

“My Ariel, chick, [...] Be free, and fare thou well!”:
Shakespeare’s Language in Millais’s *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1849–50)

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I. Introduction

Often overshadowed by the glory of *Opheelia* (1851-52) and later portrayal and fancy paintings as it is, *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1849-50) is a vivid proof of John Everett Millais’s brief engagement in fairy painting during its “Golden Age between 1840 and 1870” (Maas 11). *Ferdinand* is the artist’s first and last venture into this genre and a very experimental composition from his early Pre-Raphaelite career. An admirer of a caricaturist, Richard “Dicky” Doyle (Hunt; Millais), and a lifelong friend of Joseph Noel Paton as he was, Millais had never created any work of the genre after *Ferdinand* so that he has rarely been considered as a prominent example of the Victorian fairy painters. Yet *Ferdinand* stands out as unconventional representation of ethereal subjects among all numerous compositions from this category. It depicts ethereal figures including “tricksy” Ariel in completely different ways from precedent and contemporary representations which depict “graceful human pigmies” (Hunt 399). Millais conceived an unconventional fairy painting, which were derived from nothing other than Shakespeare’s language.

This paper is an attempt to highlight John Everett Millais’s *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* as a departure from conventional representations of *The Tempest* in the fairy genre. *Ferdinand* is a crucial painting in the longstanding career of the artist. It is one of the first Shakespearean works by Millais in his whimsical, Pre-Raphaelite style and demonstrates the elaborate depiction of

nature through its careful, meticulous observation. Exploring the preceding and contemporary works of the relevant genre, the theatrical adaptations of *The Tempest* and different editions of the text Millais might have seen and read, we will first set Millais's representation in the Victorian context. The focus will then move on to the depictions of Millais's Ariel and subordinate sprites and clarify the difference between the pictorial representations of Millais and his contemporaries as well as the theatrical ones. Simultaneously, following the transition in his own representations of Ariels from fair, blonde, angelic figures in the initial sketch and oil study to a translucent figure in stark green in the final format, we will prove that the subtle qualities of Millais's ethereal subjects are the result of the gradual amalgamation of his imagination and Shakespeare's language in *The Tempest*. Overall, we will elucidate that Millais produced a work which differs itself from the preceding and contemporary representations of *The Tempest* by applying such qualities derived solely from Shakespeare's text on his canvas.

Ferdinand may be regarded as a pivotal composition in the artist's career mainly for two reasons. First, it was the very first painting based on the Shakespearean play executed by the painter after the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848. Secondly, the painting is regarded as his "first attempt to paint nature in a radical Pre-Raphaelite manner" (Rosenfeld 36). Following the Pre-Raphaelite principle to stay true to nature, he aimed to depict "all [he] could see" (Prettejohn 172) and pursued reality on canvas; such an eagerness is directly reflected in the detailed botanical background in highly saturated colours in his own pictorial representation. Besides these facts, there is another reason why this work matters in his career: As already mentioned, it was the only example where Millais invested in conceiving his own fairy painting.

Long before *Ferdinand* stirred the exhibition space in 1850 with another ambitious work by Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop, 1849-50)*, the audience had already witnessed the heyday of fairy painting. Ethereal subjects such as fairies and spirits have appeared in British

literature since the fourteenth century; yet the inspirations for the works of the fairy genre mainly came from Shakespeare’s plays such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* (Maas 12). In most cases, fairies and spirits were depicted in a similar way as described by Millais’s Pre-Raphaelite peer, Hunt, in his comment on *Ferdinand*:

We must put ourselves back to the date when it was painted. The exhibition works were full of pictures of fairies and attendant spirits, and without exception we may see that these were all conceived as graceful human pigmies. (399; emphasis mine)

Hunt astutely points out that fairy painting dominated exhibition spaces in the mid-nineteenth century; the most notable aspect about this phenomenon is that they were all depicted in similar appearances as “graceful human pigmies.”

