that given the context of "queen's chess" in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Miranda's sacrifice of authority or agency on the chessboard resonates with sexual as well as national politics. Marilyn Yalom notes that "'Queen's chess' spread from Spain to other parts of the continent, where it was not always greeted enthusiastically. During the last years of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth, reactions to the chess queen's new power ranged from positive acceptance to frank hostility" (Yalom 2004, 214). The tableau in Shakespeare can arguably be seen as invoking this context, but also portrays Miranda as voluntarily refusing to appropriate the queen's symbolic power.

William Poole notes that while it would be "excessive" to "suspect that the wager here can only be Miranda's virginity, the dialogue does have sexual overtones that are also present in the [literary chess] tradition" (Poole 2004, 66). If the chess match symbolically marks Miranda's sexuality, Lamb effects a permanent suspension of that sexuality, so that "Ferdinand play[s] at chess with Miranda" (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 26). Nothing more of the chess match is presented, however, and Miranda neither does nor says anything further in the tale.

In the prose *Tempest*, Lamb produces a reader-identification that is aspirational: the implied pre-adolescent female reader is encouraged to look forward to becoming the kind of late-adolescent woman who will please her father and marry well. The implied reader is thus encouraged to "look

at" Miranda in anticipation of emulating her actions and identity. That sexual maturity, which is reified in the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* as matrimony, involves the regulation of both body and voice and so provides an ideological link between Shakespeare and the construction of feminine sexuality in mermaid texts for children during the same century. The naturalizing of a young woman's development as movement through patriarchally endorsed and defined roles (daughter to wife) may be facilitated in these texts by the absence of any alternative discourse to patriarchy. There are no mothers or maternal figures here, with the exception of the marginal and invisible Sycorax. I make this point because nineteenth-century mermaid texts and contemporary *Tempests* actively produce maternal figures within their patriarchal models.

Given the increasing popularity of literary fairy tales for children in the nineteenth century, it is unsurprising that Edith Nesbit, in her *Children's Shakespeare* (1897), later published in expanded form as *Twenty Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare*, combines the story of *The Tempest* with the register of the fairy-tale genre, replete with a framing narrative of a female storytelling adult (Nesbit 1907). The collection's preface represents "modern" girls as asking to be told about Shakespeare's stories, constructing a willing audience with whom the implied reader can identify. But this paratextual construction of active girls' voices is undermined by the production of feminine voices within the text itself. If the reader's proxy is allowed to ask for information, Nesbit's Miranda has only one line of direct speech, in which, significantly, she affirms her attraction to Ferdinand:

For Miranda, who had never, since she could remember, seen any human being save her father, looked on the youthful prince with reverence in her eyes, and love in her secret heart.

"I might call him," she said, "a thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble!" (Nesbit 1907, 38)

This scenario extends the Lamb model, for not only does Nesbit's Miranda fail to see Caliban as a man, but she also cannot remember the "four or five women once, that tended" her, according to Shakespeare's Miranda (Shakespeare 1999, 1.2.47). The privileging of "love" at the expense of agency or autonomy — or indeed sexuality — completes the process by which the dense Shakespearean text is transformed into a hetero-normative romance plot. The subordination of self to a "holy" version of love constructs Miranda as a willing participant in the familial plot that has since been critiqued by modern feminist critics of Shakespeare's play.

It is important for my purposes that Nesbit combines the genres of the fairy tale and "Shakespeare for Children," because I believe that it contributes directly to the twentieth-century's conflation of the mermaid and the Miranda. The nineteenth-century names which are immediately



suggested by the fairy-tale genre are Hans Christian Andersen, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Andrew Lang, Joseph Jacobs, and Oscar Wilde. With the exception of the Grimms, all these writers produced mermaid texts, although here I will consider only two of the most influential mermaid stories of the nineteenth century: Friedrich Heinrich Karl Fouqué's *Undine* (Fouqué 1932) and Andersen's "The Little Sea Maid" (Andersen 2002). These texts offer a model of mermaid-identity that parallels the trajectory of Miranda narratives, as outlined above.

### Mermaids And Undines

As a sub-species of the mythological mermaid, Undines are "a scaled-down descendant of . . . powerful water deities, a being midway between the supernatural and the human, and midway again between the human and the animal" (Easterlin 2001, 258). The Undines' liminality, however, is signalled not by their physical bodies (they lack the tail of a fish), but rather by their unfamiliar spirituality and ability to communicate with and through bodies of water. Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de La Motte Fouqué's *Undine*, first published in German in 1811, was translated into English shortly thereafter. It is not specifically addressed to a juvenile audience, but makes a significant contribution to the tradition in which water sprites fall in love with men, become mortal, gain a soul, and then are betrayed. Combining this narrative with the traditions of German Romanticism, Fouqué established a template for nineteenth-century creators of mermaids. In an echo of *The Tempest*, the knight Huldbrand — having arrived at the home of a fisherman and his wife in a forest by supernatural means — felt himself isolated on an "islet" (Fouqué 1932, 28) and "had the illusion that no world existed on the other side of the encircling torrent, and that it was quite vain to imagine that he should ever mix any more with his fellow men" (Fouqué 1932, 29). Huldbrand, who exhibits elements of Shakespeare's Ferdinand, soon becomes enamored of Undine, the only young girl on the island. I do not mean here to imply that Fouqué is producing a version of *The Tempest*, but his tale seems to suggest that once a writer places a family on an isolated island, the narrative forms of Shakespeare's play are readily available for comparison or intertextual reference. What Fouqué does contribute to the narrative traditions I am examining is the domestication of the mermaid. Indeed, his story thematizes the attempt to domesticate a water-spirit; that the attempt fails may have influenced Andersen's construction of a self-domesticating mermaid.

