

The Changeling Sea Short Guide

The Changeling Sea by Patricia A. McKillip

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Changeling Sea Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Themes.....	6
Key Questions.....	7
Literary Precedents.....	9
Related Titles.....	10
Copyright Information.....	11



Characters

Periwinkle — Peri for short — is a young woman who has lost her father at sea. She lives with her mother until her grief-stricken mother becomes too difficult to live with. Peri then retires to an abandoned shack on the beach.

She decides to put a hex on the sea and force it to give back her father. While making the hex, she meets a young man on a black horse whom she later learns is the son of King Ustav. He convinces her to add some things to her hex and this starts the action. Soon a sea dragon appears and the townspeople hire a magician to free it and claim the gold chain which binds it to the sea.

Kir is the royal son of King Ustav.

He appears on the beach one day and later appears at Peri's door. Eventually he discovers that although he is the son of his father, his mother is a mermaid.

Lyo is the magician who comes to town to help take the gold chain off of the sea dragon. He does sever the chain and free the human son of King Ustav, but he turns the chain into Periwinkles when the people will not meet his demands. Aidon is the name that King Ustav gives to his human son. Aidon was imprisoned by Ustav's "fishwife," but once he is freed, he becomes human and takes up his rightful station.



Social Concerns

In *The Changeling Sea*, author Patricia McKillip explores the different permutations of love. She examines conventional love of a woman and man (the king and his queen); she examines the love between an exotic sea-creature and the king; she examines a love between a woman and her lost husband (Peri's parents); and she examines Peri's adolescent love for the prince of the sea. All these different types of love are somehow incomplete. Each of them is slightly "unnatural," the woman is either asked to change or becomes obsessed with her love-object.

For McKillip, it is only the last love — the love of Peri and the Magician Lyo that is pure and fulfilling. Unlike the other women, Peri does not lose herself in her love for Lyo. She remains herself. She is Lyo's equal and both characters know it.

Techniques

This young adult novel uses traditional fairy tale conventions to tell the story of a spunky heroine. Fairy tales have a number of conventions: ambiguous time, fantastic characters, universal themes, use of magic, trial or quest, and royalty. Although *The Changeling Sea* is set in the past, like most fairy tales, there is no real sense of historical time. Whether it is the seventeenth century or eighteenth century, it really makes no difference in a fairy tale. The setting by the sea seems real enough except for the fact that the cast of characters includes a mermaid and a sea dragon, as well as a magician. Many of the characters at first seem to be stock one-dimensional figures who could appear in any fairy tale. The themes of coming-of-age and searching for true love are popular in fairy tales.

However, unlike many fairy tales, Peri is not a passive heroine. She is an independent and courageous young woman. She lives in a world with no positive female role model. She has no mentor in her rite of passage. The old woman who taught her to make potions leaves without any explanation.

Her own mother is too grief-stricken to be helpful so Peri moves into an abandoned cottage on the beach. She puts away the things of childhood and becomes responsible for herself and her own well-being. McKillip has created a new world order where women need to look first to themselves and then to others. Women need to be confident of their own abilities, need to develop self reliance, and then they can find happiness and fulfillment. The plot of *The Changeling Sea* reveals some of the tensions present in "new" fairy tales written by women. It clearly shows the contemporary concern about the tension between the roles and societal expectations of women. This is a new type of fairy tale which presents its heroine as an active, thoughtful, capable, human being. Peri is not a superhero, but she is capable of finding a solution to her problems. When Peri goes to live by herself in the cottage on the beach, she rejects the natural order.

This action symbolizes her rejection of a passive role in life.



Themes

There are two major themes in *The Changeling Sea*. The first theme is the female coming of age in a somewhat hostile world. The second theme is the importance of finding and choosing the right kind of love.

McKillip's heroine, Peri, is a young woman in search of herself and her identity. From the very start of the book, she knows that she must be active, not a passive participant in life.