This convention has been, in fact, present before the arrival of the Golden Age of fairy painting as observed in preceding works from the late eighteenth century: For example, *Titania and Bottom* (c.1790) by Henry Fuseli, based on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, displays an almost naked figure of Titania in milky-white skin. Surrounding her and well-muscled, donkey-headed Bottom, there fly and stand attendant fairies and spirits dimly tinted in white who appear either naked or dressed in neoclassical garments. David Scott’s *Puck Fleeing Before the Dawn* (1837), also based on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and another fairy painting of his based on *The Tempest*, *Ariel and Caliban* (1837) present more playful, amusing figures of spirits. These precedent figures made their ways into the later examples such as Richard Dadd’s *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* based on *The Tempest* (1842) and the painting with the same title by Robert Huskisson (1847). Almost stark-naked, serene, human-like figures, dancing and flying in the air are observable in the latter two works; as these elegant dancers remind their beholders of dancing performers on stage, often suspended with wires from ceiling, theatrical influence on these fairy

paintings is distinctive and unmissable. Literature had been a predominant source of inspirations for subject matter while “the visual impact and contemporary pantomime, theatre and opera was paramount” (Maas 13); art, likewise, had a considerable influence on theatre as later discussed, and these two realms often shared the same type of fairies in their visual representations.

II. Millais’s Familiarity with *The Tempest* in Victorian Culture

Let us then explore the Victorian culture, especially in the realms of theatre and publication, which likely allowed Millais to familiarise himself with various adaptations and interpretations of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.

Publishing was a thriving industry in the Victorian period so that various editions of Shakespeare’s plays became available: By 1849 when the artist was producing *Ferdinand*, three individual editions of *The Tempest* were published (1823, 1830 and 1849) and so were ninety-one editions of “Complete Works” since the beginning of the century (Hollingsworth 442). Some of them were introduced into both public and private libraries, including the library at the Royal Academy which Millais occasionally visited as a student. According to the records of the R.A. library, the only editions of Shakespeare accessible to the students at the time Millais and his Pre-Raphaelite fellows attended were the Boydell edition presented by Boydell himself in 1804 and the Chalmers edition of 1805 (Savage 43-44). It is plausible that Millais as a humble student who could not afford the latest published editions had read them at the library. I believe it is possible that Millais was familiar with the Chalmers edition based on the First Folio of 1623, since the format of the stage directions and lines in the excerpts attached to the 1850 catalogue descriptions of *Ferdinand* accord with that of this very edition; hence, the quotations from *The Tempest* in this paper are based on and derived from this particular edition. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Millais may have consulted the Boydell edition, which is an illustrated edition derived from

a collection of paintings called “Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery” founded to “establish an English School of Historical Painting” (Christian 217).

As much as reading, theatre was indispensable in cultural life of the Victorians; the heightened bardolatry allowed Shakespearean adaptations, often directed by actor-managers such as William Macready, to dominate the stages in the nineteenth century. Considering the fact that Millais, in his early career, frequented theatres to “earn small sums by making sketches of the actors and actresses” (Millais 83), the artist must have been no stranger to the adaptations of *The Tempest*. Even though it cannot be determined which performance of *The Tempest* he actually had seen, it is feasible to speculate some productions he had had a chance to see.

For example, Macready’s *Tempest* starring Helen Faucit and Priscilla Horton as Ariel was put on stage at Covent Garden fifty-five times in 1838 (Norwood 348-416; Poole 56). The 1842 production with George Vanderhoff and Miss Rainforth was performed at least eighteen times, and the 1847 production at Sadler’s Wells, starring Samuel Phelps and Julia St George as an angelic Ariel (Orgel 70), would be another candidate. Sadler’s Wells, in addition, hosted another production of the play starring Miss Carlstein in the year of Millais’s execution of *Ferdinand*, 1849 (Norwood 348-416). Mary Bennett adds to this that Millais might have seen “the Shakespeare [N]ight at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden on 7th December 1847” (503). This event is particularly remarkable as it offered an opportunity for the Victorian public to see the enacted scenes from various Shakespearean plays with which they might have found familiar. It also serves as a great example of the heightened bardolatry at the time as it was held in order to raise a fund for the purchase and preservation of Shakespeare’s house in Stratford-upon-Avon. According to the content on the programme of the event, there were nine performances shown based on particular scenes from Shakespearean plays such as *Henry VIII*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Winter’s Tale*. It included a performance called “The Story of Prospero” based on Act 1 Scene 2 from *The Tempest*, in which Priscilla Horton performed

Ariel as she did in Macready's 1838 production: It is remarkable that this was the exact scene represented in *Ferdinand*. This event must have provided an introduction to Shakespeare's works to some in the audience who were not familiar with the plays included in their programme as well as entertained those who had already been acquainted with the world of his plays. Though mostly speculative, these examples also illustrate there were abundant choices for Millais to familiarise himself with *The Tempest*; there were various adaptations which stimulated the young artist's imagination in his process of recreating the world of the enchanted island.

