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Prospero's Tri-Filial Family Unit: Queer Childhood as a Tool and Threat to Heteropatriarchal Maintenance and Restoration in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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This paper explores the quasi-familial dynamic in William Shakespeare's The Tempest, proposing that Prospero's efforts to restore and secure patriarchal authority in Italy and on the island are contingent upon his abusive paternal control over three queer child figures: Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda. Drawing on early modern childhood studies and queer theory, this paper reads these figures as queer children: mutable, gender-unstable, arrested in development, and marked by naïveté. It is among the first studies to conceptualise these characters as a tri-filial unit whose queer identities are instrumentalised to construct a vision of heteropatriarchal stability. Prospero fosters his children's queerness by maintaining them in queer states, manipulating these conditions to advance his heteropatriarchal agenda of securing his biological daughter's marriage to the prince of Naples. However, as the play progresses, each child figure begins to resist or outgrow Prospero's control, ultimately revealing the fragility and artificiality of the hetero-patriarchal structures he seeks to uphold. This paper argues that The Tempest exposes the inherent instability of patriarchal power, showing that the very queer identities Prospero manipulates become the agents of its potential undoing.

Introduction

In the early modern period, the concept of a 'family' extended beyond the confines of the biological nuclear unit to include non-kin members and was typically organised under the authority of a patriarch (DiGangi, *Queering* 270; Stone 26-27). With the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I on the throne, conflicting religious and scientific discourses on generation and a heightened awareness of social mobility, the central role of patriarchy increasingly started to be threatened, causing anxieties surrounding a collapse of heteropatriarchal structures (MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity* 1-5). In response, a considerable dramatic effort was invested in preserving the role of the patriarch (MacFaul, *Problem Fathers* 8). This "great deal of dramatic energy" (ibid) that was devoted to protecting "the position of the patriarch, [which]

was so important – even central – to the culture of the time” (ibid) is also prevalent in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611). Prospero, head of a tri-filial family unit comprising his ‘children’ Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda, attempts to maintain his patriarchal authority on the island and restore the rightful patriarchal order in Italy by reclaiming his former title and compelling his daughter into a heterosexual marriage with Ferdinand to secure his dynastic lineage¹. He pursues this goal through forceful magic and calculated manipulation, reflecting the coercive tactics of parental abuse. Unlike modern Western society, where children inhabit a symbolically privileged status, children lived a marginalised existence in the patriarchal, gerontocratic society of Renaissance England without any laws protecting them from parental violence or neglect (Higginbotham and Johnston 9-10; Witmore 12).

While Prospero’s children are marked by his cunning influence, they are also characterised by their queerness: an aspect that proves integral to his goal of preserving heteropatriarchy.² “Queering the child, or exposing the child’s latent queerness” (Kidd 183) has become a central concern in childhood studies, with foundational texts in the field increasingly informing early modern scholarship on childhood (Higginbotham and Johnston 1-4).³ For instance, children represented on stage are discussed in the 2018 *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture* edited by Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Albert Johnston, for their destabilisation of the heteropatriarchal order. In his seminal 2004 work *No Future*, Lee Edelman posits the symbol of the child as a vital figure in modern society that upholds compulsory heteronormativity through reproduction and the maintenance of collective futurity. Higginbotham and Johnston suggest that early modern

¹ Scholars seldom consider Caliban, Miranda, and Ariel part of a tri-filial unit. However, Hiewon Shin in *Single Parenting, Homeschooling: Prospero, Caliban, Miranda* (2008) and Naomi J. Miller in *Sibling Bonds and Bondage in (and Beyond) Shakespeare’s The Tempest* (2006) acknowledge Caliban as a quasi-child to Prospero while Ezra Horbury stresses Ariel’s childlike qualities and Prospero’s position as father and schoolmaster in *Early Modern Transgender Fairies* (2021).

