NTU Studies in Language and Literature
Number 19 (June 2008), 81-116

The "Perfect" Woman in *The Tempest*: A Comparative Deconstruction of Miranda's Body

Pei-Chen Liao
Ph. D. Student, Graduate Institute of Foreign Languages and Literatures
National Taiwan University

ABSTRACT

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, most critics read *The Tempest* as a complex allegory in which a series of binary opposites such as nature and culture compete for supremacy. On the subject of Miranda, the early critics either were silent or merely regarded her as an emblem of beauty and ideal womanliness. In more recent readings, post-colonial interpretation dominated, focusing on Prospero and the indigenous Caliban, Sycorax, and Ariel. The role of Miranda as the "perfect" woman has long been taken for granted and thus ironically fades into nothing more than a "bright shadow" in some major interpretations. In this essay, I reposition Miranda as a central character and argue that the role of Miranda as the "perfect" woman has not only been created by Shakespeare but been conditioned beyond the text by social, racial and gender politics that presume "female imperfection." Such a role as the "perfect" woman under patriarchal domination has significantly influenced Miranda's formulation or even misconception of gender and identity. This essay hence undertakes a comparative deconstruction of Miranda's body, which has been constructed as a "transcendental myth" (Dolan 96) in the Renaissance historical context, modern critical interpretation, visual art, and theatrical performance.

Keywords : William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Miranda, "perfect" woman, transcendental myth, body, deconstruction

《暴風雨》中的「完美」女人：比較解構米蘭達的身體

廖培真
國立臺灣大學外國語文學研究所博士生

摘　要

十八、十九世紀時，大部分的評論家將《暴風雨》解讀爲複雜的象徵寓言，其中一系列如自然與文化的二元對立相互競爭主權。關於米蘭達（Miranda）的角色，早期的批評家不是沈默不語就是僅將她視爲美麗和完美女性氣質的象徵。較近期的解讀則是以後殖民的詮釋爲主，專注在博思普（Prospero）和當地土著卡力班（Caliban）、賽克拉絲（Sycorax）以及愛瑞兒（Ariel）上。米蘭達做爲「完美」女人的角色長期以來被視爲理所當然，因此在一些主要的閱讀中，米蘭達諷刺地如「光亮的陰影」般消失。本文重新將米蘭達放置回核心角色，認爲「完美」女人的角色並不只是莎士比亞的創造，更超越文本受到設想「女性不完美」的社會、種族和性別政治的決定。父權統治下的「完美」女人的角色顯著地影響米蘭達對性別及自我認同的表述甚或誤解。本文因此比較解構米蘭達的身體，探討她如何在文藝復興的歷史背景、現代批評詮釋、視覺藝術及劇場演出中被建構成「超自然神話」（Dolan 96）。

關鍵詞：莎士比亞、《暴風雨》、米蘭達、「完美」女人、超自然神話、身體、解構

The "Perfect" Woman in *The Tempest*: A Comparative Deconstruction of Miranda's Body*

Pei-Chen Liao

FERDINAND. Admired Miranda!
Indeed the top of admiration, worth
What's dearest to the world. Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard, and many a time
Th'harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear. For several virtues
Have I liked several women; never any
With so full soul but some defect in her
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,
So perfect and so peerless, are created
Of every creature's best. (3.1. 37-48)[1]

"Nobody is perfect," says Joe E. Brown at the end of the movie *Some Like It Hot*. To purport to discriminate between a "perfect" woman and an "imperfect" woman according to their substance seems still more illusory, since the two absolute concepts—"perfection" and "imperfection"—cannot possibly evolve from the nature of women. The representation and recognition of perfection in women is at most defined by the way it is uttered, constructed, and used in a discourse. With the stylized repetition of assuming and performing acts through time, however, the socially and culturally constructed notion of perfection comes to be naturalized and takes on the form of "myth," defined as "depoliticized speech" by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (142). In passing from history to nature, the myth of the "perfect" woman assumes the look of generality, making itself look "neutral and innocent" (125), whereas it is but "a semiological system" (111), which

* This essay was revised from a project I conducted at the Graduate Institute of Comparative Literature, Indiana University Bloomington. I benefit from the comments generously provided by Angela Pao, Eugene Eoyang, and Joan Linton. I am also indebted to the two anonymous reviewers of my essay for their insightful opinions and revision suggestions.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, lines of the play are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

arbitrarily connects a particular form/the signifier to the concept of perfection/the signified.

To uncover the overlooked and naturalized signifying consciousness, that is, the intention and ideology underneath the speech act that regards women as "a transcendent myth," as Jill Dolan indicates in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, is the focus of the discourse of feminist criticisms in the area of the performing and visual arts (96). In a representational frame, according to Dolan, an image of a woman "cannot merely denote" its essence but "always connotes an underlying ideology and presents a narrative driven by male desire that effectively denies women's subjectivity" (57). The specified male ideology or more broadly the dominant cultural and social apparatus, made explicit in representation, projects their values onto the historically disempowered female and perceives and evaluates a woman "based almost uniformly on her physical appearance" (30). The doctrine assumes that beauty is naturally an essential attribute of the "perfect" woman, whereas it is formed according to standards of value and evaluation. The canon of beauty is as mystified and obscured as the socially instituted concept of "perfection." Such a myth as female beauty and feminine perfection sustains and creates seemingly naturalized gender roles and stereotypes, and as Judith Butler argues in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," denies "the possibilities of gender transformation . . . to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts" and "the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (271).

As a critique to unravel the complex socio-cultural processes that create and perpetuate particular myths and to denaturalize gender biases reflected in different forms of representation, this essay focuses on Miranda, who is specifically created and described by Shakespeare as the "perfect" woman in *The Tempest*. In fact, the role of Miranda as the "perfect" woman has not only been created by Shakespeare but been conditioned beyond the text by social, racial and gender politics that presume "female imperfection." Such a role as the "perfect" woman under patriarchal domination has significantly influenced Miranda's formulation of gender and identity, making her (the female other in the play) conform to the patriarchal ideology and become blind to her self. This essay hence undertakes a comparative deconstruction of Miranda's body, which has been constructed and

mythicized in the Renaissance historical context, modern critical interpretation, visual art, and theatrical performance. As shown in the example of Miranda, the notion of "perfect" and the concept of the ideal woman have appeared to be neutral. Nevertheless, not only is the notion of the "perfect" woman subjectively determined and socio-culturally constituted but the link between female beauty and feminine behavior—two crucial factors in defining Miranda as an absolutely "perfect" woman—is also arbitrarily made. When the male characters of the play, modern critics of Shakespeare's text, painters and directors perceive, interpret, and embody Miranda, they assume an absolute concept of the "perfect" and take certain body images for the naturalized identity of the ideal woman. Miranda, as a representative of "perfect" women for men, has been created as "a transcendent myth" and thus has ironically become invisible to herself and to those who read *The Tempest*.

The Role of Renaissance Women: *Commedia dell'Arte* and Masque

To identify precisely the historical and literary sources that are likely to influence Shakespeare's characterization and conceptualization of Miranda is obviously as impossible as to try to identify those of the other characters. As Alden and Virginia Vaughan indicate in *Shakespeare's Caliban*, a wide range of sources recognized and argued over by scholars for *The Tempest*'s historical and literary contexts—"notoriously less certain" than Shakespeare's other plays such as *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet*—stretches from William Strachey's "True Reportory," Silvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Barmudas*, and Montaigne's essay on cannibals to Virgil's *Aeneid* and the Jacobean Masque genre (24). Numerous documents and literary analogies have been proposed for the reinterpretation and elucidation of the play's racial and political issues brought out by the noble Prospero and the savage Caliban. Compared with the various plausible models proposed for the male protagonists, the agreement on and the exploration of Miranda's sources are however less controversial. The context of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* (comedy of the profession), the Stuart masque genre, and the Elizabethan social order of men provide an essential literary and historical background to the construction of Miranda as being inferior to the male, even if she is created to be a "perfect" woman.