Undine is no Miranda, however, but a changeling who believes that "[t]o have a soul must be a delightful thing" (Fouqué 1932, 40). In Undine's descriptions of her race and her quest, elements that later are manifested in Andersen's tale are legible:

We and those who resemble us in the other elements . . . no souls have we: it is the element [water] that moves us, often, so long as we live, obeys us, when we die, turns us to dust . . .

Yet all creatures desire to rise to higher things. So my father, who is a mighty prince of waters in the Mediterranean Sea, desired that his daughter should in measure possess a soul . . . But one of us can only win a soul by the most intimate union in love with one of your race. (Fouqué 1932, 47)

Although Undine and Huldbrand marry, he cannot endure life with a "supernatural" woman and eventually betrays her with Bertalda. Undine dies of grief, but on the eve of her husband's second wedding, returns to the castle as a "soaring stream [that] took the shape of a pale woman veiled in white" (Fouqué 1932, 98).

As the wronged bride, Undine enters Huldbrand's chamber:

Quivering with love and the approach of death, the knight bowed to meet her, she kissed him with a heavenly kiss, but she released him not, she pressed him ever closer and closer to her, and wept as if she would weep away her soul. The tears flooded the eyes of the knight, and in a sweet agony of woe they so whelmed his bosom that at length they bore his breath away, and he sank back a corpse out of those lovely arms on to the cushions of the bed of rest. (Fouqué 1932, 100-101)

This symbolic shift in the "function" of the knight's bed from bridal (sexual) experience to death/rest (spiritual) experience reflects the story's broader trajectory from the material to the spiritual. For the majority of the text, any model of sexualized subjectivity is constructed for the reader via Huldbrand's gaze, as he is the primary focalizer. This makes Undine the subject of Huldbrand's quest, but the object of the narrative; her greatest moment of agency, which is cited above, emerges at the point of the narrative's shift from sexuality to spirituality.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally I believe that Fouqué's tale lacks the aspirational identification present in the Lambs' *Tempest*, primarily because its implied reader is not necessarily juvenile; Undine nevertheless represents the "necessary" feminine sacrifice that will become crucial in later nineteenth-century mermaid texts and in more recent mermaid-Miranda texts.

Perhaps the best-known mermaid text for children, Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Sea-Maid," was first published in 1835 (Andersen 2002). Although Andersen is commonly discussed as an inventor rather than a transcriber of fairy tales, his mermaid text clearly was influenced by Fouqué. The story of Andersen's little mermaid opposes the physical and sexual realms to the spiritual, obviously privileging the latter. Andersen's undersea world is a matriarchy, for although the heroine has a father who "had been a widower for many years" (Andersen 2002, 61), it is the father's mother who educates the little mermaid and her five older sisters. After visiting the surface

as part of a coming-of-age ritual that all mermaids experience at age fifteen, the mermaid falls in love with a human prince. After the grandmother has explained to her the metaphysics of mermaid existence, the sea-maid's love for the prince (and by extension, a love of the human world) produces in her a desire for an immortal soul. The story is governed by a symbolic opposition between the feminine/material and the masculine/spiritual: as the grandmother says, mermaids

"have not an immortal soul; we never receive another life; we are like the green seaweed, which when once cut through can never bloom again. Men, on the contrary have a soul which lives for ever, which lives on after the body has become dust: it mounts up through the clear air, up to all the shining stars!"

. . .

"Then I am to die and be cast as foam upon the sea, not hearing the music of the waves, nor seeing the pretty flowers and the red sun? Can I not do anything to win an immortal soul?"

"No!" answered the grandmother. "Only if a man were to love you so that you should be more to him than father or mother; if he should cling to you with his every thought, and with all his love, and let the priest lay his right hand in yours with a promise of faithfulness here and in all eternity, then his soul would be imparted to your body, and you would receive a share of the happiness of mankind. He would give a soul to you, and yet retain his own". (Andersen 2002, 69-70)

The mermaid's desire for an immortal soul dominates critical responses to the tale, which efface the sexual desire that is also present in her experiences. Ian Small is representative in his reading of Andersen's "moral intention": to "describe the corrupting influence of the material world and sexual desire and the ultimate triumph of the power of selfless spiritual love whose reward is immortality" (Small 1994, xx-xxi). Such readings separate the mermaid from the physical, the material, and the sexual; that such readings also tend to "approve" of the separation they construct demonstrates clearly a continuing anxiety about the presence of sexuality in narratives intended for children. This mermaid's journey to immortality, however, begins with a physical metamorphosis that is linked to her sexuality. The sea-witch (whom the mermaid visits voluntarily) tells her, "your tail will shrivel up, and become what the people of the earth call legs, but it will hurt you — it will seem as if you were cut with a sharp sword . . . every step you take will be as if you trod upon sharp knives, and as if your blood must flow" (Andersen 2002, 72). This painful change which, as Roberta Trites notes, "prepares the girl for menarche, while the image of knife-like pain warns

the girl about the potentially hymen-breaking phallus" (Trites 1991, 148), is an obvious metaphor for sexual development that is never "consummated" by the text. Andersen's mermaid is, in the tradition of the figure, simultaneously sexual and sexless, moral and immoral, body and spirit, while occupying wholly none of these categories.

The mermaid pays for the draught the witch gives her with her voice, here represented by her tongue, which the witch cuts out; this symbolic castration (removal of sexuality) is dismissed by the witch as potentially ameliorated by physical presence:

"But if you take away my voice," said the little sea-maid, "what will remain to me?"