She knows there are many hardships in life, and she knows that one has to work. When her father is lost at sea, she takes action. Unlike her mother, a woman of an older generation who has been taught to accept natural order, Peri decides to do something about her lost father. She learns how to create a hex, and then she actually casts it. She is not a pretty, vapid young woman who waits for a male to come along and help her. Peri has a certain degree of maturity tempered by reality, as evidenced by the fact that she accepts responsibility for her actions. She knows that her actions have caused the seadragon to appear. She has to do something about it but she also knows that her powers are limited and so she accepts the help of the magician. In her youthful wisdom, Peri knows that all people have their strengths.

Peri is also seeking an equal to love.

She is, after all, a "modern" young woman: She works outside of the home; she expects to be treated as an equal; and although she is flattered by the attentions of the Prince (and even fancies herself in love with him for a time), she knows that he would never look at a commoner like herself if he was a human prince.

In the end, Peri chooses someone like herself, a human being who sees her beauty and celebrates it, someone with a sense of humor, with integrity and knowledge of human nature. He is not misled by false gold. He, like Peri, is content with simple pleasures. After looking at all the adult role models in *The Changeling Sea*, it seems incredible that Peri should choose as wisely as she does. The book has a very positive and optimistic outlook on life.



Key Questions

It has been said that love makes the world go 'round. Well if that is true this novel is spinning. Peri is a young woman just learning what love is all about and she certainly has many opportunities to study different permutations on love in this novel. Most of the love is flawed. The King Ustav "loved" both his wife and a mermaid. The mermaid, who did not "love" or care about the children, is still obsessed with Ustav and tries to punish him by taking his son and replacing the human son with her child. Peri thinks that she might be "in love" with one or the other of the flawed princes but she also knows that if they could really "love" they would not be looking at a commoner. She eventually realizes that her true love is a magician who knew the origin of her name.

McKillip has a special skill with characterization. All the characters in *The Changeling Sea* are fully realized or have dimension to them. They are not simply stock fantasy or fairy tale characters. Before looking at the questions, think about the characters and how you might describe them, and think about the way in which "love" is depicted in the book.

1. We know that one day after Peri's father went away, the old woman who lived by the sea, taught Peri magic and told her about a land beneath the sea which was filled with houses made of pearls, disappeared. Why and where did she go?
2. How is Peri's relationship with Kir similar and dissimilar to her relationship with Aidon? with Lyo? Why does Kir think she was named after a slug when she tells him her name but Lyo knows she was named after the Periwinkle?
3. Was the mermaid right in changing the King Ustav's human son into a seadragon?
4. Why does Lyo only do part of what the people want about changing the chain?
5. Was Peri right in hexing the sea?

Why did she want it to be an "ugly hex"?

6. Have you read many fairy tales?

In what ways is this like a fairy tale? In what ways is it different?

7. Even though you have never met Peri, could you write a sketch of her or describe her? How do imagine she would be at forty?
8. Pretend for a minute that you are a child psychologist and are assigned to evaluate Peri's childhood. Did she have a "healthy" life? If so how?
9. Some people might be suspicious of the magical elements in this book.

How do you feel?



10. Lyo says that "It's an odd thing, happiness . . . Some people take happiness from gold. Or black pearls. And some of us, far more fortunate, take their happiness from periwinkles."

What does he mean?

11. Peri kept the black pearl and asked Kir to come for her when she was old. Will she go with him or not?

Why or why not?

Literary Precedents

Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Mermaid* (1846) is a literary fairy tale about a mermaid who wants to become a human being. The transformation has a great price. In *The Changeling Sea* McKillip has created a mer-prince who wants to become a merman, a human prince who is a sea dragon but eventually wants to become a human prince, and a girl who wants to become a fully human adult capable of loving and being loved for herself. All these transformations eventually take place for McKillip's characters.

There are many other tales involving sea creatures and humans. Often the transformations cause disastrous results and the mer-people usually return to their undersea world. Jane Yolen's *Greyling: A Picture Story from the Islands of Shetland* (1968) is a recent tale of a selchie or seal boy raised by a human who reverts to his seal-form.

Related Titles

In *The Changeling Sea* McKillip returns to the theme of the importance of true love with the right person. She first introduced this theme in *The Throne of Erril of Sherill* (1973), and since both works are essentially "coming-of-age novels", this is an appropriate theme.

The main character in both works must decide which person they really love, and once they decide, the reader knows they will find true happiness.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994