The Italian *commedia* origins, first suggested by Ferdinando Neri in *Scenari delle Maschere in Arcadia* in 1913, make available an alternative perspective from which to examine the English bard's characterization and plot design.[2] Comparing *The Tempest* with five pastoral comedies in Arcadia: "La Pazzia de Flandro," "Il Gran Mago," "La Vane," "Li Tre Satiri," and "Arcadia Incantana," Neri indicates some influential *commedia* elements by drawing from the play a basic story line:

> La tempesta ache dispede i naviganti in un'isola lontanà, per volonta di un mago che guida tutta l'azione in un giorno d'incanti, dopo il quale spezzerà la sua verga; una terra salvaggia popolata di spiriti; due gruppi di personaggi, i nobili ed i plebei, rivolti i primi all'ambizione e all'amore (co le nozze finali), i secondi al godimento brutale e riserbati allo scorno; par bene sia questa la nuda trama dell'ultima comedia dello Shakespeare. (33)
>
> [The tempest that disperses the sailors in a distant island, at the volition of a magician who guides all the action in one day of spells, after which he will break his staff; a wild land populated by spirits; two groups of characters, the noble and the common, the first turning toward ambition and love (with the final marriage), the second to brutal enjoyment and disgrace; properly that is the bare plot of Shakespeare's last comedy.]

The fantasy setting of *The Tempest* is similar to that described in *commedia dell'arte*, either the coast of Arcadia or a distant island inhabited by spirits and nymphs. On the island, Shakespeare's characters, corresponding to the *commedia* stock characters, follow a parallel plot. Prospero, like the defined *commedia* character of the *Mago*, starts the play by wielding his magic to create a storm for revenge. He controls Ariel, a type of spirit servant, and Caliban, like the deformed personage *Pulchinella*—both the kind of servants who always look for ways to overthrow the domination of their master. In the end, both Shakespeare's comedy and the *commedia dell'arte* conclude with a customary marriage of the *innamorati*. The young lovers in *The*

---

[2] Other relevant contexts and sources will be brought into discussion in the course of the article. It is nonetheless worth pointing out at this stage that to depend entirely on the source of this Italian Renaissance comedy genre may narrowly mislead readers to construe Shakespeare's play as a vulgar street performance and Miranda as a stock character.

Tempest, Miranda and Ferdinand, represent respectively the *Mago*'s daughter and the lost son of the *Magnifico* (like Alonso) or the *Dottore*, who are shipwrecked to the island with the *Arlecchino*, associated with the drunken servants, Stephano and Trinculo. Reliable parallels between the *commedia dell'arte* and *The Tempest* thus justifiably lie in not only the *scenari* and plot but also the defined character types.

Although Shakespeare does not incorporate every character type of the *commedia dell'arte*, functions and representations of the *commedia* personages still highlight his characterization, specifically of the role of the *innamorata*. The *innamorati*, according to Kathleen Lea in *Italian Popular Comedy*, are not "properly a mask of the Commedia dell'arte" (102). They are less important and popular than the recognized masked characters, such as the *Mago* and the *Dottore*, despite the fact that the *innamorati*'s falling in love after some love intrigues and having a customary marriage is often used as the basis of the storyline. In general, the *innamorati* appear as the only unmasked characters, who "should be young, graceful, handsomely dressed, and well made up" (Lea 102). In particular, the main concern about the *innamorata* invariably emphasizes her appearance, even when her role changes from being passive to active with the development of theatrical performance. Before the introduction of actresses to the Italian theatre by the 1570s, only a few pioneer companies implemented the fashion for women to act on the public stage.[3] Thus, "for the convenience of academic representation, and in accordance with the convention that honest women were not seen in the street or at the windows" (Lea 113), the *innamorata* did not take a meaningful part in performance and was often concealed from sight, although she was continually the subject of discussion by other characters. After "the practical difficulty of boy-actors taking women's parts was obviated," the *innamorata* was finally created and allowed to participate actively in the play as much as possible (Lea 113). The characterization of this female role, however, was not thus exploited deeper and further. Instead, the focus continued to be kept on her beauty, for "the beauty that was taken for granted," Lea writes, "is now put to the test" (113). The general description and assessment of the *innamorata* has concentrated on the

[3] P. M. Cecchini's writing in 1621 reckoned that it had been the fashion for women to act on the public stage for barely fifty years (Lea 2: 114).

importance of her looks, as if it were a crucial factor in determining the meaning of her existence.

The *innamorata*'s characteristic youth, beauty, and her function in a conventional marriage to end a comedy appear to be obvious traits adopted by Shakespeare for Miranda's part in *The Tempest*. The original *commedia* love intrigues, as Lea suggests, might be inappropriate for a performance at court, where the play was put on to celebrate the royal marriage between Princess Elizabeth and the Protestant Prince Frederick on December 27, 1612. With this particular occasion taken into account, the conventional *commedia* ending of marriage, in Shakespeare's use, could serve not simply as an "excellent motive for comedy" (Lea 119) but also echo the actual royal marriage that *The Tempest* was called on to help celebrate. Rather than a stock character, Shakespeare's young beautiful *innamorata* is enabled to embody the newlywed princess, whose political marriage was arranged by King James to resolve the country's power struggles.

It is in fact questionable whether *The Tempest* would have been commissioned purely and simply for Princess Elizabeth's wedding festival, since its first performance was actually recorded earlier in 1611, to open the Winter Season at the King's Banquet House at Whitehall. However, there can be little doubt that, in order for the play to be suitable for a performance at court, Shakespeare would have incorporated the tradition and symbolism of the masque, which has been used and favored by the Stuart monarchs "to foster an exalted conception of the divine right of kings" (Creaser 118). Shakespeare's use of the masque, integrated with the *commedia dell'arte* conventions, involves more complexly the English *innamorata*—Miranda—in a Renaissance hierarchy of power, gender, and class.

The marriage masque given to Miranda and Ferdinand by Prospero in Act 4 could be used both as an entertainment and a literary form. As a spectacle performed at court, it offers a visually gorgeous scene for the nobility in the audience to watch and invites the courtiers to enter as masquers and to dance. Symbolically, "the themes of chastity and fertility elaborated in the masque," as Bette Werner argues in "Masque vs. Drama," deliver the concept of "the right order of nature" (71) and further enhance the purpose of the masque to glorify the court and, in particular, the monarch. As the masque manifests, in the system of nature, with the supreme God as the center, the three goddesses descending from the heavens—Juno, Iris, and

Ceres—stand for fecundity of the earth and celebrate chastity. They occupy higher positions than their counterparts, Venus and Cupid. This hierarchy of order suggests a glory of James I, who, as a monarch, also settles the countering forces in the country. Nonetheless, the masque is not simply "an added attraction relevant only to a specific occasion," but, "an integral part of the play" (Werner 71). The symbolism of the masque is incorporated into the play. Prospero's masque, while it seems on the surface a celebration of Miranda's marriage, is intended to remind the newlywed bride of purity and virginity and to obey discipline and order in the patriarchal system: fathers superior to daughters and husbands to wives. Furthermore, it comes off even more powerfully as a display of Prospero's supernatural magic and his dominance of the spirit-servants. To begin the masque, Prospero thus summons Ariel and demands obedience:

> Go bring the rabble,
> O'er whom I give thee power, here to this place.
> Incite them to quick motion, for I must
> Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple
> Some vanity of mine art. (4.1. 37-41)

The show, however, is all of a sudden ended with Prospero's "Avoid; no more!" (4.1. 42), when he recalls "that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates / Against my life" (4.1. 139-41). Comic or grotesque characters like Caliban and his confederates are introduced in the form of anti-masque to act as foils to Prospero's main masque and to allow the main masque to resolve on keeping order.

The contrast between order and disorder, as represented by the play's main masque and anti-masque, is from time to time threatened by transgressions between classes. Miranda, despite the fact that her beauty, chastity, and European birth should have proclaimed her belonging to a high class in the main masque, falls unfortunately to the compulsory bottom, a status even lower than that of the characters in the anti-masque. It is because she is the only female character in the play and thus in the patriarchal ideology, is conventionally recognized as "the other" with regard to gender. Her female body offers a tempting possibility for the deformed savage, Caliban, to invade the order of the stabilized chain of being and to institute his own system. In rejecting the right order established by Prospero, Caliban not merely proposes to overthrow the magus but repeatedly threatens to

violate Miranda's honor. In addition, Miranda's body continues throughout the play as a vulgar joke for Caliban's conspirators. The lower class Stephano, working as Alonso's (King of Naples) drunken butler, jests about Miranda as a war trophy: "Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will / be king and queen . . ." (3.2. 101-02). As far as the main masque and anti-masque are concerned, Miranda remains the weakest and the lowest in both Prospero's patriarchal structure and the churning disorder of the satirical anti-masque.