"Your beautiful form," replied the witch, "your graceful walk and your speaking eyes; with those you can take captive a human heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Put out your little tongue, and then I will cut it off by way of payment, and you shall have the strong draught." (Andersen 2002, 73)

Famously, Andersen's mermaid does not "get her man," although she is allowed to sleep on a velvet cushion outside his door for a long time. After he marries, she refuses to kill him in order to reverse the spell. Instead, the mermaid is transformed into an air spirit and must perform three hundred years of good deeds to earn an immortal soul. The final paragraph outlines the "moral" of the tale for the implied child reader:

Invisible we float into the houses of men where children are; and for every day on which we find a good child that brings joy to its parents and deserves their love, our time of probation is shortened. The child does not know when we fly through the room; and when we smile with joy at the child's conduct, a year is counted off from the three hundred; but when we see a naughty or a wicked child, we shed tears of grief; and for every tear a day is added to our time of trial. (Andersen 2002, 80)

As Jack Zipes notes, Andersen's tales tend to reveal that "real power . . . resides in the social organization of relations affirming bourgeois hegemony of a patriarchal nature" (Zipes 1999, 105), and here, the child reader is made complicit in the maintenance of that hegemony.

Nineteenth-century Mirandas thus offer ideal daughterly identities and model a relationship of subordination to paternal figures (Prospero and Shakespeare), while nineteenth-century mermaids demonstrate the dangers of unregulated sexuality and the necessity of self-sacrifice. In either case, the implied juvenile feminine consumer is encouraged — by identification or instruction — to regulate both her body and voice.

### Body And Voice in *The Little Mermaid*

The domestication and sanitization of the mermaid-Miranda for a child audience intersect powerfully in the Disney Corporation's film adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* (Clements and Musker 1989). Overtly an adaptation of the Andersen tale, Disney's film recasts the story as "a father-daughter Oedipal tale" (White 1993, 192) that is informed intertextually by *The Tempest* to produce a text that has attracted much attention from critics of children's literature. Central to critical response is the issue of fidelity to Andersen's tale, particularly in terms of the film's "happy ending." The "moral simplification" in Disney's film, about which A. Waller Hastings complains (Hastings 1993) is, arguably, facilitated by the *The Tempest*. Hastings argues that the film "accentuates the most sentimental and romantic aspects of the story" (Hastings 1993, 85); that "order is restored through the discovery that the parent's and child's wishes are the same" (88); and that the film makes "a shift from a predominantly matriarchal world in Andersen's tale to a strong patriarchy" (88). It is precisely these elements of hetero-normative romance, feminine subordination to patriarchal structures, and a sustained affirmation of paternal figures that Disney appropriates from Shakespeare. Thus, Disney combines the opening of Andersen with the closing of Shakespeare, drawing on the cultural capital of both authors while simultaneously erasing from their texts those elements that challenge dominant notions of gendered childhood. The mermaid who refuses to kill and the Miranda who acts against her father (in the most generous reading of the play) are effaced in favor of a mermaid who gets married and a Miranda whose rebellion is really a form of commodity consumption. In doing so, the film joins a culturally powerful genealogy of fairy-tale films that is bolstered by Disney's claim to represent "classic," "timeless," and "universal" themes.

At the beginning of *The Little Mermaid*, the patriarchal order, signified by the lyric "Ah, we are the daughters of Triton / Great father who loves us and named us well" (Clements and Musker 1989), establishes Triton as the Prospero of this world. His daughter Ariel (whose name invokes the enslaved spirit of Shakespeare's play and who is renowned for her singing voice), embodies many of the film's tensions, as Richard Finkelstein notes: "The corporate Ariel conflates Miranda and Shakespeare's spirit in her innocence, her announced desire for knowledge, and of course, her position with regard to her father" (Finkelstein 2003, 136). Ariel falls in love with a human, and when her father refuses to acknowledge her feelings, she travels to see this film's incarnation of Sycorax — Ursula, the witch who originally ruled the ocean until ousted by Triton. In her history and machinations, Ursula combines the figures of Caliban and Sycorax. Ariel, furthermore, is every

inch the nineteenth-century Miranda, the favored daughter of a powerful father, until her lust for belongings becomes lust for humanity.

The link between voice and sexuality, which in Andersen's tale is represented by the mermaid's tongue, is also present in the Disney film, although due to the "requirements" of Disney politics, their mermaid must achieve a romantic happy ending. Thus, the codings of sexuality become more complex. Just as Miranda's sexuality in *The Tempest* must be present but passive, so must Ariel's voice be present but controlled. The film's opening musical number, which revolves around Ariel's singing debut (much like a formal debutante ball), identifies the public performance as a display of passive sexuality, but also marks Ariel's unwillingness to "sing for her supper." She is absent from the performance, thus raising her father's anger. Later in the film, during the musical set-piece "Under the Sea," Ariel also fails to display passive obedience. The music builds into a crescendo, and the many undersea creatures who have been performing choreograph a climax to be sung by Ariel; but as they all point towards her space, she has disappeared.

