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Miranda's Return: Reimagining Heroism and Narrative Authority in Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (2016) offers a contemporary retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, centring on Felix Phillips, a former theatre director consumed by grief and a desire for retribution. However, Atwood's novel diverges from conventional adaptations by deconstructing the original narrative through feminist and postmodern perspectives. Rather than focusing on action and resolution, the novel explores trauma through spectral figures and emotional absences, particularly in Felix's mourning and the ghostly presence of his daughter, Miranda.

This dissertation argues that challenges canonical narratives through feminist storytelling and the aesthetics of absence. Atwood reconfigures Shakespeare's mythic structures by doubling Miranda, splitting her between ghost and performer, and recasting Felix's journey as a heroine's arc rooted in emotional restoration over revenge. Drawing on Gail Carriger's model of the Heroine's Journey and Maria Tatar's work on female archetypes, I examine how Atwood subverts traditional gender roles and the monologic narrative closure imposed by Shakespeare's original text. Through intertextual play, multiplicity of endings, and spectral voices, Atwood resists patriarchal storytelling conventions and reclaims narrative agency for the silenced. *Hag-Seed* thus emerges as both an elegiac response to loss and a powerful feminist rewriting of canonical literature.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*, Shakespearean adaptation, feminist revision, Heroine's Journey, intertextuality.

0. Between Myth and Modernity: An Introduction to *Hag-Seed* and Feminist Storytelling

In terms of narrative storytelling patterns, Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth has become one of the most influential theoretical foundations for understanding the shared structure of myths, literature, and even personal experience[1]. First introduced in his 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell's model revolutionized literary criticism and transformed the study of narratology by revealing a universal pattern underlying many stories. His model outlined a universal pattern for most of fairy tales and stories, rooted in ancient mythic traditions. This pattern spans traditional narratives such as *Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, the Story of the Grail (c. 1180), The Odyssey's* account of Odysseus's journey and the labours of Hercules, to modern storytelling in works like *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hunger Games;* indeed, the pattern has always been there. The archetypal hero in Campbell's "monomyth" "ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (28)

This heroic duty was traditionally confined to male characters, even if women were not explicitly excluded (Segal 14). Women, by contrast, were often "grounded in cults of fertility and death" and, when present, were typically portrayed as obstacles, temptations, or challenges in the hero's journey, rather than as autonomous figures with

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[1] While Joseph Campbell's model of the monomyth is central to discussions of narrative structure, other foundational theorists have significantly contributed to the study of narrative patterns. Vladimir Propp analyzed the morphology of the folktale; Claude Lévi-Strauss approached myth structurally through binary oppositions; and Northrop Frye explored archetypal narrative cycles within literature.

their own voice or agency (Tatar 11). Influenced by the Second Wave of Feminism (1960s–1980s) and the emergence of Postmodernism in the late twentieth century, feminist scholars and writers began to question literary and mythic traditions that had long marginalized or erased women. These movements challenged the supposed neutrality of canonical texts, exposing their gendered assumptions and the dominance of male-driven narratives. Especially in recent decades, there has been a significant increase in retellings of traditional Hero's Journey narratives and other classic stories from a female perspective. This shift is often associated with the emergence of the female gaze, a narrative and visual perspective that centres female subjectivity, experience, and emotional truth. It stands in direct contrast to Laura Mulvey's foundational concept of the male gaze (1975), which frames women as passive objects of visual and narrative desire for a presumed male viewer.