² The term ‘queer’ is often conceptualised outside of the framework of same-sex object choice and can be defined as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62). The contemporary definition of antinormativity does not strictly align with the early modern perceptions of the non-normal; however, any destabilisation of heterosexual marriage, patriarchal structures, and reproductive norms was seen as transgressive in that period (DiGangi, *Homoerotics* 1-9, 17). Individuals who challenged dominant notions “not only of sexuality, but of gender, class, religion, or race” (DiGangi, *Homoerotics* 6) appeared as what now could be defined as queer. Thus, this essay uses this term despite its historical incongruities.

³ This paper largely refrains from post-colonial analysis due to scope. Additionally, it will only focus on the text of the play; performance elements such as boy actors will be disregarded.

concerns of succession parallel these modern aims and discussions of children's queerness when thwarting heterosexual rites and reproduction (4). Similarly, Joseph Campana proposes to view Shakespeare's child-characters as figures that can expose the ideological work of futurity (Campana, "The Child's Two Bodies" 812). Urvashi Chakravaty examines Caliban's role within the succession narrative, focusing on how racialised and non-normative children are systematically excluded from such narratives. She reinterprets Caliban as a figure of queer resistance to reproductive futurity (57-72). On the other hand, Miranda's queerness has largely been overlooked in scholarly literature, although feminist scholars, like Jessica Slights, have acknowledged her defiance of patriarchal structures. This paper specifically explores Caliban and Miranda as queer figures who resist passive participation in Prospero's vision of dynastic succession. However, their active queer disruptions are ultimately co-opted by Prospero to serve his own interests.

Moreover, Higginbotham and Johnston note the early modern understanding of children as protean figures. They represented mutable identities (Higginbotham and Johnston 4-7), being portrayed as "suspended between or blurring sexes, genders, ages, races, statuses, [...] highlight[ing] the inconsistencies, contingencies, variabilities, and artificialities inflecting all identity categories" (6). This echoes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queerness itself as "eddy[ing], troublant" and "antiassimilationist" (xii). These children remained in genderless states until appropriately educated into adult masculinity or femininity (Horbury 79; Moncrief and McPherson 4). Prospero enforces a sense of innocence and *navit  *, to manipulate them and utilise their mutable identities, effectively keeping them in child-like queer states. This reflects Kathryn Bond Stockton's conception of queer children, who writes, "[c]hildren grow sideways as well as up [...] in part because they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it's time" (6). Accordingly, this paper positions Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda as figures of early modern queer childhood, defined by their mutable corporality, gender instability, arrested development, and *na  vet  *.

This paper argues that Prospero uses and enforces the queerness of his children Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda through parental manipulation to maintain and re-establish the heteropatriarchal order. However, in this endeavour, he exposes the artificiality and fragility of this structure, as he raises three queer agents that pose a potential future threat to this patriarchal family system.