Shortly after the first performance, as Ariel enjoys playing truant, she rescues Prince Eric from a shipwreck. As she sings to him, he is attracted to her voice; in this way, the film fulfils its understanding of voice as display of available sexuality. It would be a mistake, however, to read this as a trajectory of autonomy or independence, for the film ultimately reveals that Ariel must retain her voice and sexuality within a patriarchal model of personal relations. Thus, I agree with (even as I am concerned by) the claim that Ariel:

can perhaps be understood as a fantasy sexual self for young girls, a figure through which the relation between the self as experienced in the present, with the body of a small child, to the self as imagined and projected into the future, with the sexual body of a woman, can be played at, perhaps rehearsed, perhaps learned. (Richards 1995, 146)

If Ariel does function as a future "fantasy sexual self" for the girl viewer, then within this fantasy there is room only for the self-regulating female. In *The Little Mermaid*, aberrant or excessive feminine sexuality (uncontrolled feminine voice) must be exorcised (from both the film and fantasizing self) in order to achieve a happy ending.

Ariel, I would suggest, is more conservative than any of the Mirandas or mermaids produced in the nineteenth century because in their combination, these discourses are stripped of any potential for resistance, challenge, ambivalence, or — even more important for my purposes — independent feminine sexuality, experience, or knowledge. Just as the sexuality of Andersen's tale was located in the marginal space of the witch, Disney locates its version of feminine sexuality in

Ursula's cavern. But while Andersen's mermaid experiences asexuality in pursuit of a soul, Disney's mermaid gambles her soul in pursuit of sexuality.

Andersen's "wise woman" is neither evil nor absent; Shakespeare's Sycorax is famously the absent evil. In seeming to negotiate between these texts and produce a present evil, Disney in fact contradictorily produces a figure so excessive that there is no possibility of sustained challenge to the patriarchal model of femininity. Ursula's vocal set-piece is the unashamedly burlesque "Poor Unfortunate Souls," during the performance of which she revels in her obese body, enormous hips, belly, and breasts and makes herself up in the style of a drag queen. Julian Stringer provides the most succinct account of Ursula:

Ursula is a great villainess, in the tradition of Malificent and Cruella de Vil, although, given Disney's attitude towards women, it's no surprise that she's presented throughout as a grotesque parody of female sexuality. Or that she should finally be phallically speared so Ariel can be recovered by King Triton before being passed on to Prince Eric.

Still . . . she hints at truths about the body and sexuality, the kind of knowledge that Disney perennially seeks to disguise or ignore. (Stringer 1990, 299)

In this scene, Ursula tempts Ariel to sacrifice her voice (rather than her tongue) in exchange for a three-day period of humanity, during which she will be able to attract Eric. The mise-en-scène of this number visually evokes shrivelled phalluses and images of the devouring womb, particularly as Ariel approaches Ursula's home.

Although Disney overloads the screen with explicit and implicit images of the monstrous feminine and of dangerous maternity, the scene has actually provoked a positive reading from a feminist critic:

In Ursula's drag scene, Ariel learns that gender is performance; Ursula doesn't simply symbolize woman, she performs woman. Ursula uses a camp drag queen performance to teach Ariel to use makeup . . . Ariel learns gender, not as a natural category, but as a performed construct . . . Just as Ursula's drag performance destabilizes and deconstructs gender, her excessive figure provides the site upon which we can construct the image of the mermaid. (Sells 1995, 184-84)

Sells's optimistic reading, however, fails to take into account the film's conclusion. That Ursula self-consciously "performs" her gendered and sexual identity becomes one of the many signs of demonization that the film itself "performs." (*A film clip is available in the HTML version of this*

*document.*) While I am concerned, however, by Sells's ready conflation of "performance" and the category of the "performative" (an issue that plagues studies in children's literature), I absolutely agree that Ursula's body provides a site for reconstructing the figure of the mermaid. Indeed, the film projects all the mythical connotations of devouring sexuality, of threat to patriarchal order, onto Ursula in order to exorcise these qualities — along with Ursula herself — in the film's penultimate scene. Similarly, the film's plot fundamentally affirms Ursula's claim that:

... on land it's much preferred  
 For ladies not to say a word  
 And after all, dear, what is idle prattle for?  
 Come on, they're not all that impressed with conversation  
 True gentlemen avoid it when they can  
 But they dote and swoon and fawn  
 On a lady who's withdrawn  
 It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man. (Clements and Musker 1989)

(*A sound clip is available in the HTML version of this document.*) Ursula's "oral rape" (Richards 1995, 145) of Ariel, while apparently sanitizing the tongue-removal of Andersen's tale, actually displaces that version's sexuality from the body onto Ariel's voice. This transfer of sexuality from one location to another is emphasized by the film's later use of the voice in the shell when Ursula disguises herself as Vanessa and like a siren, seduces Eric with Ariel's voice, tempting him to his destruction. When Ariel regains her voice, it is to affirm her subordination to a hetero-normative happy ending within marriage to Eric. Just as in the Lamb text, where for Prospero "nothing now remained to complete his happiness but to revisit his native land, to take possession of his dukedom, and to witness the happy nuptials of his daughter and Prince Ferdinand" (Lamb and Lamb 1953, 28), nothing remains for King Triton to worry about beyond "how much I'm going to miss her" (Clements and Musker 1989). Indeed, he gives Ariel human legs to signal his approval of the marriage with which the film closes. Ariel's final line, which is quickly followed by her matrimonial kiss with Eric, is "I love you, Daddy" (Clements and Musker 1989). (*A sound clip is available in the HTML version of this document.*) It may be argued that Ariel is sexually assertive here, but I am convinced that this kiss is ultimately a gesture of self-regulated sexuality, rather than an expression of agency.<sup>6</sup> As the film ends, a chorus of voices performs the refrain from Ariel's song of desire, "Part of Your World," as she literally cannot sing while engaged in a kiss. Thus, the film musically performs the acceptable integration of Ariel's early rebellion into a patriarchy-friendly marriage.