The construction of Miranda as being ambiguously sensual and insubstantial results no more from the *commedia dell'arte's* influence of an emphatically beautiful *innamorata* or from the performance and symbolism of the literary and theatrical masque and anti-masque, than from the traditional Elizabethan hierarchal picture of the world. In *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Eustace Tillyard discusses in great detail how the conception of order influences both the Elizabethans' perception of identity and Renaissance literature. In his account, Elizabethans believe that creatures are "assigned their precise place in the chain of being," and men are positioned between angels and beasts (25-26). Within every class, there is a primate. But every class in the chain of being is allowed to "excel in a single particular" (Tillyard 26). The vertical order of the static self can thus be transformed by a possibility of change, due to the presumption and fact that none of the classes is perfect in every respect. From this perspective, Tillyard explains well the contrast and competition between Prospero and Caliban—the main masque and anti-masque in *The Tempest*, which is thought of as Shakespeare's representative work of the Elizabethan world picture. Throughout the discussion, however, Tillyard is notably silent about women's position, no matter when he portrays generally the Elizabethan world picture or when he pinpoints the concrete chain of being in Shakespeare's play. Elizabethan women, while they must also have occupied a fixed place in the chain of being, dis/appear as if they were unworthy of mention as a distinct class. They are like Shakespeare's Miranda, a leaking, fragile, and indeterminate lack in men's class, and allow the lower class of beasts a chance to surpass and to occupy a space in the class above.

The invisibility of women in the chain of being, according to Stephen Orgel in *Impersonations*, is an inevitable truth of the Renaissance patriarchal society, for women are "defined in this culture by their relation to men" (13).

Renaissance ideal women, as represented by the *commedia innamorata*, Miranda, and Princess Elizabeth, are beautiful figures and useful commodities, whose marriages are arranged for the convenience and advantage of their male dominators or fathers. "The whole range of male dominance over women," as Orgel calls our attention to, results from the concept of "female imperfection" (24-25), echoing the fact that women's role is regarded by the Elizabethans as nearly absent or simply the weakest in the class of "men," a justifiable term sufficient enough to stand for the whole humanity. On the whole, the Renaissance notion of the ideal woman, however it is created, assumes ironically "female imperfection" and conditions instead of admiring the female sex.

De/Constructing Miranda in Modern Interpretations—
Seeing "a Beauty" as an Ideal Woman

Unfortunately, most modern critics do not explore deeply the controversial issues of gender and body politics to bring out the full significance of Miranda as a problematic "perfect" woman and the only female character in the play. Major interpretations have continued to emphasize her beauty and to approach her as a less important and less problematic role than the male characters such as Prospero and Caliban. Throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries, most critics read the play as a complex allegory in which a series of binary opposites—nature/culture, instinct/reason, savage/civilized man—compete for supremacy.[4] In primitivist readings, critics like William Hazlitt idealize the figure of the noble savage and interpret Caliban as an "amiable" savage "with the simplicity of a child" (110), whose brutal mind is "in contact with the pure and original forms of nature" (108). These sympathetic critics, however, do not give extended attention to the subject of Miranda. In the few discussions there are**,** Miranda is merely an irresistible emblem of beauty and simplicity. William Richardson, for example, was one of the few that admired the playwright's ability to create female characters. However, Miranda is still understood consistently as being "[t]hus simple, apt to wonder, guileless . . . compassionate and tender" (346).

[4] For a review of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critical attitudes on the characterization and power struggle of Prospero and Caliban, see Slights, Vaughan, esp. 89-117, and Murphy.

Miranda begins to come to the forefront in women-centered sentimental readings by Victorian women critics. Anna Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832), regarded as one of the earliest examples of feminist criticism along with Mary Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1851), focuses on the "worshipful cult" of Shakespeare's women (Auerbach 210). In the popular female tradition, in which "women extract Shakespeare's heroines from the texts of their plays" (Auerbach 210), the originally imagined female characters are exalted to serve as inspiration for the living Victorian women. Ultimately, Jameson's women-centered interpretation attends to Miranda; however, Jameson still in idealized and ideologically biased terms supposes that Miranda must be beautiful and have certain internal and external qualities to be "perfect." By describing her as a character in the category of passion and imagination, Jameson acknowledges "the very elements of womanhood" of Miranda, specifically pointed out as being "beautiful, modest, and tender" (145). In Jameson's comments, "What, then, has Shakespeare done? . . . he has removed Miranda far from all comparison with her own sex" (145), the notion of "perfect" womanliness is not to be questioned but to be confirmed and sought for.

In most of the recent feminist and post-colonial criticisms that finally address the issues of body politics, the body of Miranda, compared with those of the other absent female characters, remains invisible. Miranda is too beautiful to be critically seen, too perfect to be substantial, and too white to be a victim. Her aristocratic European whiteness, as May Joseph implies in *Nomadic Identities*, excludes her from the island's indigenousness and thus from a more justifiable right to scream against the abusive body politics in the colonized island (128-29). In comparison with Miranda, Sycorax—Caliban's mother, who does not even physically appear in the play—is acknowledged by Joseph to be "[u]nlike Miranda" because of her embodiment of "gendered indigenousness" and to function "[a]s a key to unraveling the psychic boundaries of power, gender, and nationalist sentiment" (128-29). Stephen Orgel's "Prospero's Wife" also exerts a similar logic to see "the absent" and "the unspoken" as "the most powerful and problematic presence" (231). The body of Sycorax and that of Prospero's wife are both conspicuously absent from the play, yet subtly but not obscurely, they attract more attention from critics than Miranda, whose lines end up being minimized as in, for instance, Aimé Césaire's post-colonial

rewriting, *A Tempest*, which erases Miranda's suffering body by eliminating Shakespeare's original scene of an alleged rape. When post-colonial and feminist critics take the mission to liberate the repressed, most of them choose to listen to the voices of the secondary characters and silence Miranda.

The first move in a direction that rightly focuses on Miranda and understands her repressed role in the play begins in earnest in the late twentieth century with the publication of new feminist readings, such as Lorie Leininger's significant essay "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*" (1980), Laura Donaldson's "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading" (1988), and Jessica Slights' "Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda" (2001). While most critics merely respond to the earlier colonial and post-colonial readings in which Miranda is read through the conditions of Prospero and Caliban, Slights not only sympathizes with Miranda as the other critics do but also frees and reads her as an active character. Recognizing Anna Jameson as "a springboard for a re-evaluation of Miranda" (358), Slights goes even further to challenge the conventionally romantic, allegorical, and emblematic interpretations of Miranda, and persuasively proposes an alternative reading of Miranda as an active and moral agent of independent selfhood in her own right. It is, however, a pity that she does not go far enough to take into account the function of Miranda as the "perfect" woman conditioned in the play's social and racial politics and its significance for her formulation, or even misconception, of identity and gender.

While of course no single critical method can offer an overall view of *The Tempest*, complementary uses of semiotics and feminist theory can provide a critical methodology to reposition Miranda as a central figure and to deconstruct the representations of her as an ideal beautiful woman. My deconstructive analysis of the text will proceed to see Miranda as a living sign through her name and her body by adopting Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory and relating the arbitrary linguistic link between the signifier (Miranda's name) and the signified (the miraculous) to the feminist distinction between sex (Miranda's body) and gender (ideal womanhood).