Millais could have possibly been familiar with Shakespeare in the contemporary theatre as mentioned earlier, and considering the principal nature of the text as a script for theatre, it must not be reasonable to separate his own pictorial representation of the play from his possible theatre experiences. However, Millais's composition neither appears to be greatly under theatrical influence nor exudes the mood which pervaded the Victorian stages when compared with other works of the same subject matter. In the compositions of the works by Dadd and Huskisson with the same title of *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*¹ as earlier mentioned, an element of a proscenium arch from the traditional theatre is distinctly observable, as a rocky semicircular arch is placed on the left-hand side of the canvas in both paintings. Furthermore, in the case of Huskisson, the artist painted more than one semicircular arch in his composition: The camel-coloured frame on the foreground is not the actual frame of the painting but the trompe l'oeil arch painted by the artist. Having no such obvious, theatrical features as these, the impact of theatre on Millais's canvas appears relatively small.

III. "How lush and lusty the grass looks!": The Vivid Colour Scheme on *Ferdinand* Compared to Other Fairy Paintings

Regarding the ingenuity of Millais's rendition in comparison to the works of his contemporaries under the theatrical influence, it might be worth paying

attention to the colours used in these works. The bright and luminous colours which dominate Millais’s composition were not the colours recognisable in other canvases based on Shakespeare’s plays. Fuseli’s *Titania and Bottom*, as already mentioned, presents a very obscure and dark-toned background behind dim shapes of the fairies in white and light gray around the figure of Bottom. Scott’s *Puck Fleeing Before the Dawn* and *Ariel and Caliban* share the eerie and earthly pigments such as olive, deep orange and gray.² Regarding the paintings by Dadd and Huskisson, their colour schemes appear much softer and brighter than those of the preceding ones, yet they are still occupied by dark and obscure colours. By comparison, the colours constituting *Ferdinand* are all luminous and clarified. The creation of such vivid colours on canvas was possible only by the particular technique on which Millais and his Pre-Raphaelite peers experimented, the “wet-on-wet” technique. In this painting technique, colour pigments are applied over a canvas covered in half-wet white pigment. The saturated colours achieved with this technique give the whole painting a photographic impression and imbue the otherworldly event happening on canvas with liveliness.

Among the several colours applied on *Ferdinand*, particularly the mass of green hues must attract the attention of the beholders, and these green colours pervading the background foliage echo a certain quotation from Shakespeare’s text: Landing on the island with the King of Naples and his courtiers, Gonzalo, “a noble Neapolitan” (I. ii. 161), exclaims “How green!” (II. i. 55). This striking remark must be uttered with awe at the wild nature surrounding them on the island, including the lush grassland he and the Italian nobles are standing upon as suggested by his earlier comment: “How lush and lusty the grass looks!” (II. i. 55). The gradations of colour in the nature from the green of tree frogs to the straw colour, together pierce the eyes of the beholders, and visually heighten the exclamation of Gonzalo. As will be later discussed, this greenness even permeates the bodies of Ariel and the subordinate sprites, and occupies more than half of the whole space.

As earlier mentioned, *Ferdinand* is one of the first paintings which Millais

fully engaged in drawing “en plein air,” following a Pre-Raphaelite principle to depict “all one could see”; as seen in later works such as *The Woodman’s Daughter* (1851) and *Ophelia* (1852), the artist continued to engaged in representing greenness in nature. Considering these facts, Shakespeare’s text should not have been the sole reason for such a striking green colour on this particular work. Yet, more than any other painting, *Ferdinand* is a fine example where the colour scheme of the source text is well reflected on canvas. Also, having altered the background from blue sky and ocean in the oil study (1849) to green foliage in the final version, Millais might have been aware of its evocativeness of the particular lines from the original text.

Contrasting to the vivid green of foliage, flamboyant scarlet of Ferdinand’s tunic also stands out and these two colours bring out each other: Meanwhile, a puzzled look on his face makes this naïve prince appear overwhelmed by the greenness of exuberant, thriving plants on the mystical island. This seems to heighten vulnerability and smallness Ferdinand must be feeling while lured and confused by Ariel and sprites.