The re-examination of mythic structures and the emergence of more female-driven narratives represent a crucial shift in contemporary storytelling, challenging deeply rooted assumptions about agency and the very nature of heroism itself. Feminist scholars such as Maria Tatar, Maureen Murdock, and Gail Carriger have been instrumental in this shift; they have not only analysed but actively reconfigured Campbell's monomyth to make space for female agency and alternative narrative forms that move beyond traditional male-centred models. Novels such as *Circe* by Madeline Miller, *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood, and *the Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker are examples of this cultural shift where authors, not only started experimenting with language and "defamiliarizing the stories that circulate widely in our culture, but also actively subvert

traditional narrative forms and question established structural boundaries within these stories (Tatar 62).[2]

Among these writers is Margaret Atwood, a seminal figure in contemporary literature, widely recognized for her incisive exploration of the female gaze and her persistent critique of patriarchal structures. Her work resists easy categorization, spanning multiple genres and engaging with themes such as gender inequality, the dynamics of power, speculative futures, and the transformative potential of art itself (Vanhaudenarde 1). Atwood's ability to interrogate traditional narratives while offering alternative perspectives has positioned her as a key voice in the feminist reimagining of myth and literature. Myths, as some of the earliest forms of storytelling, are deeply embedded in cultural values; revising them becomes a means of challenging and reshaping those values (Warner 418). Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (2016), the central focus of this dissertation, exemplifies this approach. Written as part of the Hogarth Shakespeare Project, a literary initiative launched in 2015 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, *Hag-Seed* reimagines *The Tempest* for a contemporary audience. The goal of the project was to renew Shakespeare's plays by inviting celebrated authors to retell them in novel form, thereby making their themes more accessible to modern audiences as well as extending Shakespeare's legacy.

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[2] Additional recent female-authored retellings that reimagine classical or legendary narratives from a feminist perspective include *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes (2019), which presents the Trojan War through the voices of women; *The Mere Wife* by Maria Dahvana Headley (2018), a contemporary retelling of *Beowulf* from Grendel's mother's perspective; *She Who Became the Sun* by Shelley Parker-Chan (2021), a gender-bending reimagining of the rise of the Ming dynasty; and *Lavinia* by Ursula K. Le Guin (2008), which gives voice to a silent female figure from Virgil's *Aeneid.*

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* centres on Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, who uses magic to orchestrate his return to power after being overthrown by his brother, Antonio. Isolated on a remote island for twelve years with his daughter Miranda, Prospero commands the spirit Ariel and enslaves Caliban, the island's original inhabitant. When he learns that his enemies are nearby, Prospero conjures a tempest to bring them ashore, setting in motion a complex story of betrayal, revenge, and ultimately, reconciliation. Miranda, the only significant female character in the play, remains largely peripheral to the main action but serves an important symbolic role. She embodies innocence, obedience, and idealized femininity, functioning primarily as a tool in Prospero's plan to restore his status. In terms of its thematic and symbolic archetypes, *The Tempest* can be seen as a text with mythic resonance, in which female figures are cast as passive or supportive rather than active agents. Even if, as Divya K.B notes, Miranda's portrayal as a weak, submissive, virginal young girl reflects the limited roles and perceptions of women during the Elizabethan era (26). In contrast, Prospero embodies the figure of the active hero in line with Campbell's hero's journey, driving the plot with his departure through betrayal, initiation by mastering magic and overcoming revenge and transformation by mercy, embodying the hero's role as a redeemer and agent of restoration.

On the other hand, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* follows Felix Phillips, a disgraced theatre director exiled from his artistic world by his ambitious colleague Tony Price. Unlike *The Tempest's* Prospero, who is cast out, Atwood's Felix chooses self-imposed exile, retreating to a remote shack in the wilderness. There, he is haunted by the memory of his deceased daughter, Miranda, invoking the ghost trope in a manner that intertwines grief with the supernatural. Like Prospero, Felix seeks revenge and reconciliation through illusion, orchestrating a production of *The Tempest* that becomes both a mirror and a

response to Shakespeare's original. Atwood layers this with metatheatrical elements and intertextuality, allowing Felix to stage his vengeance against Tony and Sal O'Nally using theatrical deception.