The foregrounding of Ursula as the performative, excessive, sexualized feminine ultimately discredits these categories as viable for the juvenile feminine reader or viewer. Conversely, Ariel is established as lacking these qualities and so is presented as an idealized figure with whom the viewer can identify. The implied viewer is therefore inculcated as an aspirational consumer of two authoritative cultural traditions — the fairy tale and Shakespeare — even as those traditions are sanitized, desexualized, and made subordinate to the ultimate neo-cultural authority: Disney. Rather than circulating as an "emptied classic text" (Willis 1987, cf. 85-86), Shakespeare is called up by Disney's *The Little Mermaid* as the ultimate paternal authority, used in turn to authorize Disney's own preferred model of paternalism.

### The Enchantment of Shakespeare In Russon's *Undine*

Where Disney's *The Little Mermaid* constructs as its primary narrative Andersen's fairy tale, and interpolates Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Russon's *Undine* (2004) takes as its primary intertext *The Tempest*, into which it then interpolates the mermaid tradition. Undine is a sixteen-year old girl living in Tasmania, Australia with her single mother, Lou, and infant brother Jasper. She suddenly finds herself having strange dreams and able to perform "magic"; her quest is to reconcile her new powers with her existing interpersonal relationships. The novel recounts an adolescent's coming-of-age within a single-parent family through a fantastic discourse of "magic," connected with water and sexuality, that it inherits from the mermaid narratives.

Indeed, it may be that the figure of the mermaid offers a necessary model of supernaturally powerful femininity to combine with the Shakespearean referents because the obvious point of identification for such power in the play itself is Sycorax. Within children's literature, the witch-figure tends to be a negative model; when sexualized or maternalized (or both, as with Ursula) she is certainly not to be aspired to by the adolescent female. *Undine* gestures towards a critique of the traditions on which it draws even as it rewrites them, but despite the novel's suggestion that female autonomy is to be achieved despite the father rather than through the father, *Undine* nevertheless produces problematic codings of feminine sexuality and knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Undine is aware of herself as an "intertextual subject" in that she feels "like Rapunzel or Juliet, or some other fated and mysterious woman" (Russon 2004, 9), but this knowledge is not self-reflexive, despite the fact it calls up the fairy tale and Shakespearean traditions I am discussing here. As a "reader," both of self and others, Undine tends to be passive. In terms of the novel's use of Shakespeare (and indeed the narrative tradition of the "Undine"), Undine remains either unknowing or uninterested. While the text produces a positive model of feminine development that includes agency and autonomy, it does so separately from the very cultural capital it uses to add

weight to that narrative. In short, *The Tempest* is used to structure the plot and deepen the characters, but Undine herself remains oblivious to this transformation. It is indicative of the novel's mode of appropriation that Undine knows the etymological genealogy of her name, but is not aware of the literary-mythological genealogy behind it that is familiar to her male friend Trout:

Her own name was a sea name. The book Lou had bought to choose a name for Jasper, when he was still a restless lump inside her, said Undine was Latin, meaning "of the waves," but Trout had told her Undine was a sea nymph in old mythology. In fact, it was one of the reasons she and Trout had become friends. (Russon 2004, 45)

Both Fouqué's and Russon's Undines actually experience sexual development, rendering the "legs" metaphor of the mermaid figure unnecessary in their cases. However, this very sexuality marks them as unintentionally dangerous to men, reinforcing a devouring model of feminine sexuality, beyond the control of the female subject. The opening sections of Russon's novel include Undine's ignorance of herself as a sexual subject, as opposed to the visual consumption of her body by Undine's male peers. The following description is from Trout's perspective:

Trout did notice Undine's legs, and a lot more besides . . . Funnily enough, no one ever really asked her out. She was possibly too sexy for the average ego of a teenage boy. She was also too smart for most high school boys, and despite their big talk he knew most of the boys were a little afraid of her. (Russon 2004, 11-12)

Trout's unrequited sexual interest may mark him, at least temporarily, as a Caliban figure. His fishy name would certainly lend support to such a claim. If so, Trout's Shakespearean competence may contribute to his self-regulation of sexual interest in Undine: knowing Caliban's fate when marked as unwanted sexual aggressor could serve a cautionary function. Undine's entrance into a new phase of sexual development is marked — in good fairy-tale fashion — by the spilling of blood, which "pooled from a cut on her hand onto the benchtop" (Russon 2004, 26). This wound, which is caused by broken glass, becomes a site of rupture on Undine's body that marks her connection to the sea: "Undine remembered the sensation of opening the wound and could feel the sand and the shell and the crabs moving — living — under her skin" (Russon 2004, 31). This realization has been instigated by vivid dreams, voices that tell her "it's time to come home" (Russon 2004, 24) and the appearance of dead fish, as though from nowhere, in her bedroom. Undine unburdens herself of anxiety about these events by reporting them to Trout.

Throughout the novel, Trout is an alternate focalizer who not only provides the reader with another perspective on Undine and her life, but also establishes his gaze as superior in analysis

and understanding. The pattern established early, in which Trout explains Undine's name to her, is maintained throughout the text, as he sees and understands signs and symbols that Undine cannot or will not examine. A fish that appears in her bedroom has inside it a piece of paper inscribed with a quotation from *The Tempest*. It is Trout who finds the paper and recognizes the quotation, functioning as a literary interpreter. In the novel's first direct use of Shakespeare, Undine is literally outside the space where Trout confirms his understanding of the paper by consulting a book: "Ms. Hague reached up and pulled an enormous book off the shelf. Undine knew which one it was straight away. 'Pff, Shakespeare,' she breathed aloud, dismissively. [Ms. Hague and Trout] were both mad about Shakespeare. No doubt they would be in raptures for the whole period" (Russon 2004, 48). Trout's direct engagement with the Shakespearean text, here and for the remainder of the novel, allows him to interpret Undine's experiences (past and future), while she remains deliberately ignorant of "Shakespeare" beyond her school's requirements (Russon 2004, 53). Having decoded the message, Trout gives the quotation to Undine:

Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell,  
Hark, now I hear them — ding-dong bell.