IV. The Transition of Millais’s Ariel Throughout the Three *Ferdinands*

Greenness is certainly not the only element which separates Millais’s work from contemporary works of the same subject matter. In terms of the subjects depicted on canvas, Ariel and its subordinate sprites must have appeared and even still do quite different and radical. When compared to serene figures of these ethereal characters like ballet dancers on stage by Millais’s contemporaries, his Ariel and sprites are certainly unconventional in their appearances and movements.

Let us then focus attention on the transition of Millais’s interpretation and depictions of Ariel in particular by comparing *Ferdinand* with the early studies, independent drawing in pen and ink (1848) and an oil sketch (1849). As is customary for Millais to produce several studies in his painting process, it seems the artist created these two in order to experiment with composition

and figures for the large-scaled *Ferdinand*. For *Mariana* (1850-51) based on Tennyson’s poem, Millais initially conceived a pen and ink study of a female figure who stands straight with a painful look on her face while biting a tip of a cloth (1850; illus. in Millais 104). The composition and figure of this study quite differ from those in the final oil version of a woman arching her back; this suggests such studies and early drawings remained as part of the artist’s experimental process and did not always make their ways to the final versions. Also, in the case of *Ferdinand*, as it was initially commissioned by the dealer named Wethered, Millais might have conceived them to let his commissioner know of his initial plan. Surprisingly or not, while the Ariels seen in both his pen-and-ink drawing and oil sketch seem to echo contemporary stage Ariels, Ariel in his final format of *Ferdinand* appears alien to such stage representations of the figure. We will begin by considering the two earlier representations of the spirit by Millais in comparison with the representations in the contemporary theatre.

Millais’s early drawing of the relevant scene in ink on paper and small-scale oil study interestingly illustrate the artist’s initial image of the spirit which suggest the influence of theatrical representations of Ariel. From its feminine features and streamlined form with bird wings, fair skin and blonde hair, it is quite apparent that he initially considered depicting the spirit in an angelic and serene form in accordance with stage conventions of the time. On the Victorian stage, as it had been since the previous century, Ariel was a female role in general. The engravings of the stage productions clearly reflect such a convention; even the illustrations which are not direct copies of the stage performance still depict Ariel in a female form, occasionally with angelic features and flying in the air.

Among several productions of *The Tempest* the artist had likely seen, all three productions, Macready’s production in 1838, the 1847 performance at Sadler’s Wells and “The Story of Prospero” at the Shakespeare Night in 1847, featured female actors performing Ariel, in angelic forms. Priscilla Horton, who performed the spirit role in the two previously mentioned

productions, could have provided inspirations: In the print titled “Priscilla Horton as Ariel in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Covent Garden 1838” (V&A), the popular singer-actress adorned with sea plants and creatures such as “an elaborate headdress of corals and small shells [...]” (V&A collection) appears very feminine and erotic. She had mastered the art of hovering over stage suspended with wires before her debut as Ariel and her floating image might have influenced Millais’s interpretation and reconstruction of the character. The first production in which she performed the role turned out to be a great success, as “it was performed fifty-five times that season,” and the popularity partly owed to the floating act of Horton’s Ariel (Martineau 158). This popularity was recorded in the numerous lithographs as well as paintings. The Irish painter, Daniel Maclise painted a portrait of Horton (1838-9, Royal Shakespeare Company Collection) a yellow-gold costume too short to hide her knees, with a rose-coloured shawl which floats around her shoulders in the air. In this version, the feminine curves and graceful manners of the performer are underlined and this kind of representation might have affected Millais’s initial concept.

Surely, the theatrical representations might not be only responsible for such a convention of depicting the spirit as female. Stephen Orgel states that throughout the seventeenth century, Ariel had been a male role, taking into account Davenant’s explicitly male Ariel “provided with a consort,” a female spirit named Milcha. However, with Dryden’s production in which Ariel appeared as a female, the new century had been, or so it seemed, content with Ariel as a female role (77). While most scholars do not make further remarks on such a transition in theatre, Russel Jackson argues that the conventional portrayal of a female Ariel was a result of reciprocal influences between the realm of theatre and that of painting. In his discussion regarding the effort towards historical accuracy made by the theatre managers and producers of the nineteenth century, he points out that “Ariel was a sylph (played by a woman) in the conventions of contemporary ‘fairy painting’” even though the play “afforded opportunity for accuracy in the costumes of the court, the

sailors and the human inhabitants of the island” (158). The idea of a female Ariel, in this sense, could be regarded as a fruit of the prevailing preferences of both theatre and art worlds, which was under the domination of the Italian Renaissance art at the RA in terms of physical representations of figures on canvas.

