

## A Chorus with the Sea: An Ecocritical Reading of Mermaids in YA Fictions

Being a mixture of human and sea creature(s), mermaids exemplify what Dennis Todd calls "liminal creatures," whom "straddle boundaries between categories and thus neutralize conventional definitions" (Joseph 139). Yet, surprisingly, most literary studies of mermaids favor the human side over the non-human. To fill this gap, this paper examines mermaids in Sarah Porter's *The Lost Voices Trilogy* and Kiera Cass' *The Siren* from an ecocritical perspective.

Cheryll Glotfelty notes that ecocritics are interested in fiction as a form of environmental literature, which "concerns itself with the human relationship to nature." The nature in this paper refers to sea/ocean, which, to borrow from oceanic studies, encourages "capacious possibilities for new forms of relationality through attention to the sea's properties, conditions, and shaping or eroding forces" (Blum 152). Both authors give their sea a killing force through the songs of mermaids, but the voice also contains a healing power when used differently. The mermaid protagonists, Luce and Kahlen, turn from killers to healers, encouraging other mermaids and humans to do the same. While Luce forces humans to stop "killing the mermaids . . . [and] the ocean," Kahlen shows how silence, or ignorance, can be more devastating than killing (*The Twice Lost* 243).

To answer this year's call for papers at ChLA, I show how mermaids embody the turbulent waters, and I argue that they call for a refreshed reading for refreshing the waters. This reading refreshes the meaning of agency as the OED defines it, an "organization established to provide a particular service, typically one that involves organizing transactions between two other parties." Considering mermaids as agents of the sea and of humans, one sees that their liminality denies a human/nature dichotomy, and allows communication between the two. I will compare the two authors' portrayal of mermaids with emphasis on mermaids' body, their voice, and most importantly their roles in promoting communication and understanding of human and non-human relationships: mermaids/sea, mermaids/humans, and humans/sea. The refreshed relation demands that human readers listen to the voices and silence of others, negotiate an eco-friendly future, and join the chorus with sea right now.

### Works Cited

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