(Shakespeare 1999, quoted in Russon 2004, 52)

While Trout, we presume, immediately recognized the song as from Shakespeare and then researched its origin, Undine only recognizes its Shakespearean origins because she has seen Trout reading the text and expects him to translate its meaning and source: "Why am I reading Shakespeare? What's it from? What does it mean?" (Russon 2004, 52). Trout offers an interpretation of the quotation, explaining in a plot-based way that

this bit of the play is when Ariel — he's a spirit — is trying to trick this prince guy, Ferdinand, into thinking his father is dead. There was a big storm and they got separated and Ferdinand's stranded on this desert island. Anyway, at the end, Ferdinand's father isn't dead at all. They're reunited. (Russon 2004, 53-54)

Trout constructs the play as being "about" Ferdinand and Alonso, thus privileging patrilineal narratives that, arguably, are bolstered by Trout's insight into Shakespeare in contrast to Undine's willed ignorance. His belief that the sign signals the survival of Undine's own father is ultimately borne out by the novel. Importantly, Trout not only provides literary analysis of the Shakespeare quotation, but has "scientifically" read the paper on which the quotation is written, noting watermarks and physical features. As the skill suggests, for the remainder of the novel Trout's gaze is marked by clarity and rational understanding.

Set against Trout's rational consideration of events are Undine's emotional and bodily responses: she unthinkingly explores her newfound powers and is quickly marked as a potential Prospero (to a knowing reader), but one shown to lack personal control when she causes a storm in her backyard, but is not able to manipulate it:

Undine was playing the weather like a savage instrument, but it seemed the instrument was becoming the player, performing its own dangerous music. She swayed. She was losing her control of the storm. She became aware that she was standing in the middle of the garden, though she had no memory of having left her chair. (Russon 2004, 58)

The discovery of such powers is linked explicitly with the onset of sexuality when Undine experiences a similar episode of temporary power and subsequent loss of control while she is experimenting sexually with a boyfriend, Trout's brother Richard. This very link between power and sexuality, however, results in Undine's separation from her mother: Undine views Lou through the lens of a feminine sexuality that is set against a model of masculine knowledge. Fundamentally, because Undine herself lives by a model in which masculinity equals knowledge and femininity equals sexuality, until the end of the novel she is unable to recognize her mother as a "knower." As she negotiates her own burgeoning sexuality, Undine explicitly rejects her mother as a negative sexual role-model without knowing any details of her mother's past: "Just because you were stupid enough to get yourself knocked up when you were a teenager . . . just because you opened your legs . . . I mean, I'm not like you" (Russon 2004, 70).

The rejection of her mother leads Undine to directionless experimentation, and ultimately, to her father, but only after she has fallen prey to the temptation to experiment with her new powers. Undine's relationship with Richard, the boyfriend, initially offers her an escape from the emotional challenges created by her new powers, but leads to a stereotypical struggle for sexual control when Undine asks Richard to stop kissing her:

"God, Undine," he said, and prowled around the couch like a caged animal. "What have you done to me? I've never felt like this before."

It should have been . . . romantic, but it wasn't. He sounded almost angry, as if he really thought she had done something. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. Why couldn't he kiss her the way she wanted him to? (Russon 2004, 113)

It is the fantastic element of the novel though, that makes Undine's power literal, not just metaphorical. Undine has exerted a supernatural control over Richard: in constructing feminine power and sexuality as equivalent, Russon therefore absolves Richard of any responsibility for his own adolescent sexuality. After Richard has ceased kissing her, Undine then reinitiates sexual activity, but does so as an aggressor:

Power surged through her hand to his. She was in control, not Richard. She was making this happen. He would do whatever she wanted him to. She pulled him down to sit beside her. She kissed him — she kissed him — fiercely. He seemed to dissolve, to surrender, not just his body, but his will. Undine felt it, the same way she had felt tame air pass through her and become transformed by her body into the storm, dangerous and wild. She was dangerous, potent, and strong. Richard was weak. She almost, for a moment, despised him. (Russon 2004, 116)

The novel's constructions of sexuality for its own sake take up the models of consuming femininity that are present in earlier mermaid texts, but stripped of their moral drives: this model of sexuality is only devouring. Undine eventually recognizes that she "didn't know enough about her power to make it work for her" (Russon 2004, 125), and at this moment of recognition, a book "dropped out of the air" (Russon 2004, 125). Unsurprisingly, the book is *The Tempest*, and its front page has written on it her father's name and address.

The Shakespearean text, as a symbol of superior knowledge, is offered to Undine as a guide to her experiences and self. Again, however, she fails to read the text beyond the handwritten address, which she uses to find her father. In doing so, Undine leaves the realm of her mother and enters that of her father, creating a symbolic island inhabited by herself and her father, who is named, rather heavy-handedly, Prospero Marine and who lives in a beachfront house with a parrot named Caliban and a dog named Ariel. This Prospero does not in fact want to marry his Miranda off, but to keep her for himself so that he may have access to and, ideally, control over her magical power.