By undergoing such an experimental process as previously discussed, Millais ended up with a quite different and surprising result. His final representation of Ariel, a spirit in completely luminous green, appears poised between human and animal, as described as “half human and half like birds” (Rossetti, *The P.R.B. Journal* 232), besides between female and male. These subhuman, androgynous and insubstantial qualities of this Ariel must serve as a proof of the artist’s close attention to Shakespeare’s text.

First of all, throughout the text, Ariel appears to have a dual nature; nonhuman and humanlike, as respectively underlined by its own act and the words of other characters. Such a duality had been observable in various fairy paintings; yet in case of Millais, the whimsical appearance of Ariel appears to represent a particular feature of this character in *The Tempest*. In the beginning of the play, Ariel displays magical acts beyond human control, such as raising a storm and a fire as well as hiding a ship (I. ii. 195-236). Simultaneously, from its report to Prospero, we are informed that the spirit is capable of wide-range tasks, including “to fly, / [t]o swim, to dive into the fire, to ride / [o]n the curled clouds” (I. ii. 190-2). Ariel’s actions associate itself with the four classical elements; not only with the air as its name “Ariel” suggests, but also with the water, the fire (I. ii. 191) and the earth (I. ii. 255-6). The miraculous acts performed by the spirit suggest that it is an unworldly and untameable being, free from human control.

On the other hand, Ariel’s rebellious attitude towards Prospero evokes the image of a disobedient pupil against his tutor, and displays itself very humanlike. During the conversation with its “master” (I. ii. 216), the spirit mostly remains meek and submissive as a child to his father. In spite of its superhuman ability to control nature, Ariel is unable to undo the spell by

fact that in Shakespeare’s text, the spirit is sometimes addressed as “he” by itself and others (I. ii. 193; III. ii. 151-2). However, this addressing of “he” must not suggest the particular gender of the spirit, considering the nature of early modern English: According to Sylvia Adamson, in the language of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the personal pronoun “he/his/him” was used not only for referring to the masculine gender of an addressee but also to nonhuman subjects. She states that “where we would use *its*, Shakespeare and his contemporaries used *his*” (215). In this sense, in the understanding of other characters from *The Tempest*, Ariel is nonhuman and ungendered, hence called “he.” In other words, the concept of the spirit’s gender is perpetually unsettled between male and female. If we take a closer look at Millais’s painting, thereupon, we notice Ariel here appears neither as soft and plump as a woman nor as masculine and well-muscled as a man, but an androgynous being; such an appearance must claim that Millais’s representation shares the ambiguity of Ariel’s gender originally derived from Shakespeare’s texts. As Shakespeare has left it unclear, Millais let his Ariel remain mysterious and suggestive.

Finally, as a shape-changer, Ariel’s insubstantiality is evident in Shakespeare’s text, and that is visually connoted in Millais’s representation. The vivid fluorescent green colour of Ariel and its subordinate sprites, at first sight, stands out, yet we eventually realise that this particular colour recalls us not only of the grass but also the greenness of the ocean, from which the “sea nymph” Ariel and the “lured” Ferdinand landed. Besides, this greenness of high transparency actually lets us see through Ariel’s body, and they are assimilated to the greenness of the foliage and the grassland. This translucence of its body and the effect of its merging into the background allow this spirit appear as light as air, and also, invisible.

Ariel in this scene, as already mentioned, is supposed to be pretending as a sea nymph, and that also suggests it must remain invisible to everyone apart from Prospero:

PROSPERO.

Go make thyself like a nymph o'th' sea;
 Be subject to no sight but thine and mine, invisible
 To every eyeball else. Go take this shape
 And hither come in't. Go! Hence with diligence. (I. ii. 302-5)

As the following stage direction “ARIEL, *invisible*” (375.1) implies, “[t]he sea-nymph costume serves as a reminder of [its] invisibility” (Vaughan and Vaughan, 177) on the stage, and in Millais’s pictorial language, the green “membrane” of Ariel serves as an invisible cloak.