Through his performance, Felix confronts those who betrayed him, regains symbolic control, and, in doing so, begins a personal journey from vengeance toward healing. Ultimately, Felix's transformation is not just personal but communal. Through his work with the inmates at Fletcher Correctional Facility, he fosters their artistic voices and enables them to reinterpret literature through their own lived experiences. By the end of the novel, Felix is able to release Miranda's ghost, both literally and metaphorically, symbolizing his release from grief and his turn toward emotional restoration over vengeance.

Atwood strategically uses techniques of adaptation, intertextuality, and a reframed narrative gaze to subvert dominant interpretations of *The Tempest*. Her feminist revision of Shakespeare's text interrogates how trauma, identity, and power can be reimagined within and against classical literary structures. Atwood's novel offers greater psychological depth to Prospero's inward journey, transforming the story into one of introspection, mourning, and self-forgiveness, as Felix struggles with isolation together with political and personal conflicts. Furthermore, Miranda's character is granted greater agency in *Hag-Seed*, both as a spectral presence influencing Felix's inner world and through her double, Anne-Marie, the actress who plays Miranda in the prison production. This doubling disrupts Miranda's traditional passivity and introduces a subversive female presence that asserts agency, embodiment, and performative identity.

Atwood's subversion, however, extends beyond female representation. Felix himself departs from the conventional male heroic arc; his vulnerability, emotional depth, and need for reconciliation resist the classical ideals of conquest and autonomy. Through

this dual reconfiguration of gender roles and narrative form, Atwood interrogates and destabilizes the patriarchal foundations of the original text. Her retelling, as Linda Hutcheon suggests, "repeats [the original] with critical distance," refusing the singular, redemptive endings typical of mythic or Shakespearean narratives (qtd. in Maufort 86). Instead, Atwood embraces narrative multiplicity, ambiguity, and the possibility of transformation without one single ending.

This dissertation considers developments in the representation of heroism within mythic narratives, including subtle departures from traditionally masculine models. It explores how *Hag-Seed* enacts this subversion through a contemporary reimagining that deliberately "storms" Shakespeare's canonical text, challenging inherited structures while simultaneously bolstering interest in the original text. To support this analysis, I will draw upon Maria Tatar's *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*, which explores the evolution of female protagonists in myth and modern storytelling, and Gail Carriger's *The Heroine's Journey: For Writers, Readers, and Fans of Pop Culture*, a practical and theoretical guide that outlines an alternative narrative structure centred around connection, community, and emotional resilience.

This paper has three sections. The first section will explore the role of intertextuality and doubling, especially through the figure of the daughter and the doppelgänger, as a mechanism for challenging inherited gender roles. This discussion will be divided into two parts, focusing respectively on Miranda's portrayal as a ghostly presence and as Anne-Marie, each representing a distinct mode of resistance to the canonical tradition. The second section will examine how Atwood reconfigures the masculine arc of transformation into a model, that allows emotional vulnerability, care, and reintegration over conquest and autonomy. The final section will dive into the notion of multiplicity of endings and how Atwood attempts to challenge the traditional view of

stories having one closed ending, filling the gap left by the original play, reclaiming narrative control and exploring diverse, often subversive outcomes.

1. Exploring the Doppelgänger Motif in the Reinterpretation of Miranda

This section explores the concept of the doppelgänger as a lens through which *Hag-Seed* reimagines heroism and gendered identity within the mythic tradition. By examining Margaret Atwood's enduring fascination with doubles, it shows how the figure of Miranda, split into a ghostly presence, becomes a vehicle for subverting the stereotypical portrayal of Shakespeare's Miranda.