When Prospero discovers that Undine is not a Shakespearean, he is "dismayed" (Russon 2004, 154) and realizes that his carefully constructed messages to her have not achieved their intended impact:

Prospero made a deep grumbling sound. "But my note. Full fathom five thy father lies . . .," he intoned. "Don't tell me it had no dramatic effect whatsoever."

"Oh yes, absolutely," Undine assured him. "I had a good interpreter." (Russon 2004, 155)

The novel itself retains this dependence on Trout as "interpreter." Through his knowledge of Shakespeare and "inherently" scientific mind, Trout retains the authoritative gaze: as he researches Undine's magic, his own sexuality is displaced into "a scientist's passion for knowledge" (Russon 2004, 191). This saves him, for Undine's second lover, Grunt, falls victim to her magical powers just as Richard had. Trout also becomes the moral gaze of the novel, recognizing that "power corrupts" (Russon 2004, 175) just as Undine is unthinkingly embracing her power as "exhilarating" (Russon 2004, 178).

Undine temporarily finds power exhilarating because Prospero has been grooming her to hand over that power to him. Having established his authority through manipulation and citation of Shakespeare, Prospero then convinces Undine that her power is inherited patrilineally. Like Prospero in the play, however, he can only achieve power only by controlling his daughter, telling her "[i]t's not about what we should do. It's about what we can do. We have enormous power. We can use it. We can do anything we want. Normal laws, normal rules, don't apply to us" (Russon 2004, 170). Undine's magic becomes seriously dangerous when Grunt starts questioning her about her relationship with Richard. Although she does not necessarily seek to destroy Grunt, she nonetheless allows herself to have a "tantrum":

Power welled inside her. She didn't want to fight it. She wanted to destroy something. It was sudden and compelling. It was violent. She felt it surge through her arm . . . she forced her hand away from Grunt, to protect him, and aimed instead at the peppercorn tree.

And then, the tree was gone. She felt a fierce exuberance at this awesome example of her power, Grunt forgotten. She was throwing off the ordinary, the mundane. Like before, with the storm, language left her. Nouns were weak, thin and insubstantial. Verbs and adjectives hung useless in the air. She let them go, she threw them to the four corners of the garden. (Russon 2004, 186-87)

Clearly, for the feminine, the embrace of power means a rejection of language and knowledge. Prospero encourages Undine in this rejection, telling her that his section of beach "just wants to disappear, to break off and become an island, a place that can't be left or travelled to" (Russon

2004, 217). This separation would mark his transition into a Shakespearean Prospero and would also depend on his exploitation of "Miranda" as daughterly commodity.

In this sense, the novel would seem to activate a critique of the father-daughter relationship constructed by Shakespeare's play (and indeed of Shakespeare generally), but given Undine's sustained and willful ignorance of Shakespeare, this critique is logically only available to Prospero and Trout. Undine herself certainly critiques Prospero's presumption of authority and appropriation of her magic: "'It's not yours to give', she said, marvelling at this new idea. 'It's mine. All the magic, all the power. You're using it, but it's mine'" (Russon 2004, 217). In this articulation of ownership (which implicitly entails an acceptance of responsibility), Undine realizes that her father "didn't love her. He didn't want a daughter. He simply wanted her power, to possess her magic. Well, she wasn't going to let him have it. It was hers and she would protect it. Instinct. Survival" (Russon 2004, 219). This recognition of her autonomy is linked with the recognition that her power is derived matrilineally. Undine's mother helps her to defeat Prospero, appearing unexpectedly at the beach: there, "a last haze of magic framing her like sunlight, emanating from her — soft, warm, curved, female — was Lou" (Russon 2004, 229), who is revealed unequivocally as the source of Undine's power. (Russon does not, however, code "magic" entirely as feminine, even though it is constructed as matriarchal: Undine's younger brother Jasper clearly has the capacity for supernatural insight and communication, presumably inherited, like Undine's own magic, from Lou. One might suggest that this gesture by Russon is a symbolic rewriting of Sycorax, but it also veers dangerously toward models of the witch-woman.)

When Undine questions Trout about his "reading" of events, he avoids responding by claiming that he was thinking about "Shakespeare" (Russon 2004, 236), but the reader is made privy to his self-appointed future as protector and watcher of Undine: "He still felt that pull, that scientific urge to dissect the magic, to analyse its parts. So Trout would still get to protect Undine. He would rescue her a little bit every day, from his own desire, and she would never thank him for it" (Russon 2004, 237). Such an emphasis on the superiority of the masculine gaze, and of rationality's superiority to feminine sexuality, renders the novel's last revisionary performance of Shakespeare vexed, indeed. The final line of the novel is spoken by Undine, as the novel's figure for Shakespeare's Miranda: "'O brave,' Undine said to the wind, 'new world'" (Russon 2004, 245). The reader has no way of knowing if this citation is performed knowingly or is a random saying that seems familiar and fitting to Undine. I am not convinced that, within a novel that circulates Shakespearean cultural authority as valuable, an unknowing citation can be read as positive. Undine has certainly achieved a separation from (and thus authority over) her father Prospero, but rather than appropriating his Shakespearean knowledge, she bans Shakespeare altogether, telling Prospero that "no *Tempest*

names" (Russon 2004, 244) should be used for future pets. This comment reveals that Undine understands generally that Shakespeare's play has been crucial to her father's actions, but does not indicate whether she has any detailed or specific knowledge of the play beyond details given by the men around her. Thus, the novel reinforces the division between masculine and feminine types of knowledge, characterizing "Shakespeare" as masculine and self-regulating sexuality as feminine. In the split between intellectual and physical ways of being and knowing, Russon's erasure of spirituality creates a gendered binary model of subjectivity.