Shifting our attention to Ferdinand’s face, he looks quite vacant, confused by not knowing where he should look at, listening to the mystical sound from nowhere: This blank expression in his eyes must suggest Ariel on Millais’s canvas is also invisible to him. As the prince of Naples recognised, Ariel’s singing is “no mortal business”; unlike the mortals, the spirit keeps shifting its voice and form, and bewilders humans in both Shakespeare’s text and Millais’s adaptation.

For these certain qualities discussed above, Millais’s final representation of Ariel must have appeared daring to the Victorian beholders and defies the conventional image of the spirit as developed by preceding and contemporary artists and theatre producers.

V. “This is no mortal business nor no sound”: *Ferdinand’s* Musicality Echoing the Bard’s Text

Finally, let us focus attention on a particular quality which proves *Ferdinand’s* affinity with Shakespeare’s language instead of the Victorian adaptations, musicality. To begin with, let us examine the musicality of Shakespeare’s text. For example, Stephen Orgel explains that “[n]o Shakespeare play calls for more music, and of more various kinds, than *The Tempest*” (220). Seng points out that “none of [the other plays by

Shakespeare] puts so much emphasis on ‘dispersed’ music, performed as if it came from all over the stage” (252) and Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan agree with this point, stating the whole play of *The Tempest* is structured by music. There appear numerous scenes in which the characters sing and play instruments as well as dance to the sound. The Vaughans state that, as if to realise Caliban’s depiction of the island full of “[s]ounds and sweet airs” (3.2.136), “[t]he atmosphere of *The Tempest*’s enchanted island is created largely through sound” (17). The stage directions calling for auditory effects throughout the play are essential in the stream of the narrative, as some particular music works to push the narrative forward and supplement the information for the audience. This is evident when we focus on music performed by Ariel, who sings four different songs, “Come unto these yellow sands,” “Full fathom five thy father lies” from Act 1 Scene 2, on which *Ferdinand* is mainly based, “While you here do snoring lie” in Act 2 Scene 1, and “Where the bee sucks, there suck I” from Act 5 Scene 1. These songs sometimes guide and lead people on the island and function as “a vehicle for Prospero’s magic” (Vaughan and Vaughan 18).

If we extend our discussion to musicality in Millais’s painting, this statement of the Vaughans appears quite relevant to the subject matter of the composition, which is based on the scene in which Ariel introduces one of these songs to the shipwrecked Ferdinand:

ARIEL. [Sings.]

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

SPIRITS.

Ding dong.

ARIEL. Hark, now I hear them.

SPIRITS.

Ding dong bell. (I. ii. 397-406)

Here is depicted the scene where the “quaint,” “delicate,” “dainty,” and “tricksy” spirit (I. ii. 318; IV. i. 49; V. i. 95, 226), Ariel, dressed as a “sea-nymph” (I. ii. 303, 317), sings to infuse false information into Ferdinand, the Prince of Naples, who sets foot onto the “magical island,” that his father has died in the shipwreck which he himself has just survived.

Millais possibly intended to emphasise such musicality derived from the text, and that can be observed both in its catalogue entry as well as on canvas. Millais attached an excerpt of this particular song of Ariel with the line of the confused Ferdinand; “Where should this music be ? i’ the air or the earth ?” (“The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts. The Eighty Second” 24) to the exhibited catalogue in 1850. In terms of poses and actions of the depicted subjects, Millais’s representation appears more mobile and evocative, compared to those by his fellow Victorians such as Dadd and Huskisson which are static and tableau-like: The representation of the young man hesitantly stepping forward on the ground, and the pose of Ariel who picks up the hem of his hood to breathe the song in his ear allowed the audience to instantly grasp the situation. Furthermore, the half perplexed and half amused expression of Ferdinand, his hand covering one of his ears, Ariel’s pose as well as the facial expressions on “all his quality” (I. i. 192-93) or the subordinate sprites—some puckering their mouths to whistle, some giggling—all suggest there is a whispering, echoing and whimsical music performed and heard. The pose of one of the sprites lacing its hands in front of its chest also seems to suggest it is a member of the chorus accompanying Ariel’s singing, while the blue-eyed member on the far right “blows on a blade of grass” (Rosenfeld 38) as if to add another strange sound to the vocal. The music created by such a chorus, as Ferdinand earlier testifies, “crept by [him] upon the water [...] with its sweet airs” (I. ii. 392-4).