From the semiotic perspective, a close reading of language is the key to understanding the verbal and non-verbal texts. In the phono-centrism of

the English language, as described by Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics,* the first principle of linguistics is—"the sign is arbitrary" (67). According to Saussure's model, the name *Miranda* as a sign can be explained as the linkage of "signal" and "signification" (67)—two sides of a sign that "are linguistically linked vague and amorphous in themselves" (111). In other words, the process which selects the particular sound sequence M-I-R-A-N-D-A to correspond to the particular concept "wonderful" and "miraculous" is entirely arbitrary. The speakers' successful transmission of the sign's signification, evoked by either the English signal or its Latin root *mirandus*, to the addressed listeners and readers depends completely on the connections instituted by the dominant signifying consciousness in English language. Nevertheless, the arbitrarily linked sound-image and concept of the sign *Miranda*, so long as it is applied and interpreted consciously, highlight Miranda's wondered-at female body and figure her as a living sign in the play's socio-cultural context. The word *wonder* can be read as a pun when Ferdinand, first catching sight of his "goddess" (1.2. 425), cries out, "O you wonder— / If you be maid or no" (1.2. 430-31). Ferdinand's "wonder" refers not only to the meaning of the name *Miranda* but to the miracle of Miranda's admired body. "Miranda" is transformed from a linguistic sign into a living sign, whose specific maid/made body is to be involved and read as a visual signal in the patriarchal system of the play.

The particular body image of Miranda, in Shakespeare's creation, signifies the concept of ideal womanhood. Synonyms for the word *perfect* are used repeatedly by the male characters to describe Miranda: Ferdinand's "dearest," "noblest," "perfect," and "peerless" (3.1. 47-48), and Prospero and Caliban's "nonpareil" (3.2. 93-95). It is no "wonder," then, that Miranda, as a living sign, has long been thought of as a representative "perfect" woman among Shakespeare's heroines. Yet, while Miranda is uttered as a transcendental and neutral sign/myth, the process to select Miranda's particular body to represent the concept of the "perfect" woman is in fact as ontologically problematic and arbitrary as the linguistic conventions that randomly constitutes the sign *Miranda*. To stand out and to convey meanings in an organized structure, as Saussure indicates, the signs must "depend on the simultaneous coexistence of all the other parts" (113), and their concepts are "defined not positively, in terms of their content, but negatively by

contrast with other items in the same system" (115). Therefore, it is ironic to see how the positive value of Miranda's feminine "perfection" results from negative contrast with other women, the process of which turns out to be subjective judgments made by the male characters based on their standards of looks, voice, and virtues. Ferdinand, for example, who claims to have eyed "[f]ull many a lady," to have heard "[t]h'harmoney of their tongues," and to have liked several women "for several virtues" (3.1. 39-43), simply justifies his judgment that Miranda is created "[o]f every creature's best" (3.1. 37-48) by saying she has no defects that other women have. The linkage of Miranda's body to the concept of feminine "perfection," instead of being positively given, is negatively defined.

Besides, the claim to take for granted feminine perfection and female beauty as two inseparable sides to constitute the wholeness of the Miranda sign/myth can be further challenged and questioned by exposing the speakers' intentions and perspectives underneath their speech. Romantic love motivates Ferdinand's exclamation before his beloved Miranda as a ritual of courtship, by which rhetorical exaggeration and refinement might have been applied to please his goddess. On the other hand, the distinctive beauty and perfection of Miranda, which Prospero as a father is so proud to make known, is boasted by lust- and ambition-driven Caliban. By attempting to use Miranda's body as a sex tool to satisfy Stephano's desires, Caliban asks in exchange Stephano's conspiratorial help in a revolt against Prospero. The assertion of Miranda's representative beauty and perfection is constructed as a type of speech act and repeated in different contexts for different purposes. The linkage only becomes naturalized and conventionalized over time as the underlying desires and intentions of the male characters remain uncovered and forgotten.

The repeated beliefs and conventions of the social reality that constitute the Miranda sign/myth not only structure the way Miranda's body is perceived but also restrict and proscribe her formulation of identity and gender. According to Butler's elaboration of Simone de Beauvoir's concept that "one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman," gender is in no way a stable identity, but, "an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (270; sic). That is, the conception of gender requires "a constituted *social temporality*" of the social community and an active agent to perform in a "mode of belief," which is expressed in the "stylized repetition of acts

through time" (Butler 270-71). Where the repetition of acts is concerned, since Shakespeare's Miranda, who acknowledges that "I do not know / One of my sex, no woman's face remember / Save from my glass mine own" (3.1. 48-50), is the only "other" sex in her social reality, performative acts for her would conform purely to masculine views and wants. The "I" of Miranda, which according to Butler's argument, is her body, is "of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the 'what' that it embodies is possibilities . . . conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention" (272). The imposer and addressor of the historical conventions that circumscribe the possibilities in Miranda's constructed gender is her father, who sees himself as her "schoolmaster" and makes her "more profit / Than other princes can, that have more time / For vainer hours and tutors not so careful" (1.2. 173-75). Although a male, Prospero is confident that his knowledge of the norms of womanliness can make Miranda better than other princesses.

Moreover, in the illuminating scenes of Act 3, in which Miranda is believed to show her most individualistic way of "doing" her gender, she is still under the watch of Prospero, the Law of the Father. She seems to show an awareness of her sex and to reveal knowledge of her immodest behavior when she obliquely proposes to Ferdinand: "Hence, bashful cunning, / Prompt me, plain and holy innocence. / I am your wife, if you will marry" (3.1. 81-83). However, her seemingly obvious liberation from Renaissance women's "bashfulness" along with her claim—"Oh my father, / I have broke your hest to say so!" (3.1. 37-38)—is merely a limited revelation of her agency. Her disobedience could not have been carried out without the permission of Prospero, who is always there "aside" (3.1. 31) to watch her acts.

Miranda's constitution of gender identity and her status as the "perfect" woman thereby reflect the imagination and standards of the male community in the play. Their overemphasis on the one part and especially on the arbitrary link between female beauty and feminine perfection obscures and negates the rest of her qualities. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in *Post-Colonial Drama*, the visual markers of Miranda's female body, as "a passive-to-be-looked-at object" (205), are "inscribed on the body through discourse—visual, verbal, or otherwise—rather than simply being unmediated or objectively given" (207). In other words, the subjectivity and complex gender identity of Miranda's distinctive body, in the discourse of

patriarchy, are as invisible to the pure male community in *The Tempest* as a black man of Ralph Ellison's Tobitt in *Invisible Man*. The true failure, as Laura E. Donaldson explains in "The Miranda Complex," is "that of the inner eye—the hermeneutic eye—which selects some random elements of reality and foregrounds them as meaningful patterns but relegates others to a meaningless background" (66). The social reality of the male beholders barely sees Miranda's identity beyond the myth of beauty and the illusion of perfection. Because the society hardly sees her true nature and constitutes conventions simply to prescribe her, Miranda as the only present female "other" in the play becomes invisible, even to herself.

Aesthetic Ideals and Performative Acts

As Gilbert and Tompkins state, there are many sites provided for the colonized body to "decolonize": the body's ability "to move, cover up, reveal itself, and even 'fracture' on stage" (205). Although it might be inappropriate and even problematic to claim Miranda as the colonized, a similar strategy to reveal Miranda's disempowered and conditioned body within and beyond Shakespeare's text supports my deconstructive analysis and provides the key to seeing through the myth of beauty and the illusion of perfection. In Shakespeare's text, Miranda's beauty greatly sensualizes her body; beauty, however, does not thus concretize the body's form. Throughout the play, "beauty," "perfect," "woman," "maid," "goddess," and "daughter" are the very six words that Shakespeare has used to describe Miranda, as if they were adequate to pique the audience's and readers' imagination. The definitions of these words in the dictionary, referring simply to more synonyms, still do not effectively contribute a more concrete or clearer idea about the visualization of Miranda's image and physical features. In fact, Shakespeare hardly explains his aesthetic ideal of beauty, except to name some holy titles such as "goddess" and to introduce a contrastive idea of ugliness and deformity. The beauty of Miranda's physical body, which overshadows the rest of her qualities, hence appears peculiarly ironic when it is not actually embodied with any precise physical features. Her body image, like her signified meaning of perfection, is passively and negatively given and cannot even come to life distinctively without the contrast of Sycorax's body, which is, however sympathetically, interpreted as being colonized and victimized in recent post-colonial readings. As a

"freckled whelp" (1.2. 285), Caliban says of Miranda: "But she as far surpasseth Sycorax / As great'st does least" (3.2. 97-98). The literally presented body of the physically absent Sycorax—vividly described with details in the play as "the foul witch" and a "blue-eyed hag" (1.2. 259, 271), aged and humpbacked—makes the visual presence of Miranda's hardly visible body of beauty palpable.

