Comparison Of The Tempest And Hag-seed

The characters and motifs of these texts do not change; rather, they are reshaped to align with the author's context, which ultimately shapes their creative decision. Shakespeare's play The Tempest (1611) makes note of the Elizabethan interest of exploration, as well as ideas still relevant to the current world. This is seen in Margaret Atwood's novel Hag-Seed (2016), which mirrors The Tempest to some extent. It draws on the original's ideas of forgiveness, imprisonment, and revenge; however, it reimagines them to be relevant to new societal values.

The Tempest begins the conversation of forgiveness by reflecting Shakespeare's Christian values. An important message that reappears in the play is that is important to show compassion and forgive others, in particular at the start of Prospero's final soliloquy. His dialogue, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown / I must be here confined by you, Or sent to Naples. Let me not… dwell, In this bare island by your spell; But release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands," shows him standing humbly and begging the audience for his freedom, mirroring what Caliban and Ariel had previously done to him. By creating this antithesis of Prospero's past actions of demanding control over the island and its inhabitants, it shows that he must be forgiven to live a good life, similar to Christian values. Through this, Shakespeare can be indirectly telling the audience that before finding their humanity, one must suffer and ask for forgiveness. It is also showing trust and acceptance, an aspect of providentialism. Consequently, The Tempest reflects the Christian values of forgiving to be able to live in peace, illustrated by Prospero's need to be forgiven by the audience.

In Hag-Seed, Atwood responds to Shakespeare by highlighting how forgiveness is also achieved by showing empathy and pity. Miranda, the ghost of Felix's daughter, personifies these two qualities in both texts, however, is more prominent in Hag-Seed as she convinces Felix that forgiveness is necessary. At the denouement of the text, Felix feels as if his plan was not as adequate as he first thought, followed by his thoughts: "The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance, he hears inside his head. It's Miranda." By quoting The Tempest, Miranda is prompting him to forgive his enemies rather than continue to hate them for what they had done, as to which Felix partly does. Atwood has shown through her novels that she believes in fighting for human rights, stating in an interview that "According to Ariel, to be human is to have empathy; among other things. And without empathy, there are no human rights," drawing on her interpretations from The Tempest to include in her retelling. It could be said that she is using her story to show that in order to attain humanity, one must show empathy, enhancing the same view that was shown in The Tempest. However, in Atwood's version, Miranda is the voice of reason for Felix; in The Tempest, it is Ariel for Prospero. This is likely a way of Atwood expanding the female character's presence in the text, drawing back to Atwood's belief in human rights. Therefore, Atwood responds to Shakespeare by showing how forgiveness is also achieved by showing empathy and pity, such as how Felix does so, showcasing her belief that empathy and pity are just as important as forgiveness.

Imprisonment has been shown as a singular way to incarcerate and not rehabilitate in The Tempest. Prospero has been imprisoned on the island after being usurped by his brother and then uses his magic powers to imprison and abuse Caliban, who inhabited the island before him. He does not treat Caliban fairly, and so Caliban despises him, shown in his first words of

the play: “As wicked dew as e’er my mother brushed / With raven’s feature from unwholesome fen / Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye / And blister you all o’er!” This dialogue expresses his hatred towards Prospero and Miranda. He references his mother’s witchcraft, asking for her ‘wicked dew’ to drop on them. Then, he mentions the ‘southwest wind’, which was thought to carry diseases, that would infect both Prospero and Miranda. During the era of Shakespeare, prisons were thought to be a place to house criminals – not rehabilitate them. This is then expressed in Hag-Seed by Sal, where he says “Prisons are for incarceration and punishment.” Shakespeare includes this idea to comment on how imprisoning others was a way of personal gain. Hence the contextual value of imprisonment in England is incorporated into The Tempest as Challenging the original idea of imprisonment Shakespeare has given in The Tempest, Hag-Seed follows Felix and his journey of overcoming his emotional imprisonment. After he is fired from his job, he is locked in a self-imposed emotional prison in which he focuses on grieving the loss of his daughter, Miranda, and getting revenge on Tony for being dismissed from the theatre. Then is given the job at the Fletcher Correctional facility, where he bonds with prisoners who are a modern-day representation of what Caliban’s character embodies, in the sense that they are seen as ‘different’ and ‘monstrous’. This is seen in the narrator’s dialogue, when the prisoners are all watching the final cut of their play, “Watching the many faces watching their faces as they pretended to be someone else – Felix found that strangely moving. For once in their lives, [the prisoners] loved themselves.” Through the English program, Felix gives the prisoners freedom from feeling imprisoned and vilified to some extent, to feel self-belief based on their achievements of putting on the play. By changing the way that Felix has reacted to his imprisonment when compared to Prospero, Atwood has given the prisoners, marginalized characters, a voice.

The Tempest comments on how seeking revenge do not set oneself free or help in the confrontation of problems one may face. In The Tempest, Prospero is determined to get revenge on his brother Antonio, who usurped him and sent him and his daughter to an island. “Now he was / The ivy which had hid my princely trunk / And sucked my verdure out on’t.” This metaphor comparing Antonio to ivy enhances Prospero’s anger and emotion towards his brother, who ‘sucked’ the power out of him. However, at the moment where Prospero could finally attain his revenge, his servant Ariel comments that if he were human, he would have forgiven his enemies. Upon hearing this Prospero feels guilty and releases them from his spells and forgives them for wronging him, as well so Miranda can get married to Ferdinand. During the Jacobean period, revenge was discouraged as King James’ version of the Bible illustrates that compassion and forgiveness were more important.

In Hag-Seed, one learns that revenge does not fully put their problems to rest. Felix is determined to get revenge on Tony, the man who fired him from his position as director at a prestigious theatre. In a similar way, Prospero tortured his victims by using his magic, Felix torments his enemies by using drugs, which could be seen as modern-day ‘magic.’ The simile “Suddenly revenge is so close he can actually taste it. It tastes like steak, rare,” conveys how tantalizing revenge seems to Felix. Atwood portrays him as a type of predator, losing all control and he is focusing on executing his plan.

Tony and Sal are Atwood’s reimagined versions of Alonso and Antonio. Unlike the court setting of The Tempest, Atwood has taken them into a workplace and political setting, and with this exchange of values from the original, Atwood is able to comment on the deep corruption that she believes is occurring in current politics.

Through the characters and motifs of Shakespeare’s play The Tempest (1611) and Margaret Atwood’s novel Hag-Seed (2016), it is evident that both texts mirror their respective context, as that is what influences the author’s creative decision. Forgiveness is initially shown to reflect the Christian values of Shakespeare’s time and then is contrasted with Atwood’s own beliefs. Imprisonment is shown as being both physically, through Prospero’s imprisonment, and also emotionally, such as Felix’s self-imposed withdrawal from the world, and how these characters both reacted to their imprisonment differently. Lastly, both texts share the idea of revenge and how it can never truly set a person free from their problems.