Furthermore, it is notable that Millais’s representation portrays Ariel holding an instrumental object. Though the original stage direction does

not clearly specify which instrument the spirit is supposed to play, the artist appears to be certain about this matter. As already introduced, Millais produced an early drawing and a sketch of the scene with completely different portraits of Ariel. In these earlier versions, both Ariels appear with an U-shaped stringed object which reminds us of a lute, while the final version of *Ferdinand* depicts the spirit fingering a rather round and small object. Rosenfeld considers this “a mother-of-pearl conch shell, stringed and made into a musical instrument” (38) and a seashell seems to reflect the fact that Ariel in this scene is pretending to be “a sea-nymph.” Just like the blade of grass blown by one of the sprites as aforementioned, this stringed instrument turns out to be Millais’s own invention and echoes Shakespeare’s language.

Considering the representation of music in painting, we must always pay attention to the link between music and theatre in the Victorian period and how closely they were associated with each other. For instance, the Shakespeare Night of 1847 which Millais had likely seen serves as a great example to illustrate the affinity of music and theatre: In between the various small-scale performances of Shakespeare’s tragedies, comedies and histories, several Shakespearean music pieces were performed. They included the performances of Beethoven’s overture to *Coriolanus*, Sir Henry Bishop’s overture, “introducing popular airs from Shakespeare’s plays” (*The Shakespeare Night* (programme) 12) and Mendelssohn’s overture to *The* [sic] *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This clearly shows that around the time Millais was inspired to paint his first fairy painting, music and theatre had not been separated and been closely involved at least in the entertainment industry as they were both performed on the same stage for the same spectators.

Music was essential at the Victorian theatres staging Shakespeare’s plays so that Millais’s focus on music in the play might have been under the influence of this stage convention: Yet, subtle music depicted on canvas appears closer to that in the text rather than operatic, spectacular music in the stage productions. In this way, musicality in *Ferdinand* appears to be a crucial quality which makes this work more unique and definitely different from the

preceding and contemporary works treating the same subject matter.

VI. “A pea-green monster” or an “elfin creature”?: The Victorian Reception of *Ferdinand*

As possibly expected, the unique representation of *The Tempest* invited conflicting responses and criticism. As for the negative response, the “bat-like” figure of Ariel with its eerie subordinate sprites was not favoured by some patrons such as the initial commissioner for the work, a man called Wethered, who showed disapproval by asking the artist to make it more “sylph-like” (Rossetti, *The P.R.B. Journal* 246-47). The Academy appeared not to be fond of the outcome as they displayed the work “on the ground” (Rossetti, *The P.R.B. Journal* 272-75), which was a very unnoticeable location at the Exhibition in 1850, while the artists craved for having their works displayed “on the line.”

The critics mostly made negative comments and expressed their dissatisfaction with this work. The *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* ruthlessly called Millais's Ariel “a pea-green monster” (82). While admitting the subject and atmosphere of *Ferdinand* were “less offensive” than those of another exhibited work, *Christ in the House of His Parents*, which was slammed by Charles Dickens, the *London Times* called the work “scarcely more pardonable in style,” and rejected Ariel and the sprites “in the attitudes and shapes of green goblins” (5).

The *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, described them in a similar way, sarcastically referring to the illustrations of goblin figures in “a German goblin story” which “come under the malicious trespass act when they set their obscene little claws on the enchanted island” (355-360).³ The mention of “a German goblin story” must refer to the pervading influence of a certain publication of that time; the first English translation of the brothers Grimm's *Popular Stories* was published in a volume with widely influential illustrations by George Cruikshank in 1823-26. Though disparagingly, *Tait's*

comment actually points out that Millais’s representation, to some extent, shares the same quality of the ethereal figures narrated by the Grimms and those reimaged by Cruickshank: To some Victorian eyes, Millais’s fairies certainly appeared both English and foreign.

Most positive comments, in the meantime, came from Millais’s own artistic community; nevertheless, there were surely some who appreciated the work, considering the fact that it was purchased at the price of £150, higher than its initial commissioned price (Rossetti, *Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters* 83). Let us here, once again, pay attention to Hunt’s comment on *Ferdinand* which keenly describes the ingenuity of his friend’s representation:

[...] Millais, at one burst, treated them as elfin creatures, strange shapes such as might lurk away in the shady groves and be blown about over the surface of a mere, making the wanderer wonder whether the sounds they made were anything more than the figments of his own brain. (399; emphasis mine)

Here he acclaims his friend’s bold presentation of Ariel and the sprites as “elfin creatures” as compared with the “graceful human pigmies” depicted by their contemporaries. W. M. Rossetti also expressed a favourable view about its difference from the conventional presentation of Ariel as a “ballet-girl” (*Præraphaelite Diaries and Letters* 360).