Going beyond Shakespeare's text, painters embody their perception of Miranda according to standardized conventions of beauty and feminine behavior. It is, of course, hardly possible to examine and claim the precise number of illustrations based on Shakespeare's plays, given their ample scope, but Richard Altick in *Paintings from Books* makes an exhaustive search and highlights the significance of the burgeoning images of Shakespeare in Britain, recorded between 1760 and 1900. He estimates that "pictures from Shakespeare accounted for about one fifth—some 2,300—of the total number of literary paintings" (255). In the overwhelming number of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and also twentieth-century paintings for Shakespeare's plays, the vague idea of beauty in *The Tempest* does not exclude Miranda from being one of the most popular illustrated subjects of the playwright's heroines. The inner eye of the painters and the visual effects of painting enrich and embellish Shakespeare's dim presentation of Miranda's body in the text, and draw out her dramatic and aesthetic potential. While one might suppose that the ambiguity of Shakespeare's language allows greater latitude for the painters' imaginations, it is especially intriguing to notice the predominance of certain similar characteristics and qualities in the illustrations of Miranda. Significant examples include works by George Romney (1734-1802), Frederick Goodall (1822-1904), and John W. Waterhouse (1849-1917). Spanning almost two centuries and each having individual preferences to depict, these painters represent a stylized iconography of Miranda's image and emotions as though they were following shared expressive and narrative conventions.

A new age for the subgenera of history painting that dealt with literary characters, as discussed by Martin Meisel in *Realizations*, was launched in 1786 by John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, undertaken to commission "paintings of national importance" by specializing in the illustrations of Shakespeare's plays (31). The representation of Miranda in the hands of George Romney, who, according to Yvonne Dixon in *Designs from Fancy*,

may have proposed the idea of such a gallery to Boydell, can be considered a departure point of discussion. *The Tempest*, the first of Romney's paintings sent to the Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery in 1790, illustrates the shipwreck scene from the first act, with Prospero and Miranda on the right watching the storm, reading the lines in Miranda's words: "If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (1.2. 1-2).[5] This moment conveys Miranda's sympathetic emotions in a profile image condensed in an earlier painting of *Emma Hart as Miranda* (1785-86): her wide-open eyes look upward with small lips parted as if to plead and urge her father to calm the tempest. Miranda's features in this depiction—for which Emma Hart, whose beautiful features always inspired Romney, served as the model—complements Shakespeare's language and explicitly links a particular form of physical attractiveness to feminine sensitivity and compassion.

Romney's idealization of an empathetic and beautiful Miranda agrees with the influential thesis on the representation of "ideal subjects," meaning the invented or literary subjects, proposed in 1847 by Charles Eastlake, who soon became president of the Royal Academy and director of the National Gallery:

> [I]t is obviously safest to let the character and expression agree with the age and sex of the person. A lovely woman for instance will be more attractive (because more generally natural) with an expression of deep tenderness, melancholy, innocence, hope, devotion, or benevolence, than with a look of profound meditation or grief; which latter supposes a remote cause of which we are left in ignorance, and also destroys beauty. But of all expressions in the head of a beautiful woman that of innocence, confiding, and devoted love is what will best *tell* in a picture. (394-95)

Arguments about expressive distortion and whether it conflicts with female "beauty," however, have not been rare in the critical history. James Ward's (1769-1859) Miranda, who is absolutely statuesque and intellectual-looking, for instance, offers a noteworthy exception to the predominant model of the

[5] The original painting by Romney was destroyed in a fire, but an engraving based on Romney's *The Tempest* was done by Benjamin Smith (c. 1775-1833) and is available to us now in a reprint, *The Boydell's Shakespeare Prints*.

innocent and tender figure that has been emphasized. Ward seems to have placed emphasis on Miranda as "goddess" and imagined her as one of the majestic Greek goddesses like Hera or Athena. Even though occasionally artists like Ward did imagine a different Miranda, it was not the image that has been favored and so repeated over time.

The tropes for representing an ideal Miranda, within a limited range of the models of beauty, expressions, and behavior, continue to be practiced by the British painters of the Victorian Age. A popular series of illustrations, sponsored by the weekly newspaper *The Graphic* and later exhibited in London in 1888, exemplifies this phenomenon. When commissioned by *The Graphic* to portray their idea of female beauty and to narrow it down to the heroines of Shakespeare, the appointed artists were invited to express their opinions on the subject. However, many of these leading artists' illustrations conformed, to a great degree, to the Victorians' standards of beauty. To be more specific, the conventions applied to beautiful women in Victorian aesthetics are described by Eastlake as "red lips, ivory flesh, golden curls . . . situated in the same dreamworlds of drapery" and "large eyes, languorous postures, [and] full mouths . . ." (qtd. in Psomiades 6-7). Such Victorian myth of beauty explains materially the visual markers of Frederick Goodall's *Miranda*. In addition, the popular Madonna image, established in "the doubled feminine paradigm—Madonna/Whore, Mary/Eve" (Psomiades 5), likewise serves as a possible grounding for Goodall in symbolizing Miranda as a "perfect" woman. Since the Madonna image of femininity in Victorian culture is "tied to the historical construction of sexuality" (Psomiades 6), the benign look and melancholy aura of Miranda by Goodall, expressed through her simple and gentle body language and enhanced by the typical touching scene at the tempest, echoes once more Eastlake's idea of ideal female subjects.

Under the influence of the historical attitudes of sexuality, the public taste, and the artistic style for illustrating literary characters, the painters who depict Miranda seem to embody her with a favored form, although in fact they do show certain variations in the precise form of beauty. Just as the way conventions of language are passed down from generation to generation, the dominant Victorian conventions of beauty and womanhood also come to be used by twentieth-century painters. For example, John W. Waterhouse's

Miranda[6]—"the perennially attractive image of the young innocent girl" (Hobson 9)—exerts its appeal as powerfully as other Miranda images—the pleading and empathetic Miranda by Romney and the tender and benevolent by Goodall. Although stylistically their Miranda images do not look the same in every respect, representatively they are in the same line, as opposed to the possibility of an assertive, aggressive, angry, or conventionally unattractive version.

Theater—a transition between and a convergence of art and reality—puts into practice the aesthetic ideal and performative acts on the modern stage by casting a living actress as Miranda. The fictional Miranda becomes a real woman, and the real woman is elevated to the status of model. An ideal woman thus, instead of existing merely in Shakespeare's abstract literary language, comes alive with a living and dynamic body. With the assumption that directors and producers would pick for advertisement a moment, gesture, and pose that would exemplify or capture the core of Miranda as she would be interpreted or played in their particular productions, the following illustrated photographic images of live performances will be compared to static paintings for analysis. The photograph of Niki Sarich, taken for Alison Vesely's 1997 First Folio production, for example, demonstrates the director's view of Miranda. Sarich's slim figure, large eyes, sharp nose, elegant costume, and neat long hair correspond to the typical image of "the usual sleeping beauty" (qtd. in Coursen). Her gentle facial expression and graceful pose with both her hands lying still on the skirt also present a powerful image of traditional womanhood.

By taking advantage of the gap in Shakespeare's language and the power of representation, directors realize through the actresses' bodies their own ideas of perfect womanhood. Traditionally and normatively, "the usual sleeping beauty" portrayals of Miranda, with attractive looks and modest acts, dominate the theater as a representative projection of womanhood. This representation, with time and with social changes, encounters more and more feminist challenges. Inventive directors discover a new sense of womanhood and experiment with casting an active and revolutionary hoyden in the role of Shakespeare's model woman. The actresses leave aside the conventionally gentle and polite acts, and adopt wild, rough, and free

[6] Waterhouse's earliest illustration of Miranda (1875) was newly discovered in 2006. He painted two additional pictures of Miranda (1916) just before his death.

movements. Examples can be seen in the full squat of Jessalyn Gilsig in the American Repertory Theater's 1995 production and in, as Brad Leithauser remarks in a *Time* review, the "hotfooted flouncings, pouting moues" of the tomboyish Miranda (by Carrie Preston) in the 1995 New York Shakespeare Festival production. By making such a dramatic change, these directors free Miranda, the actress, and on the whole, women, from constraint, and demonstrate how certain performative acts have long been arbitrarily related to a passively "perfect" woman.