Prospero's Queer Children

The queer children of Elizabethan and Jacobean England epitomised instability across identity categories. Ariel, a shapeshifting, childlike spirit, represents this mutability, which Prospero uses to magically manipulate the happenings on the island for his heteropatriarchal agenda. Ariel's first lines already insinuate corporeal changes made for Prospero's benefit: "I come / To answer thy best pleasure, be't to fly, / To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride / On the curled clouds; to thy strong bidding task / Ariel and all his quality" (Shakespeare 1.2.189-193). These qualities are highly divergent and appear to necessitate different features and physical forms. Prospero's scheme to reclaim his dukedom and ensure the continuation of his dynastic lineage is set in motion when he conjures a storm that wrecks a ship carrying several Italian noblemen, including Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, whom he intends as a suitable match for his heir Miranda (Shakespeare 1.2.419). Orchestrating the meeting of Ferdinand and Miranda is essential in his aim to establish a reproductive heterosexual union between them, and is achieved through Ariel's shapeshifting ability. Prospero subsequently orders Ariel to "Go make thyself like a nymph o' th' sea. / [...] Go, take this shape" (Shakespeare 1.2.301-3), whispering further instructions once transformed (Shakespeare 1.2.317-19). Following his instructions, Ariel, as the sea-nymph, sings to magically lure Ferdinand into Prospero and Miranda's company where they become infatuated with one another (Shakespeare 1.2.375-404). Subsequently, when they become engaged, Prospero orders Ariel to arrange a masque: a form of entertainment linked to the heterosexual rites of early modern marriage. In this case, the masque serves as a blessing and a reminder of the significance of chastity (Shakespeare 4.1.1-42). This is because extramarital intercourse was seen as a transgressive act that destabilised the heteropatriarchal order (DiGangi, *Homoerotics* 16). During this ceremony, Ariel acts metamorphosed into the goddess Ceres (Shakespeare 4.1.76-167) and, under Prospero's instructions, performs a ritual to keep the couple on a conventional path. Another transformation occurs when Ariel changes at Prospero's behest into an avenging harpy to frighten and confront the people who usurped Prospero's position as the rightful patriarch of the Duchy of Milan (Shakespeare 3.3.53-93). These three overt transformations demonstrate that Ariel shapeshifts at Prospero's command to serve heteropatriarchal ends: to compel characters into proximity for dynastic purposes, to reinforce heteropatriarchal

rituals, and to intimidate those who challenged his patriarchal authority. Thus, Prospero strategically uses Ariel's changeable identity to reinstall himself as the Duke of Milan and maintain his dynastic power.

Moreover, the sea nymph, the harpy and Ceres are all feminine figures, although Ariel cannot be categorically identified as such. Consequently, Prospero needs Ariel to possess a certain gender instability. The early modern child "symbolically – if not literally – embodied the concepts of gender fluidity, mutability, and change" (Higginbottom and Johnson 17), and Ariel's gender proves to be similarly ambiguous. According to Ezra Horbury, "there is nothing in the text to suggest Ariel has male sexual characteristics" (80). Nevertheless, Ariel is frequently thought of as a male character, likely attributed to the use of masculine pronouns throughout the play. Defining Ariel's gender through these pronouns proves problematic as they are linguistically unstable. In early modern usage, a figure could be referred to by he/him/his pronouns unless unambiguously designated as female; so Ariel's pronouns could either imply masculinity or a lack of gender identification (Horbury 80; Nevalainen 82). These pronouns denote an absence of femaleness, which is complicated by the feminine transformations Ariel undergoes at Prospero's demand. Consequently, Ariel's gender is fluid, shifting from non-female to feminine shapes, rendering his gender presentation and identity changeable, intangible, and ephemeral; succinctly, Prospero claims Ariel is "but air, a touch, a feeling" (Shakespeare 5.1.21). Ariel's mutability is, therefore, rooted in his gender fluidity, which Prospero uses for his bidding. Notably, one etymology of Ariel is the word 'altar' (Johnson 206): a site of transaction, magic, and prayer. Ariel's body metaphorically transforms into such a site; Ariel's liberty is traded for his gender fluidity and shapeshifting powers until the heteropatriarchal system is restored. Thus, Ariel's corporeality is neither stably male nor female, but whatever Prospero wills into shape.

It is imperative to acknowledge that Ariel does not willingly work for Prospero as he is his imprisoned "slave" (Shakespeare 1.2.270). Prospero forcibly holds Ariel in a state of arrested development to reap the benefits of his mutability. Consequently, upon granting Ariel freedom at the end, Prospero relinquishes part of his patriarchal authority by releasing an empowered, active queer agent. From the outset, Ariel demands the freedom Prospero has "not yet" (Shakespeare 1.2.243) provided him, wishing to escape and be removed from the quest for heteropatriarchal reestablishment. This request is immediately met with verbal