### Conclusion

Where Disney's *The Little Mermaid* participates in "the expropriation of women from the mother's genealogy to the father's" (Sells 1995, 179) — a move in keeping with its use of *The Tempest* — Russon reverses this move, rewriting both Disney and Shakespeare in a celebration of the matrilineal. If Russon's appropriation is more empowering to its implied juvenile feminine reader than are earlier texts, it is made so by actively installing a matriarchal model of authority over Shakespearean elements that undermine the feminine. I am not suggesting that *Undine* activates an unequivocally feminist appropriation of these textual traditions — far from it, given the dangers created in the novel by Undine's unregulated feminine sexuality and the text's valorization of Trout's "rational" gaze — but *Undine* does move toward offering the implied feminine reader a position of autonomy. Like *The Tempest* itself, *Undine* has at its center a book that suggests "how powerful in effecting purposes and changing reality language might be" (White 1999, 11), but as in the play, that book ultimately remains in the realm of the paternal even as some magical power shifts to the feminine.

The shift in identification strategies developed from the nineteenth century to contemporary texts, from objective to subjective, ironically produces a more regulated reader/viewer. No longer are young women asked to be Miranda or to learn from the mermaid; rather, they are asked to be that mermaid-Miranda and thus to become self-regulating. Similarly, as is consistent with the secularization of contemporary popular culture, sexuality in these texts is no longer negatively opposed to the spiritual quest for the soul — as problematic as that opposition may be — but is designated as negative in and of itself. Thus, feminine sexuality is no longer a threat to a specific ideology of religion or ethics, but is to be excised regardless of context.

Contemporary juvenile readers are consistently offered *Tempests* that suggest that feminine sexuality is to be present but passive, looked at but not touched, and the very presence of Shakespeare lends cultural authority to this message. I look forward in the future, however, to reading a text that combines feminine autonomy with the cultural capital of Shakespeare, that has



a heroine who knowingly cites and rewrites our understanding of the "brave new world" — one who originates, rather than bears, the knowing gaze, who controls her own tail (or tempest), who is self-determining rather than self-regulating, and who enjoys a sexuality independent of patriarchal family structures.

### Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the following people, each of whom provided me with thoughtful feedback on this paper at various stages: Alan Dilnot, Heather Scutter, Sujata Iyengar, and the readers for *Borrowers and Lenders*.
2. This is not necessarily a negative function, as "[c]hildren's literature has an important role to play in the socialization of children, [. . .] who are still very much learning reading and 'life' skills" (Cross 2004, 56). My concern is, however, the extent to which sexual/moral didacticism in two contemporary children's texts is masked by their participation in these earlier traditions.
3. See, for example, Zibby O'Neal's *In Summer Light* (1985), Tad Williams's *Caliban's Hour* (1994), and Dennis Covington's *Lizard* (1991), all of which appropriate *The Tempest* for adolescent readers within an explicitly patriarchal framework.
4. For a concise genealogy of the mermaid as "fact" and tradition, see Waldemar and Schroeder 2004, 122-26. They note that the English tradition of the mermaid culminated in the seventeenth century and "reflected the variety and disparity of the cultures that had influenced English culture through the centuries. Greek legends, the Christian Physiologus, the old Norse descriptions, and no doubt Celtic legends were all jumbled together to create the mermaid and the merman" (Waldemar and Schroeder 2004, 125).
5. Undine is awarded more agency in a recent retelling of Fouqué's tale for young adults: *Haunted Waters*, by Mary Pope Osborne (originally published in 1994). In this novel, Undine retains her supernatural origins, but her protective uncle Kühleborn is reduced to a nasty spirit, and her husband is the unknowing victim of her all-consuming "strangeness." Osborne's narrative choices give the reader a degree of sympathy for Huldbrand by virtue of a first-person narration that simultaneously attributes and denies sexuality or agency to Undine. So, for example, Huldbrand tells the reader that as "the moon-bright waters streamed down her naked body, I was filled with jealousy. She looked more like the shimmering consort of a pagan god than my wife" (Osborne 1996, 86), but he also states that Undine's "mystery was my fault, not hers; it was my fear of the unknown that kept me from truly knowing her" (Osborne 1996, 98). Hence, in the Osborne novel, Undine is purely the object of a masculine sexual gaze, stripped of any agency or knowledge.

6. For a point of comparison, compare the final kiss in Gil Junger's teen film, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), which rewrites Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Of this film's concluding kiss, it has been argued that

[t]he original Petruchio's approbation of Kate's final self-abnegating monologue is now famously recognized in his charge, "Why there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (5.2.179), which silences his wife literally and figuratively. In its closing scene, Gil Junger's [film] exults in the brutal power relations revealed in this silencing for the audience most at risk of subjugation — teens, and girls in particular. (Jones 2004, 151)

While I am not suggesting the same brutality is present in Disney's film, I nonetheless believe that the broader point about the visual performance of power relations within hetero-normative romance plots holds true of *The Little Mermaid*.

7. Russon may also be invoking Ruth Park's *My Sister Sif* (1986). Park's novel is well-known in Australia and features a female protagonist, Riko, who is half mermaid and half human. Her journey involves reconciling herself with this genealogy and ultimately committing herself to environmentalist causes (the didactic focus of the novel). The novel also includes an authoritative masculine, scientific gaze in the figure of Henry Jacka. I believe this model is replicated by Russon's novel.

### Online Resources

Internet Movie Database Information for *The Little Mermaid* [cited 13 October, 2006]. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/>.

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