In literature, the concept of the doppelgänger, a term derived from the German *doppel* (double) and *gänger* (walker), refers to a character who serves as a double or counterpart to another, often embodying a hidden, repressed, or darker aspect of the self. Gaining prominence in the Romantic and Gothic traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries, the doppelgänger became a powerful literary device used to explore themes of duality, identity, psychological conflict, and the uncanny. Frequently appearing as a spectral or psychological mirror, the doppelgänger disrupts the protagonist's reality or moral compass, symbolizing internal struggles or suppressed desires. According to Cooper: "The double is a character that forces the protagonist to deal with the uncomfortable realities of their identity and can be a tool for them to gain introspection, or to run further away from the truth their double reveals about their character" (3). In other words, the character achieves a self-transformation through the figure of this double. Classic examples include the divided selves of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or the titular double in Edgar Allan Poe's William Wilson. In modern and postmodern literature, the doppelgänger has continued to evolve, often appearing in more abstract or metaphorical forms, as is the

case in novels such as José Saramago's *The Double*, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, and Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. Recently, the idea has been redefined, moving from a relic of Gothic fantasy to a dynamic figure that exposes the instability of identity, realism, and narrative itself.[3] As Andrew J. Webber observes, far from being a fixed archetype, the doppelgänger is "a slippery double agent" that embodies not only the repressed, but also what he calls "an inveterate performer of identity," dramatizing the constructed and performative nature of the self (350). In this view, selfhood is no longer a metaphysical constant but a series of "enactments of identity always mediated by the other self," a process that recalls reconstructions of the Lacanian mirror stage, where identity forms through repetition, recognition, and misrecognition (3).

Margaret Atwood reflects on how her early exposure to a world filled with doubles, particularly through comic books featuring superheroes and their alter egos, shaped her understanding of identity. She suggests that this recurring theme of duality played a formative role in the development of her own sense of self (Batroukha 378). Therefore, it is not difficult to trace a parallel between the original characters in *The Tempest* and Atwood's reinterpretations in *Hag-Seed*. Nearly every major character in *Hag-Seed* has a counterpart in Shakespeare's play. For instance, Felix mirrors Prospero as the exiled, vengeful director-magician; Anne-Marie represents Miranda, embodying innocence and emotional grounding. Likewise, the antagonists Tony and Sal correspond to Antonio and Alonso, both betrayers who become targets of symbolic retribution.

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[3] See Paul Ricoeur's theory of "narrative identity" in *Oneself as Another* (1992), where identity is understood as a dynamic narrative construction rather than a stable essence. See also Judith Butler's concept of "gender performativity" in *Gender Trouble* (1990), which emphasizes identity as something enacted and reiterated through discourse.

Moreover, *Hag-Seed* is not the first novel in which Atwood uses this technique. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes in her analysis of *Lady Oracle*, Atwood constructs a protagonist who exists in a state of duality: "The female hero is a doubled self: Joan Foster the person and Louisa Delacourt the writer" (45). DuPlessis further explains that Atwood explores Gothic narrative conventions comically and critically, using them to expose the performative aspects of female identity, aligning with feminist theory's emphasis on the constructed nature of identity and postmodernism's scepticism toward fixed, unified subjectivities.

1.1. Miranda as a Ghost

Regarding the portrayal of Miranda, two characters take on the role of Miranda. On the one hand, the ghostly figure of Miranda serves as a nostalgic echo of Shakespeare's original character. From the beginning of the novel, Felix is haunted by the spectral vision of his daughter. The staging of *The Tempest* becomes a ritual through which he preserves her memory. As Felix himself reflects, "Miranda would become the daughter who had not been lost; who'd been a protecting cherub, cheering her exiled father as they drifted in their leaking skiff over the dark sea; who hadn't died, but had grown up into a lovely girl" (Atwood 15). The continuation of the play, then, symbolizes the continued presence of his daughter in his life. However, Felix's betrayal by Tony and his allies shatters this illusion, and the ghostly Miranda comes to represent not only memory but also unresolved grief and emotional paralysis. The ghost trope, embodied in the spectral Miranda, mirrors Felix's grief and inability to forgive, revealing how deeply he has been scarred by the traumatic loss of both his daughter and his position. Yet, to frame the ghost as a simple embodiment of the innocent, docile Miranda from Shakespeare's play, and to position Anne-Marie (the actress playing Miranda in the prison production) as her empowered counterpart risks oversimplifying Atwood's novel. Rather than simply inverting

traditional gender roles, Atwood complicates them, offering a nuanced exploration of femininity, agency, and representation.