abuse from Prospero, as he threatens to “rend an oak / And peg [Ariel] in his knotty entrails till / [He has] howled away twelve winters” “if [he] more murmur[s]” (Shakespeare 1.2.294-6) of liberty. Hence, Prospero’s paternal violence coerces Ariel into subordination, holding him hostage in an intermediate state of “not yet” (Shakespeare 1.2.243), in which Ariel is forced to undertake his demands. This echoes Bond Stockton’s sideways-growing queer children who have not advanced into adulthood until “we say it’s time” (6). Throughout the play, Prospero keeps Ariel in a queer state of deferral, rendering him a temporal anomaly. However, Ariel does not perpetually remain a sideways-growing child in Prospero’s possession as he is eventually liberated. The queer child Ariel turns into a queer adult as he eschews heterosexuality and the gender binary, refusing to facilitate reproductive futurity any further. To illustrate, Ariel claims his future will resemble the following: “Where the bee sucks, there suck I / In a cowslip’s bell I lie / There I couch when owls do cry. / On the bat’s back I do fly / After summer merrily. / Merrily, merrily shall I live now / Under the blossom that hangs on the bough” (Shakespeare 5.1.88-94). This peaceful, leisurely, insect-like existence is removed from the order that Prospero wishes to create as Ariel, living a solitary and asexual existence, is not a participant in heterosexual reproduction himself. Furthermore, he retains his shape-shifting abilities, remaining mutable but not in servitude to a heteropatriarchal structure, threatening this very order. Prospero loses control over Ariel’s queerness and can no longer consolidate power in Naples or ensure a conventional relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand solely through him. Thus, Prospero stunts Ariel’s growth to exploit his queer child’s suspended identity; but by granting Ariel freedom, he releases a queer figure that is disorderly and no longer useful for heteropatriarchal purposes. While Prospero can restore a constructed system with himself as the patriarch in Milan, his loss of control over queer individuals raises doubts about its sustainability.

Similarly, the enslaved Caliban is a figure suspended between identity categories. Prospero fosters and demonises this queer identity, naming it as a reason not to educate him into an appropriate state of masculine adulthood: “I pitied thee,/ Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour/One thing or other/[...] But thy vile race,/Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which good/natures” (Shakespeare 1.2.353-9). Caliban’s state of in-betweenness aids Prospero in maintaining his patriarchal authority on the island. Like Ariel, Caliban’s actual shape is one of contention as he is said to resemble an array of animalistic

and humanoid figures. Caliban is referred to as a “debauched” (3.2.25), “plain” (5.1.265), “strange” (2.2.27) fish, “puppy-headed monster” (2.2.149), a “tortoise” (1.2.316) or a “mooncalf” (3.2.20), rendering his physical attributes queerly ambiguous. Nevertheless, according to Prospero and Miranda’s assertions, he is a wicked, monstrous predator lacking learning abilities and consequently must be kept in violently enforced servitude (Shakespeare 1.2.320-74). Prospero’s derogatory language when referring to Caliban and the substantial benefits he derives from his service raise doubts regarding the sincerity of Prospero’s educational efforts. During the early modern period, childhood was part of a feminine or genderless sphere. The transition from unstable boyhood to stable manhood was marked by comprehensive education (Horbury 79). Prospero’s refusal to continue educating Caliban keeps him in this genderless sphere, rendering him stuck in a queer childhood and thereby useful to Prospero. In the absence of staff on the island, the paternal figure Prospero requires a servant who can undertake a variety of chores, including traditionally feminine ones. Indeed, Caliban complains about receiving domestic chores like “fetch[ing] in firing [...], scrap[ing] trenchering, [and] wash[ing] dish[es]” (Shakespeare 2.2.174-6). Hiewon Shin shares a similar standpoint, claiming that “it is obvious that Caliban is not being taught the values of masculinity. Rather, his instruction revolves around skills associated with women and femininity” (380). Consequently, Prospero’s other queer children, Miranda and Ariel, who are fundamental agents in his heteropatriarchal plan, and the patriarch Prospero himself, are spared from feminising, laborious, and distracting tasks that could destabilise Prospero’s desired order if they had to engage with them themselves. Accordingly, while Caliban is directly exempt from Prospero’s plan to re-establish a rightful heteropatriarchal order in Italy, his subjugation and domestic labour help maintain the patriarchal structure on the island. Hence, Prospero uses Caliban’s queerness to legitimise the withholding of education, thereby fostering Caliban’s gender-fluid state and trapping him in a genderless and feminine sphere, which is then exploited for labour under Prospero’s patriarchal rule.