The new feminist mode of acting deconstructs the conventions of gendered performance, one of the emphasized halves to constitute Miranda's body. However, the other half—beauty—still powerfully and mythically charms and dominates these revolutionary directors. All in all, they still accept and expect a symbiosis between physical attractiveness and the feminine ideal. Even though they strive for freedom from restricted conventions of performance, they are still bound to outmoded notions of beauty. Conventional standards of beauty restrict their casting choices. In a manner that parallels the way Miranda has been treated by the play's male characters, modern critics, and artists, the "wonderfully" chosen actresses have been categorized with limited body types, features, and skin colors.

(Non)Traditional Casting: Cross-Dressing

When Butler refers to Beauvoir's idea of body as "a historical situation," she emphasizes:

> [T]he body suffers a certain cultural construction, not only through conventions that sanction and proscribe how one acts one's body, the 'act' or performance that one's body is, but also in the tacit conventions that structure the way the body is culturally perceived. (274)

Miranda's body, as a living sign, is perceived and formed by the male community in the patriarchal ideology of *The Tempest*, and is read and coded in a larger culture beyond the text by the painters, directors, and audience. The myth of this "perfect" woman conveys its meaning over time through both her appearance and actions, which later periods attribute to Shakespeare. Recognized as a cultural ideal "in the tacit conventions," Shakespeare's imagined Miranda has been conditioned, standardized, and victimized in a sense, not only because certain feminine acts are randomly and strictly

inscribed on her but also because certain physical female characteristics are predictably tied with feminine acts. A link of a reified body type and of certain acts with the concept of perfection has historically been taken as Truth, with a stable and unchangeable meaning, even evoking authority and privilege.

In order to both destabilize the gender ideology in current theatrical practice and the larger culture and to resist the imperial, white, and male inscription on Miranda's wonderful, "perfect," and paradoxically insubstantial female body, I would propose to construct an imagined stage, casting a male actor as the anti-thesis of Shakespeare's perfect woman.[7] The chosen male actor would be heavy-set, large, small-eyed, big-mouthed, flat-nosed, and dark-skinned. In addition, he would be shown with a blonde wig, curly and long, over his black short hair, in the classic style of Waterhouse's *Miranda*, and would be dressed in an elegant shining white skirt. Preferably, this stereotypically "imperfect" male-Miranda, while performing perfectly as a woman with modest and gentle acts, would resemble the deformed Caliban. They would appear as twin sister-brother on stage to satirize the play's hierarchical order and to reveal transparently and shockingly through visual effects the essence of their victimized and colonized bodies, in terms of gender and race respectively.[8]

---

[7] I have been searching recent productions of *The Tempest* but unfortunately up to now still have no access to any particular production in which the director did interpret Miranda as a central character and challenged both the conventional gendered performance and the limited types of actresses by casting a stereotypically imperfect male actor in this ideal female role. Cross-dressed male impersonation of Prospero, though, was attempted in the Globe Theatre production in 2000. Directed and designed by women (Lenka Udovicki and Bjanka Ursulov from Belgrade), the production cast Vanessa Redgrave as Prospero, playing the role as neither male nor female, but with "authority, humanity and humor . . . a watchful parent to both Miranda and Ariel" (Gay 171-72). This move, albeit intellectually challenging and visually as well as textually exciting, shifted the focus back to Prospero as most major interpretations of the play have done and did not question the role of Miranda as the "perfect" woman.

[8] As a male Miranda is introduced into the context of the play, it needs to be clarified that this is cross-dressed casting, purposely crossing the bodylines, instead of a switch of roles. Miranda, although not such a substantial role as Prospero and Caliban in some major interpretations, determines in fact the structure and the patriarchal ideology of the play. Her important role as the only woman in the play and the daughter of the dominant character, Prospero, may not be switched to a man/son without making any changes to the lines and weakening the controversial power of the sex issue in the original text, even though the play's resolution of the elder generation's hatred through the love of their offspring can still be worked out if Prospero is cast with a son and King Alonso with a daughter. While casting a son cannot explain Caliban's and Stephano's sexual desire for Prospero's wonderful daughter, a cross-dressed Miranda played by a

To call this practice of cross-dressing non-traditional casting may evoke indignation or disagreement, since casting boy actors in female roles has been a Renaissance tradition in English theater. The ideologies that my casting and Renaissance practice are based on and the purpose and effect each seeks to achieve, however, are different. It is because the normative gender attitudes and protocols of reception have changed significantly from Shakespeare's stage and time to our contemporary theater and society. According to Orgel in *Impersonations*, the Elizabethan theater assumes absolute interchangeability of sexes based on the material and superficial level of costumes, voices, and mannerisms. The acceptance of gender disguise by the audience reflects two important societal concepts of the sexes: (1) Man is the only sex, considering the hierarchal order of power, and thus there's actually no need to clarify the difference of sexes; (2) Boys are analogically versions of women (Orgel**,** *Impersonations* 18-19). Under this situation, cross-dressed boys playing women are regarded as natural and would have caused no disturbance, whereas cross-dressing may be used strategically as a special effect and a parody of stable gender identity when it appears in our contemporary theater. This new contribution results from a modernist attribution of a fixed self and a close connection between sex and gender. To quote again from Orgel's observation:

> Ours is a theatre of named, known, and (most important for the purposes of this argument) gendered actors; to be seriously deceived by cross-gendered disguising is for us deeply disturbing, the stuff of classic horror movies like *Psycho*. We want to believe that the question of gender is settled, biological, controlled by issues of sexuality, and we claim to be quite clear about which sex is which—our genital organs, those inescapable facts, preclude any ultimate ambiguity. (19)

According to Orgel's argument, the effect of a drag role by a cross-dressed male actor in my proposed casting of Miranda to destabilize gender identity and ideology would paradoxically depend on the audience's familiarity with contemporary normative gender attitudes and behavior.

While aiming for subversive effect, I am critically conscious that cross-dressing in performance has generated dispute or even dissension over

---

male actor still fits into the text and can furthermore make a parody of the play's patriarchal gender politics.

the past few decades. Contemporary drag, for example, has been argued by some critics to promulgate misogynistic images of women. In "Cross Left-drag 1," Erika Munk examines the contemporary modes of cross-dressing and claims that there is a parallel between men in drag and blackface minstrel show. Munk says,

> Most men in drag are no more subversive than whites in blackface were. . . . The more women fight for autonomy, the less helpful become restatements of stereotype which have lost their critical edge and turned into means of putting women down and aside. (89)

Other feminists like Jill Dolan and Peggy Phelan articulate similar theoretical points though with different focuses. In "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" Dolan is concerned with the absence of women in drag performance, for "both spectator and performer conspire to construct a male-identified subject" (8). In "Crisscrossing Cultures," Phelan explores how the figure of woman in drag performance is "appropriated as a sign to validate male authority," which is determined by how fully men can "wear" women (161). It is indeed a controversial debate whether cross-dressing in drag performance makes politicized statements about gender hierarchies or cruelly parodies a hackneyed and stereotypical vision of female sexuality.