Moreover, although Miranda's ghost is a projection of Felix's inner trauma, she nonetheless exerts agency at key moments, even going so far as to "ma[k]e decision[s]" (Atwood 180). Atwood uses this ghostly figure not only to externalize Felix's grief but also to introduce a subtle layer of female autonomy and resistance. The personification of his dead daughter as a ghost adds emotional and psychological depth absent from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where Ariel, the magical spirit who serves Prospero, operates primarily as a tool for achieving revenge. In *The Tempest*, Ariel's relationship with Prospero is that of loyal, obedient servant to master. In *Hag-Seed*, however, this dynamic is transformed. As Muñoz-Valdivieso observes, the ghost of Miranda partially takes over Ariel's role, but unlike Ariel, she does not simply serve; instead, she resists (116). Whereas in *The Tempest* Ariel obeys Prospero unconditionally, in *Hag-Seed*, Miranda does not fully comply with Felix's commands, even though she exists only within his imagination; instead, she defies them. Within Felix's mind, Miranda has liberated herself from this master-servant dynamic, exercising her own free will and agency. She influences Felix's internal thoughts, asserting her independence rather than submitting passively. In summary, Atwood's ghost Miranda differentiates herself from Shakespeare's Miranda in two main aspects which will be elaborated in detail: 1) agency and decision-making, 2) influence over Felix, which will be further developed in section 2.

First, in terms of agency and decision-making, Miranda is portrayed as Felix's three-year-old deceased daughter who exists as a vivid, autonomous presence within his mind. Although she is physically gone, Felix perceives her as alive, allowing her to move freely through his inner world and influence his thoughts and emotions. This internal

struggle, his inability to accept her death, persists throughout the play he stages and remains unresolved until the final scene. Despite being a product of his imagination, Miranda displays a degree of independence: she asks questions, shows curiosity, and interacts with her surroundings as if she were real. In one scene, when Felix is preparing the materials and costumes for the play, Miranda looks at the unfamiliar items with wide-eyed wonder, asking: "What is each thing? … A bathing cap? Ski goggles? What is bathing, what is skiing?" (Atwood 160). These innocent questions reflect not only her preserved childlike nature but also her detachment from the real world.

Felix's memory of Miranda is frozen at the age of four, and his imagination keeps her locked in that state of purity and dependence. Her unawareness of ordinary objects reinforces that she exists only within his constructed reality, a projection of loss, longing, and unhealed trauma. Yet within this inner world, Miranda retains a symbolic agency, acting not merely as a passive memory but as a living force within Felix's psyche. Expanding this agency, by comparing it with Judeo-Christian iconography, Miranda could be read not only as a projection of Felix's grief, but as purity lost or spiritual rebirth. The spirit of a lost child symbolises grace, redemption, or a soul untainted by earthly corruption. This lens would also reframe Miranda's ghost as a liminal figure mediating between past and present, life and death, guilt and forgiveness. In Avery Gordon's words, a ghost "has a real presence and demands its due, your attention" (xvi). The ghost of Miranda is the embodiment of unfinished emotional work, a "something-to-be-done" (Gordon xvi) that exposes the emotional cracks in Felix's psyche, forcing him to confront the parts of himself he tries to suppress: his guilt, grief, and inability to move on. In that sense, Atwood leaves space for the reader's interpretation of what kind of presence Miranda is, expanding her portrayal.

Comparing *Hag-Seed* to *The Tempest*, Miranda's difference can be understood through Maria Tatar's distinction of the three main women in mythic fiction. Tatar identifies foundational archetypes of women: the femme fatale, the virtuous wife, and the murderous woman (51). These stereotypes are embodied respectively by Helen (whose seductive beauty is blamed for launching a war), Penelope (whose chastity and loyalty define her worth), and Clytemnestra (vilified for reclaiming agency through the murder of her husband). Even though these categories reduce women to one-dimensional figures, temptress, caretaker, or threat, and leave little room for complexity, one of which aligns with Miranda's role in Shakespeare's play.