Moreover, through Caliban’s forced enslavement and lack of education, Prospero evades his usurpation as the island’s patriarch and the failure of his long-term plans to regain and sustain dynastic power in Italy. Unlike Miranda, Caliban is not a blood relation to Prospero, and although inhabiting the position of his child, Caliban is not regarded as his dynastic heir. Prospero lacks the strict patrilineal line essential in the early modern period for families’ legal

and economic continuity (Tromly 68). But he does not compensate for this by making Caliban his quasi-heir or Miranda's husband as that would destabilise Prospero's rightful patriarchal order in Italy.⁴ Caliban is stopped from reproducing with Miranda, asserting: "[Prospero did] prevent me. / I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (Shakespeare 1.2.348-9). Notably, Caliban acts as a queer disrupter in this instance, undermining Prospero's dynastic authority and is ultimately only being prevented from doing so by violent subjugation. Prospero averts the production of further monstrous, misshapen Caliban-hybrids and reserves Miranda's reproductive abilities for Ferdinand, the future king of Naples, as their heterosexual union strengthens his dynastic power. In addition to avoiding a reproductive usurpation by the queer Caliban, Prospero circumvents the latter's rebellion, which serves as another instance of his queer defiance. If successful, a rebellion from Caliban, a lower-class figure and mere surrogate son, would topple the class system inherent in Prospero's agenda of dynastic reproduction. Notably, the early modern period saw social mobility as a threat to patriarchal structures (MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity* 2). Caliban encounters the drunkard Stephano and jester Trinculo, with whom he devises a plan to overthrow Prospero (Shakespeare 3.2.40-60). Caliban misidentifies them as powerful, supernatural beings, mistaking their alcohol for "celestial liquor" (Shakespeare 2.2.112). However, Caliban's two co-conspirators are ill-equipped for such a coup, something Caliban does not notice due to his manufactured ignorance regarding social standing, and consequently fails to remove Prospero from his patriarchal position. Therefore, Prospero's refusal to inform Caliban about the mechanics of politics and class retains his status as a queer child incapable of usurpation, upholding Prospero's position as the island's patriarch and ensuring his agenda of dynastic reproductive futurity but does not eliminate his queer unruliness.

While Prospero maintains his dynastic power on the island through this preservation of Caliban's state of queer childhood, which is already unruly, Caliban's unclear future and his later acquisition of knowledge surrounding power structures suggest an eventual maturation.

⁴ Orphaned Caliban becomes Prospero's 'child' when Prospero assumes the patriarchal position on the island. Previously, Caliban's mother, "this damned witch Sycorax" (Shakespeare 1.2.263), was ruling the island, paralleling Prospero's quest for a heteropatriarchal sphere with her matriarchal "mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible" (Shakespeare 1.2.264). The exact extent and machinations of her "earthy and abhorrent commands" (Shakespeare 1.2.273) are unclear, yet with her aging, deformed appearance and matriarchal power, she appears distinctly queer. Thus, Caliban's own familial background is far removed from Prospero's heteropatriarchal order.