Although Dolan agrees with many other feminists that male drag may mirror women's socially constructed roles, she does not hence deny the potential of theatre as a laboratory to experiment with non-gendered identities. Her ambiguous idea echoes Lesley Ferris in *Crossing the Stage*, in which various controversies of cross-dressing are discussed and understood as essential for a public forum of theatre. A public forum is free for players and spectators to debate, and performance in theatre can "become a kind of battleground for shifting moral dilemmas and social and cultural change" (Ferris 9). Cross-dressing, particularly for its being controversial and its playing with thresholds, becomes a symbol of liminality. As Ferris further argues,

> Theatrical cross-dressing has provided one way of playing with liminality and its multiple possibilities and extending that sense of the possible to the spectator/reader; a way of play, that while often reinforcing the social mores and status quo, carries with it

> the possibility for exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, that slippery sense of a mutable self. (9)

Prominent use of cross-dressing in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, for example, exposes that liminal moment and forces audiences to recognize the counter-reality in her play, in which men play women, women play men, and adults play children. On the one hand, Churchill's theatrical technique of cross-dressing is found by some critics to clothe gay male and lesbian desires in heterosexual attire (Harding 260). On the other hand, the performance achieves one of the main epic-theatre (anti-mimetic drama) goals: *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect). *Verfremdungseffekt*, according to Gerhard Knapp in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, applies to the function of any theatrical device designed to dispel the audience's notion that "reality" is directly represented on stage and thus creates the estrangement effect:

> *Verfremdung* creates an "estranged," i.e. detached, and potentially rational, reception of a play, and thus counteracts the spectator's emotional involvement or identification with the characters or actions displayed.

The gender bending in Churchill's play makes the audience aware of the fact that the play is a play with and against reality. After the curtain falls, such an artifact intended as a tool of intervention to stimulate the audience's thought processes should be applied to socio-political practices and help the audience discover their true reality and identity, as it "underscores the social construction of gender" and "deconstructs" the patriarchal "character of representation" (Reinelt 104).

Corresponding to Churchill's subversive and provocative performative tactics in such plays as *Cloud Nine*, my casting of a male "Caliban-looking" actor who would perform Miranda's role as perfectly and "femininely" as Song Liling in David Huang's *M. Butterfly* also seeks estrangement effect and liminal moments in which both the cross-dressed actor and the audience may be unsettled by the tension between subverting and consolidating gendered identity and perfection. At the beginning of the performance, Ferdinand alone would be seen on the stage. He would read passionately the lines—"Full many a lady / I have eyed with best regard/ But Miranda, O Miranda / So perfect and so beautiful, is created / Of every creature's best"—in order to introduce Miranda as a central figure in this production

and to clue the audience in on both the cross-gendered casting and the parody of the beauty ideal and feminine perfection that a male "Caliban-looking" Miranda is meant to complicate. After Ferdinand goes, the male actor playing Miranda in women's clothes would follow Prospero silently and slowly to the center and start the play's first act in the shipwreck scene. Lifting his/her face slightly upward to face Prospero, expressively knitting his/her eyebrows to show his/her grief and worry, the male Miranda parts his/her big mouth to urge her father to allay the tempest. With tears flowing down his/her face and his/her left hand touching his/her heart, s/he begs compassionately for the shipwrecked sailors in a soft voice. Weeping—originally a perfect quality for the female heroine, stereotypically "defined by that weakness, by her being other than *manly*" (Jardine 193)—is now taken over by a burly male actor, whose "imperfect" masculine features and "perfect" feminine performance dramatically relax the conventional connection between female features and feminine acts. In this theater house, the audience, from the opening of the first act, would be exposed to a "brave new world" (5.1. 186) of imagination in which Miranda would be the focus of the spotlight, not with her "typical" female beauty, but with her surreal embodiment of the binary distinctions between art and reality, female and male, feminine and masculine.

Because Miranda is a man in a dress, "a beauty" with the appearance of "a beast," her body would be read, decoded, and shaped not only by the narrative structure of the play itself but also by the audience. As Ferdinand first catches sight of this hideous male Miranda on stage and exclaims "Most sure the goddess" and "O you wonder" (1.2. 425, 430), the seemingly satirical admiration of his/her physical attractiveness might stimulate the audience's thought processes. The audience may appeal to their self-critical resources and hence not only recognize gender stereotypes but realize the absurdity of the cultural expectations of beauty. Otherwise, the audience, whose perception of beauty and gendered identity remains unaffected, may be prompted to produce a defensive suspicion. They may suspect that perhaps the pain-stricken Ferdinand, suffering from his assumption of his father's death in the storm, has dizzily mistaken the beast Caliban for the beautiful Miranda or that the actor has just read wrong lines. Interactively both the perturbed audience's self-criticism and spontaneous doubt should gradually adjust their original perception of genders to the expected

development of Shakespeare's plot. The play's irony may then be strengthened when the audience is made aware of the fact that the wondered-at body of Miranda as the idealized perfect woman is rendered visible only in the male characters' narrow or paradoxically excessively far-reaching imagination.

The male imagination imposed on Miranda's body, when it is repeated throughout the play, could elicit ridicule from the audience, especially from those who stick to the conventional view of beauty. For example, when Caliban seriously compares Miranda and his mother Sycorax to underscore Miranda's greatest beauty, saying "I never saw a woman / But only Sycorax and she / But she as far as surpasseth Sycorax" (3.2. 95-98), the audience would be tempted to laugh sourly at Caliban's ignorance. Looking exactly like Caliban, this large and fat Miranda is in fact visually no better looking than the literally described old and ugly hag-witch, Sycorax, if beauty can be simply judged by the standards of cultural authority.

The physical resemblance between Miranda and Caliban could not only tactically make the beauty of Shakespeare's perfect woman sound particularly ironic but also increasingly intervene in the audience's perception, when they are invited to notice that none of the male characters surrounding Miranda seem to be aware of her "true" "ugliness." Both her intimate lover and later husband, Ferdinand, who claims to have eyed "full many a lady" (3.1. 40), and her respected and close father Prospero, who even roughly criticizes Sycorax's appearance as a "blue-eyed hag" (1.2. 271), reject the false truth of her beauty, even though at the same time they remain committed to describing her gender identity at face value, on the notion of surface. The more bizarre the audience find this, the more aware they could become of the inclination to judge one's appearance with certain conventional standards and of the play's dangerous social reality, in which Miranda's gender identity and female body are overlooked and overemphasized at the same time by the male community.

In the play's gender hierarchy, Miranda as a woman, "the other" in the male community, is supposed to be overlooked and silenced, when she serves no use for her male dominators. Now, played by a corpulent man, Miranda could no longer be excluded as the weak of the other sex. Instead, in the eyes of the male audience, a cross-dressed male Miranda may also be a part of "we," a role they may feel sympathy with. For example, at one of

the play's most provocative moments, Prospero, the powerful father in Shakespeare's creation, represses severely his gentle and tender daughter:

MIRANDA. O dear father,
Make not too rash a trial of him, for
He's gentle, and not fearful.

PROSPERO. What, I say,
My foot my tutor? Put thy sword up, traitor,
. . . . . .
For I can here disarm thee with this stick
And make thy weapon drop.

MIRANDA. Beseech you, father!

PROSPERO. Hence! Hang not on my garments.

MIRANDA. Sir, have pity.
I'll be his surety.

PROSPERO. Silence! One word more
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What,
An advocate for an imposter? Hush! (1.2. 470-81)

At this point, a spectator planted in the audience would chauvinistically yell "Coward!" The assignment of this added revolutionary voice seeks to invite the audience to rise to their better critical judgment and to ask themselves why this fat Miranda cannot fight "like a man" and curse back as Caliban does: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (1.2. 366-68). When the advantages are set equally for both Caliban and this male Miranda that they are both taught language by Prospero and both strong enough to take action, the sex issue would come to the surface. The question, "to fight/speak, or not to fight/speak" in a patriarchal society, is concerned neither with one's linguistic ability nor strength, but with gender.

The parody that this male Miranda endeavors to make of the play's patriarchal politics, moreover, reveals the way a woman's body is regarded as men's property for and through which battles of power are fought and

settled. As Gilbert and Tompkins indicate, dramatists often represent rape, especially inter-racial rape "as an analogue for the colonisers' violation of the land, and also for related forms of economic and political exploitation" (23). For Shakespeare, an accused inter-racial rape of the European princess Miranda by the indigenous colonized Caliban is an even more complex issue, a prominent signifier, which furthermore signifies gender's surrender to race. As discussed earlier, Miranda's female body functions as the space which Caliban attempts to occupy in order to establish his own realm and to overthrow his master Prospero's control. The irony of this sexual oppression again lies in the male community's arrogant ignorance and inevitable dependence on Miranda's body. By casting a "*Caliban*-looking" male actor in this role, the tragic state of Miranda in the attempted but failed rape by Caliban could instead be transformed into one of the funniest jokes in the play, which delivers a "man-to-man" and "*Caliban*-to-*Caliban*" message to the audience. This scene may introduce black humor that the male playwright would not have anticipated, when Caliban lewdly responds to Prospero's accusation: "O ho, O ho! / Would't had been done! Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with *Calibans*" (1.2. 352-53, emphasis added).