In *The Tempest*, Miranda clearly aligns with the archetype of the virtuous wife. Like Penelope, she is defined by her chastity, obedience, and domestic potential, serving as a stabilizing symbol of purity and order in a world governed by male power. When Miranda declares to Ferdinand in the play, she states: "I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I'll die your maid" (Shakespeare 155). This moment captures the essence of the virtuous wife archetype as defined by Maria Tatar. Miranda's identity is entirely shaped by her chastity and her willingness to define herself in relation to a man, either as his wife or as a maid who dies untouched. Her agency is expressed only within the narrow bounds of sexual purity and devotion, mirroring Penelope's loyalty in *The Odyssey*. Therefore, the character of Shakespeare reflects a shallow description of femininity, totally in alliance with the standards of patriarchal femininity. According to Divya, K.B, "[Miranda] is, furthermore, the only female character within a cast of strong male figures, and much of her interaction on stage is dominated by the male figures around her" (26). Thus, Miranda's role serves as a reflection of the patriarchal order, as her identity is constructed in relation to the dominant male figures surrounding her. Through this lens, she appears less as a fully developed individual with agency and more as a symbolic

embodiment of the enduring cultural notion that a woman's value lies in her virtue and devotion to men.

On the other hand, while *Hag-Seed* offers a more psychologically complex and narratively present version of Miranda, she nonetheless remains framed within traditional roles of nurture and femininity. Even though the ghostly Miranda evolves beyond Shakespeare's original in some respects, gaining symbolic agency and emotional depth, Felix still envisions her through a lens of vulnerability and idealized girlhood. As he states, "Miranda, however, is not a monster or a grown woman. She's a girl, and a vulnerable girl. Any man playing her would lose status in a disastrous way. He'd become a butt, a target. Playing a girl, he'd risk being treated as one" (Atwood 87). This remark underlines that, regardless of who plays the role, Miranda remains a delicate and protected figure in Felix's eyes. As Renée Drost argues, "Despite being impressed, however, Felix imagines his Miranda to be physically weak, obedient, and ultimately pliable; he projects these values on both his hallucination as well as the character Miranda in the play" (56). In other words, despite the ghostly Miranda's expanded narrative presence and psychological impact, remnants of the original character's passivity persist. Atwood thus complicates but does not fully break away from the gendered constraints embedded in Shakespeare's portrayal, showing how even imagined liberation can be shaped by ingrained ideals of femininity and paternal control.

This remnant of the original play becomes particularly resonant when considered through Lacan's theory of *objet petit a,* the unattainable object-cause of desire that structures the subject's fantasies. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan outlines how desire is not oriented toward an actual object, but rather revolves around a lack, a gap that cannot be filled, "the object as cause of desire, of that which is lacking" (IX) In *Hag-Seed*, ghost-Miranda functions precisely as Felix's object a: an idealized, unreachable projection that embodies

both the loss of his daughter and the unfulfilled desires linked to fatherhood, control, and creative authority. She is frozen in innocence, untouched by time or reality, thus maintaining the purity of Felix's paternal fantasy. Rather than an autonomous subject, she becomes a vessel shaped by his unconscious longings, a spectral stand-in that replays the trauma of loss without ever allowing its resolution. In this way, Felix's Miranda is not entirely an autonomous figure but the Lacanian "lack" around which Felix's fantasy circulates, impossible to grasp, yet constitutive of his very being.