This makes Caliban a potentially dangerous queer disruptor who threatens the stability of Prospero's order. After Caliban's failed rebellion, Prospero immediately forgives and keeps him as his slave: "Go, sirrah, to my cell. / [...] As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely" (Shakespeare 5.1.291-3). Therefore, Prospero overlooks Caliban's disobedience and keeps him in servitude regardless of his attempted transgressions, diverging from the more tyrannical fathers of early modern literature, who would have banished or physically harmed their disobedient sons (MacFaul, *Problem Fathers* 42). Prospero's lenience retains Caliban within his court in Italy, which jeopardises his established order, given Caliban's newfound knowledge concerning disruptive agents who could successfully challenge Prospero's patriarchal status. Caliban slowly resumes his masculine education and now knows that he was "a thrice double ass / [to] take this drunkard for a god, / And worship this dull fool!" (Shakespeare 5.1.295-7). This realisation indicates a maturation, ushering in the transformation of a queer child into a queer man, who remains "disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape" (Shakespeare 5.1.290-1). Caliban also claims that he will "be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (Shakespeare 5.1.294-5), meaning that he will remain in Prospero's servitude and not challenge the system. This statement appears insincere, considering the forcible nature and agency of Caliban's earlier attempt at usurpation, wishing "a plague upon the tyrant that [he] serve[s]" (Shakespeare 2.2.154) and passionately asserting his patriarchal rights (Shakespeare 3.2.40-2).⁵ Thus, there is a future threat of an uprising against Prospero's authority from the now-matured queer Caliban as he has already attempted a rebellion prior. This shows anew that although Prospero can maintain and regain patriarchal status, he finds himself with another protean queer child growing into a queer adult, thereby challenging the order he is trying to uphold. Prospero's heteropatriarchy has an unstable future and is entirely constructed by his manipulation.

Miranda, the final member of Prospero's tri-filial unit, also has the qualities of a queer child that he has cultivated. Prospero forcibly keeps her unaware of her identity as the princess of Milan before the beginning of the play, removing her as a political player who could oppose his plans. Prospero describes her as "[his] daughter, who / [is] ignorant of what [she is]" (Shakespeare 1.2.18). This is a state he has fashioned as Miranda, who cannot recall

⁵ Numerous critics have similarly questioned the sincerity of Caliban's assertions, including Joshua R. Held in *Caliban and the Rhetoric of Sincerity* (2017).

how and why they are on the island (Shakespeare 1.2.41-7), explains that he has “[b]egun to tell [her] what [she is], but stopped / And left [her] to a bootless inquisition, / Concluding ‘Stay. Not yet’” (Shakespeare 1.2.34-1.2.36). Therefore, like Ariel, Miranda was trapped in a state of delay prior to Prospero’s revelation, reminiscent of Bond Stockton’s configuration of the queer child. This means Miranda has been growing sideways, unaware of her royal authority and status, rendering her identity largely concealed and unstable. Prospero only divulges parts of Miranda’s identity once he has set his plan into motion and immediately incapacitates Miranda, preventing her from spoiling his foils as he bewitches: “Will ever after droop. Here cease more questions: / Thou art inclined to sleep. ’Tis a good dullness, / And give it way – I know thou canst not choose” (Shakespeare 1.2.184-6). Consequently, Prospero deliberately preserves Miranda’s ignorance through magical manipulation. His actual plan to reinstate himself and to secure his dynastic legacy remains hidden from Miranda. This choice prevents Miranda from disrupting his plans, given the indications of resistance already present in Act 1, where she urges: “If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. / [...] O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer: / [...] Had I been any god of power, I would / Have sunk the sea within the earth [...]” (Shakespeare 1.2.1-11). This illustrates her willingness to confront her father and envision herself as a male authority figure, a prospect that threatens Prospero’s plans and compels him to preserve her ignorance. Thus, Prospero intentionally holds Miranda in a state of queer ignorance, revealing only minimally and, with time, her position in his heteropatriarchal order to keep her compliant.