The audience's laughter might be further stimulated to get bigger and bigger at the arrogance and ignorance of Miranda's male dominators (father Prospero and husband Ferdinand), when they symbolically "trade" her through the final marriage and do not even seem to have any idea of her true value. Ferdinand's naïve courtly love makes him blind not only to Miranda's appearance but also to her value. Miranda exists only in his chivalric imagination of ideal women. In his eyes, Miranda is nothing but feminine sweetness, fragility, and weakness when she offers to help him bear the logs:

> MIRANDA. If you'll sit down
> I'll bear your logs the while. Pray give me that;
> I'll carry it to the pile.
>
> FERDINAND. No precious creature.
> I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,
> Than you should such dishonour undergo
> While I sit lazy by. (3.1. 21-27)

Yet, in the audience's eyes, they would clearly see on stage how easily this heavy Miranda, grown up in nature, could do a better job bearing the logs than the pampered prince Ferdinand, who keeps grumbling about the labor. The audience listens and watches the performance of Miranda, who tries to comfort Ferdinand: "I should do it / With much more ease, for my good will is to it, / And yours it is against" (3.1. 28-31). Unlike self-contented Ferdinand, the watching audience communicates with Miranda not only through the mode of spoken or written words, but through her body: her movement, gestural language, and physicality. Hence, the audience understands that to do the labor with much ease in fact depends not only on will but also on strength. Realizing this, the audience might laugh at Ferdinand's ignorance of Miranda's value and at his naïve complacent smile when he accepts Miranda as a gift from Prospero, who says:

> Here, afore heaven,
> I raify this my rich gift. O Ferdinand,
> Do not smile at me that I boast at her,
> For thou shalt find she will outstrip all praise,
> And make it halt behind her. (4.1. 7-11).

Smile. Everyone is invited to smile in this final happy ending of marriage. Ferdinand smiles because he thinks that he has found his ideal woman. Prospero smiles because he regains his political power through his daughter's marriage. Miranda smiles because she finally knows what men want from the illusion of the perfect woman—self-satisfaction and imagination. The audience, male and female alike, may smile too, because they could discover at some liminal moments a part of themselves or non-selves in this surreal multifaceted Miranda.

Works Cited

Altick, Richard Daniel. *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760-1900*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1985.

Auerbach, Nina. *Women and the Demon*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

Boydell, John, and Josiah Boydell. *Boydell's Shakespeare Prints: 90 Engravings*. New York: Dover Publications, 2004.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Performing Feminisms*. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. 270-82.

Césaire, Aimé. *A Tempest*. Trans. Philip Crispin. London: Oberon Books, 2000.

Clarke, Mary Cowden. *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*. 1851-52. London: Bickers and Son, 1880.

Coursen, H. R. "Two Versions of *The Tempest*." *West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association Selected Papers* 20 (1997). 22 May 2008 <http://www.marshall.edu/engsr/SR1997.html>.

Creaser, John. "'The Present Aid of This Occasion': The Setting of Comus." *The Court Masque*. Ed. David Lindley. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984. 111-34.

Dixon, Yvonne. *Designs from Fancy: George Romney's Shakespearean Drawings*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1998.

Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1991.

---. "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" *Women and Performance* 2.2 (1985): 5-11.

Donaldson, Laura E. "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading." *Diacritics* 18.3 (1988): 65-77.

Eastlake, Charles. *Materials for a History of Oil Painting*. 2nd ed. London, 1869.

Ferris, Lesley. "Introduction: Current Crossings." *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*. New York: Routledge, 1993. 1-19.

Forbes, D'Anna. *Niki Sarich as Miranda*. 1997. First Folio Shakespeare Festival, Oak Brook. 22 May 2008 <http://www.firstfolio.org/1997.htm>.

Gay, Penny. "Women and Shakespearean Performance." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*. Ed. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 155-73.

Gilbert, Helen, and Joanne Tompkins. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Goodall, Frederick. *Miranda*. 1888. The Folger Shakespeare Library, Seattle. *Shakespeare Illustrated*. 22 May 2008 <http://shakespeare.emory.edu/illustrated_showimage.cfm?imageid=106>.

Harding, James M. "Cloud Cover: (Re)Dressing Desire and Comfortable Subversions in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*." *PMLA* 113.2 (1998): 258-72.

Hazlitt, William. "The Tempest." *The Tempest: Critical Essays*. Ed. Patrick Murphy. New York: Routledge, 2001. 107-13.

Hobson, Anthony. *J. W. Waterhouse*. Oxford: Phaidon-Christie's Limited, 1989.

Jameson, Anna. *Shakespeare's Heroines*. 1832. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1901.

Jardine, Lisa. *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*. Brighton: Harvester, 1983.

Jessalyn Gilsig as Miranda. 1995. American Repertory Theatre, Cambridge. 22 May 2008 <http://www.amrep.org/past/tempest/tempest.html>.

Joseph, May. *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*. Minnesota: Minnesota UP, 1999.

Knapp, Gerhard P. "Estrangement Effect [Verfremdungseffekt]." *The Literary Encyclopedia* 18 Dec. 2006. 7 May 2008 <http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=355>.

Lea, Kathleen. *Italian Popular Comedy*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1934.

---. *Italian Popular Comedy*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1934.

Leininger, Lorie Jerrell. "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*." *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1980. 285-94.

Leithauser, Brad. "They Blew It." *Time* 20 Nov. 1995. 22 May 2008 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,983742,00.html>.

Meisel, Martin. *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.

Munk, Erika. "Cross Left-drag: 1. Men." *The Village Voice* 5 Feb. 1985: 89-90.

Murphy, Patrick. "Interpreting *The Tempest*: A History of Its Readings." *The Tempest*. Ed. Patrick Murphy. New York: Routledge, 2001. 3-72.

Neri, Ferdinando. *Scenari delle Maschere in Arcadia*. Citta di Castello: S. Lapi, 1913.

Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.

---. "Prospero's Wife." *The Tempest: Critical Essays*. Ed. Patrick M. Murphy. New York: Routledge, 2001. 231-44.

Phelan, Peggy. "Crisscrossing Cultures." *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*. Ed. Lesley Ferris. New York: Routledge, 1993. 155-70.

Psomiades, Kathy Alexis. Introduction. *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997. 1-22.

Reinelt, Janelle. "Rethinking Brecht: Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Politics of Form." *Essays on Brecht: Brecht Yearbook 15*. Ed. Mare Silberman et al. College Park: U of Maryland, 1990. 99-107.

Richardson, William. "On Shakespeare's Imitation of Female Characters." *Essays on Some of Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters*. London: J. Murray and S. Highley, 1797. 338-63.

Romney, George. *Portrait of Emma Hart as Miranda*. 1785-86. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. 22 May 2008 <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/103823.html>.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Trans. Roy Harris. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. New York: Norton, 1997. 3055-107.

Slights, Jessica. "Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41.2 (2001): 357-79.

Smith, Benjamin. *The Tempest*. 1797. Bolton Art Gallery, Bolton. 23 May 2008 <http://www.ourtreasures.org>.

Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1960.

Vaughan, Alden, and Virginia Vaughan. *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Ward, James. *Miranda and Caliban*. 1838. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre Collection, Stratford-upon-Avon. *Shakespeare Illustrated*. 22 May 2008 <http://shakespeare.emory.edu/illustrated_showimage.cfm?imageid=225>.

Waterhouse, John William. *Miranda*. 1916. The Maas Gallery, London. *Bridgeman Art Library*. 22 May 2008 <http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com>.

Werner, Bette Charlene. "Masque vs. Drama: Ben Jonson's Court Masques, The Tempest, and Comus." MA thesis. Indiana U Bloomington, 1968.

[Received 31 January, 2008;
accepted 18 April, 2008]