This conceptualization of ghost-Miranda as *objet petit a* also deepens our understanding of her psychological influence over Felix, a presence that not only reflects his inner loss but actively shapes his actions. Miranda's influence over Felix far exceeds her role in the original play. Not only does she have a voice, but her voice is rooted in Felix's mind. At the beginning of the narrative, Felix starts to hear the voice of his recently deceased daughter: "It wasn't one of his whimsical yet despairing fabrications. He actually heard a voice. It was not a consolation. Instead, it frightened him" (Atwood 47). The ghostly presence at once fuels Felix's obsession with revenge while simultaneously grounding him emotionally, shaping both the structure and the emotional tone of the play-within-the-novel.   Furthermore, as the narrative progresses, Miranda's voice begins to take on a more integrated and guiding role. Her voice functions as both a cue for Felix and as commentary for readers, hinting at an omniscient presence. The shift becomes especially striking in a moment of eerie ambiguity when 8Handz, one of the inmates involved in Felix's prison production, reports hearing a faint song coming through his headphones:

> "What kind of singing?" Felix asks.
> "It's faint, but ... wait. Okay. It's 'Merrily, merrily.'"
> ...
> It must be Miranda, prompting again. Clever girl, she's infiltrated Ariel's headphones! (Atwood 238)

What begins as a private hallucination or internal voice becomes externalized and shared, blurring the lines between psychological experience and supernatural suggestion. This moment implies that Miranda's presence has expanded beyond Felix's imagination, suggesting a symbolic form of spiritual agency or collective resonance. Ayşegül Ernur even argues that it is in fact "through this voice, [that] Miranda's ghost gains visibility, emotional capacity" (16). This shared "hearing" of Miranda can be linked to theories of collective memory or communal healing, indicating a moment of collective witnessing that potentially redresses Felix's isolation. Alternatively, some interpretations might focus on 8Handz, who explicitly draws the connection to Ariel and, by performing that role, may be capable of hearing Miranda. In any case, this dual role enhances Miranda's narrative function: she is no longer merely a character to be portrayed, but a silent collaborator in Felix's artistic process and in the production itself.

1.2. Miranda as Anne-Marie

In this section I will explore how Atwood's Anne-Marie contrasts with Shakespeare's passive Miranda by embodying strength, autonomy, and resistance to the male gaze. Drawing on feminist theory and mythic archetypes, I will show how Anne-Marie challenges traditional femininity and reclaims agency within a male-dominated space.

Anne-Marie diverges significantly from both the traditional interpretation of Miranda and conventional representations of femininity. Introduced early in the novel when Felix seeks a young woman to embody the role of his recently deceased daughter, Anne-Marie is described as "a strong, supple waif, just coming into bloom" (Atwood 16). She is further characterized as "so eager, so energetic: barely over sixteen" (Atwood 16). This depiction disrupts conventional perceptions of female characters, especially in mythic or literary traditions. Drawing on Maria Tatar's classification of the three prototypical female roles in mythic fiction, Anne-Marie actively resists conforming to

these archetypes.in *The Tempest*, Miranda is largely defined through passivity and obedience, an embodiment of what Tatar identifies in fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty, Donkey Skin, Cinderella, and Snow White, where the woman is "the one who receives and endures" (Tatar 46) Shakespeare's Miranda is similarly shaped by her relationships with men: she submits to her father Prospero's authority and is ultimately paired with Ferdinand, a future in which she is expected to continue in obedient roles. In contrast, Atwood's Anne-Marie is active, physically confident, and resistant to being confined to such passive or symbolic roles. In this way, Anne-Marie transcends Tatar's three archetypes and may instead be read as a subversive fusion of the "warrior maiden" and the "creator figure." Like the warrior, she exhibits strength, skill, and assertiveness; like the creator, she imaginatively reconstructs Miranda's role, offering a version of the character who defends herself and others, and who shapes her own destiny. Therefore, she differentiates herself both in the distance from patriarchal relationships and in her more masculinized traits. Instead, Anne-Marie is portrayed as an autonomous female character not defined through a male gaze.