Furthermore, Miranda is fundamental to Prospero’s plans of patriarchal re-establishment as her reproductive heterosexual union with Ferdinand secures his dynastic lineage. Prospero manipulates this romantic connection to bring it to its rightful completion. He does not sufficiently educate Miranda about humanity; consequently, she cannot completely assess Ferdinand’s character or question the courtship. Thus, Prospero retains her in a state of childhood by fostering a naïveté that is easily manipulated for his reproductive agenda. Notably, childhood was perceived in early modern times “as a state of simple naïveté” (Higginbottom and Johnson 9). Miranda is effectively queered by her ignorance and becomes a malleable piece in Prospero’s plan. For instance, Prospero constructs Miranda and Ferdinand’s first meeting, in which Miranda encounters someone other than her father and Caliban for the first time (Shakespeare 1.2.446-7). She mistakes Ferdinand for a spirit that

“carries a brave form” (Shakespeare 1.2.412). She does not recognise him as a male suitor as she is unaware of the qualities that define both a man and a husband and must rely on her father’s identifications (Shakespeare 1.2.413-8). Her lack of reference renders her appraisal of Ferdinand’s qualities naïve. This ambiguity and potential artificiality of her affection towards Ferdinand become more explicit in her final lines of the play, stating: “How many goodly creatures are there here? / How beauteous mankind is! / O, brave new world / That has such people in’t” (Shakespeare 5.1.182-4). This statement implies a general infatuation with humanity and suggests that Miranda would have fallen in love with anyone that her father presented to her because she uses similar language to describe Ferdinand and the rest of the shipwrecked. Thus, rather than an innate desire for heterosexual reproduction, Prospero fosters Miranda’s queer naïveté, utilising it to engineer a romance between her and Ferdinand for his goals of dynastic lineage.

Additionally, Miranda receives an incomplete education from Prospero; while Caliban was not raised into adult masculinity, Miranda was not raised into adult femininity. Education shaped and solidified the behaviours expected of women in the early modern heteropatriarchal society, as young girls were prepared for subservience and domesticity and transitioned from unstable girlhood to stable womanhood (Moncrief and McPherson 4). Crucially, Miranda lacks female guidance or behavioural models, stating poignantly that she does not know “one of [her] sex” (Shakespeare 3.1.49). Thus, the queer child Miranda exposes, like her quasi-siblings, the instability and artificiality of her identity as she relies solely on Prospero’s education. Her behaviour is, however, not in accordance with ideas about early modern female subservience and appropriate passive roles during courtship (Jacobi 115; Shin 386). Instead, traits that would be considered masculine actively advance her relationship and, consequently, also Prospero’s reproductive agenda. To secure and stabilise Miranda and Ferdinand’s affection, Prospero separates the two, giving Ferdinand laborious work on the island and ordering Miranda to stay away from him. He does so out of fear of their fast and intense exchange (Shakespeare 1.2.451-6), reflecting the early modern anxieties of heterosexual passion out of wedlock. Nevertheless, Prospero needs Miranda to disregard his patriarchal authority and seek Ferdinand out anew so their courtship can progress. Indeed, she defies her father and pursues Ferdinand to her knowledge clandestinely – Prospero, in actuality, closely observing (Shakespeare 3.1.26-31). According to Slights,

Ferdinand does not meet her “with words of tenderness, but with grumbling as he complains about the laborious task” (368). As a result, she offers to carry the logs he is struggling with, unaware of the gendered division of labour and ready to execute a traditionally masculine task. Evidently, Miranda has not been taught that such an act is deemed unsuitable for a woman, and as an active queer agent persists in her offer despite his refusal. However, this incident prompts Ferdinand to embrace his role as a suitor, leading him to affirm his feelings for her and continue their courtship (Shin 385-386; Slight 368-9), which aids Prospero’s agenda of heterosexual union. Furthermore, it is Miranda who proposes marriage to him in this scene (Shakespeare 3.1.80-90), subverting gender expectations. This display of masculinity is something that her father welcomes watching from afar (Shakespeare 3.1.92-6), as he does not comment on it or seems to have taught Miranda otherwise, as Shin (386) also notes. Hence, Prospero preserves Miranda in a protean state, not instructing her into femininity but rather fostering masculine traits that aid her in her courtship, which serves his goal of heterosexual reproductivity.