As well as his fellow Pre-Raphaelites, Millais’s depictions of Ariel and the sprites likely caught attention of some of his contemporary artists; the cartoonist and illustrator, Richard Doyle who came to the RA exhibition left numerous satirical sketches based on “either the works of art exhibited, their titles or the names of the artists listed” and some of them also show “other visitors” on his exhibition catalogue (*Royal Academy of Arts*). Among many drawings of “puns, caricatures, parodies or flights of fancy” (*Royal Academy of Arts*), particularly notable sketches must be the ones inspired by Millais’s *Ferdinand* (Doyle). Throughout the lower half of the page of the catalogue where Millais’s work is introduced, Doyle drew various sketches of Ariel

playing the stringed instrument behind the figure of Ferdinand as well as the mischievous goblin-like figures. Though it is hard to tell if this practice of Doyle is supposed to be a positive reaction or not, it is quite evident that he, as an artist, found Millais's representation amusing (See Asano for a further discussion on the artistic relationship of Millais and Doyle).

As seen from these responses toward *Ferdinand*, the work was not widely appreciated and its evaluation remained uncertain at the time of its exhibition; however, this controversy stemmed from the critics' awareness that Millais's representation is very different from the fairy paintings with which they had been familiar.

VII. Conclusion

Thus far, we have considered various distinctions of *Ferdinand* in terms of its contrasts to the preceding and contemporary paintings and theatrical productions based on the same subject matter. The overall composition and arrangement of the subjects as well as colour scheme of Millais's rendition separate itself from the contemporary works which were quite close to the theatrical representations of his time, while his early drawings echo the conventional representations of a feminine Ariel and the sprites. The history of the theatre adaptations of the play and representations in fairy paintings show that the idea of a female Ariel and her ethereal companions could have been an amalgam of the preferences of both the art world and the theatre world, as they were interactive. This underlines the ingenuity of the result, and suggests that the transition from the earlier depiction of the human-like, feminine subjects to the final version of an androgynous Ariel and whimsical sprites possibly derived from another source of inspiration, the original text by Shakespeare. It also explains the controversial responses towards the painting from the art world, due to its radical depictions of ethereal subjects. At the end of the play, Prospero utters his final lines solely towards Ariel; "My Ariel, chick, [...] Then to the elements / Be free, and fare thou well!" (V.

i. 332-35) Just as Shakespeare’s Ariel is set free from servitude to Prospero, so Millais’s Ariel is liberated from the shackles of the conventional dancer-like figure in the visual representations.

NOTES

- 1 John Christian discusses Huskisson’s work as follows:

The work is indebted to one of the same subject by Richard Dadd (Private Collection), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842, but the main influence is undoubtedly the stage. The action is seen through a painted arch reminiscent of a proscenium arch in a theatre, with symbolic figures painted above in a manner still found in some theatres built or refurbished during the Victorian era. As for the ‘actors,’ they fly around as if on wires and seem to be caught in the gaslight or limelight that revolutionized the early Victorian theatre, and were never more effectively employed than in the ballets and pantomimes in which fairies so often played a central role. (230)
- 2 According to George Field’s *Chromatography; Or, A Treatise on Colours and Pigments: And of Their Powers in Painting* (London: Tilt and Bogue, 1841), when green pigment is “mixed with purple, it becomes the other extreme tertiary, *olive*” (223). Field further describes olive colour as follows:

[T]he antagonist, or harmonizing contrast of olive, is a deep orange; and like blue also, it is a retiring colour, the most so of all the colours, being the penultimate of the scale, or nearest of all in relation to black, and at last, theoretically, of the regular distinctions of colours. (264)

Having stated as above, Field explains the importance of this colour is “as great as that of black” (264) in nature and painting.
- 3 “[T]he malicious trespass act” in this comment might literally imply the Malicious Trespass Act enacted in 1827, which, together with the Vagrancy Act in 1824, dragged out many children and young people into courtrooms and gaols under the name of law (Johnston).

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