Although Prospero benefits from Miranda’s arrested development, he also releases an order-destabilising queer child into Italian society who is progressing into a new stage of life through her upcoming marriage. Miranda has not only shown interest in the masculine arena of politics and disregarded her father’s patriarchal commands but also unwaveringly opposed Prospero’s mistreatment of Ferdinand when he says, “Beseech you, father” (Shakespeare 1.2.474). This is a direct result of her lack of schooling in traditionally appropriate behaviour of her time. Shin poignantly states, “Naples may be in for some startling social moments, once she is queen” (386). Hence, Miranda’s unstable identity, which facilitated her union with Ferdinand and furthered Prospero’s orchestration of a reproductive heterosexual union that secures his dynastic legacy is a future destabilising element. Miranda is never reformed into a subservient woman; rather, her ‘brave new world’ pronouncement introduces themes of masculine expansionism. Deanne Williams also claims that she “cast[s] herself as [a] conqueror and explorer” (5). Miranda’s flouting of patriarchal norms and her potential as a matured, domineering queen echo one of the main threats to the patriarchal order in early modern England: the prolonged reign of a female head of state; a woman, therefore, being the patriarch par excellence (MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity* 1). Prospero relinquishes his magic abilities in the final act (Shakespeare 5.1.51-7), losing his power over Miranda, who

remains equally queer as in the beginning. It is important to note that Miranda and Ferdinand's "nuptial" (Shakespeare 5.1.308) has not yet been "solemnized" (Shakespeare 5.1.308–9). Therefore, there is still a possibility that "her virgin-knot [breaks] before / All sanctimonious ceremonies" (Shakespeare 4.1.15-6), which would disrupt the early modern trajectory of appropriate heterosexual reproduction and courtship. By relinquishing his power, Prospero not only prematurely convinces himself that he has achieved an orderly heterosexual union but also loses the ability to enforce Miranda's compliance, unleashing a queer agent that may challenge the established order. This demonstrates that, since Prospero's desired heteropatriarchy relies on his manipulation, the order that he restores is destabilised by the queer agents he previously exploited once he cedes his control over them.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, Prospero's children – Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda – embody the queer identities of early modern children through their changeable corporality, gender instability, arrested development, and naïveté. Prospero fosters, enforces, and exploits this mutability for his plans to maintain, restore and secure his desired heteropatriarchal order on the island and in Italy by reclaiming his former title and coercing Miranda into a reproductive heterosexual union with Ferdinand. Through Prospero's magical manipulations and threats of paternal, patriarchal violence, he can orchestrate the events and suppress any resistance to his authority. However, Prospero's considerable efforts to re-establish and preserve heteropatriarchal structures may have been futile. While he manipulates these fluid identities for his benefit, he fails to recognise that he is nurturing family members who are growing into queer adults who can undermine his desired order. Consequently, by the play's end, Prospero's tri-filial unit has matured by gaining independence, knowledge, and political power but has remained as "eddy, troublant" and "antiassimilationist" (Kosofsky Sedgwick xii) as in the beginning. Prospero's children are released from his violent patriarchy without conforming to normative adulthood because he relinquishes his coercive parental powers by giving up magic. Prospero's act is premature, as his desired and presumed system has not yet demonstrated its sustainability; with Miranda unmarried, underscoring his queer family as a future threat. The disorderly traits of the tri-filial unit reflect early modern anxieties about subsequent social upheaval and women in positions of authority. This reliance on his

children's protean mutability exposes the artificiality of the heteropatriarchal regime with a patriarch at the head of the family. *The Tempest* is a play not about patriarchal victories so much as about the patriarch's desperate attempts to sustain his power in the face of the destabilising agents he has created himself, proving the fallibility and artificiality of the system itself.

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