The concept of the "male gaze" is useful for understanding Anne-Marie's departure from traditional, often reductive portrayals of women in literature and drama. First attributed to Laura Mulvey in her analysis of cinematography, the male gaze refers to the way visual arts and literature depict women from a heterosexual male perspective, often reducing them to passive objects of male desire. In contrast, Lisa French defines the female gaze as centred on the "communication or expression of female subjectivity," shaped by a woman's perspective, voice, and experience (54). In *Hag-Seed*, Anne-Marie resists objectification and instead emerges as a character with complexity and autonomy. She is not framed through Felix's sexual or romantic desire, nor is she confined to the archetypal roles traditionally available to women in mythic or Shakespearean fiction.

Instead, she occupies a space of agency, particularly visible when she reacts to the prisoners' refusal to play Miranda: "I know, right? I don't blame them," she said with a hard edge to her voice: "Being a girl is the pits, trust me" (Atwood 96). This moment conveys Anne-Marie's acute awareness of the burdens of femininity and the social structures that devalue it. Unlike Shakespeare's original Miranda, who is sheltered and innocent, Anne-Marie has been shaped by the realities of the outside world and is acutely conscious of gender inequality. Her question later in the novel, asking whether Caliban will really try to rape her, serves as a sharp commentary on the implicit violence in the original narrative. In doing so, she disrupts Felix's nostalgic fantasy of Miranda as a symbol of purity and innocence, exposing instead the uncomfortable power dynamics embedded in the source text. Anne-Marie, therefore, not only resists the male gaze but actively critiques and reframes it through a lens of female subjectivity. Awfa Hussein claims that "Atwood does not defend Miranda directly; instead, she rewrites her story in which she is presented as an aid, a surrogate mother, and an independent woman (62). By doing so, Atwood gives the reader the chance to reconsider the values that lie behind; she makes the reader wonder what would happen if the real story had been written like that" (62) Ultimately, the author opens space for a rethinking of the original tale, imagining Miranda as a more active and self-determined figure.

In one particular moment, the reader sees how Anne-Marie skilfully navigates a male-dominated environment without allowing herself to be sexually objectified. As rehearsals begin, the narrator notes that she has "settled on a den-mother act, aiming to inspire filial devotion rather than lust among her fellow cast members," revealing her acute awareness of how she is perceived and her deliberate control over that perception (Atwood 170). By adopting a nurturing, maternal persona, she consciously deflects romantic or sexual attention and maintains clear professional boundaries, handling her

intimate scenes with WonderBoy with precision, neither encouraging flirtation nor sending ambiguous signals. In doing so, Anne-Marie resists patriarchal expectations and asserts agency over her role within the group. As Wolfgang Kloss observes, "Fletcher Correctional is a prison world dominated by a male gaze, where a female presence immediately provokes foreseeable desires (88). When Anne-Marie is introduced to Felix's cast though, gender roles are reversed" (88). Kloss's analysis suggests that Anne-Marie, as a character, not only gains agency but also positions herself as a central pillar in the play's development, despite being the only woman present, aside from the ambiguous figure of Miranda's ghost. Through Anne-Marie, Atwood does more than build character; she makes a broader political statement about the empowerment of women in male-dominated spaces. This goes beyond narrative function and becomes a feminist act in itself, as the novel challenges conventional ideas of femininity and reclaims space for female autonomy and leadership.

In conclusion, Anne-Marie's portrayal becomes a powerful vehicle through which Atwood critiques the male gaze and reclaims narrative space for female subjectivity. Atwood redefines agency not only through Anne-Marie's role as a strong, confident woman but also through the symbolic use of the ghost trope and the doubling of Miranda's character. As Drost explains, "although we only see Anne-Marie through Felix's perspective, it becomes clear that Anne-Marie is not in reality the obedient, pliant and feminine woman Felix wanted her to be for the play" (64). In this sense, *Hag-Seed* allows the character of *The Tempest*'s Miranda to experience freedom through an adaptation of her role wherein she does not function as a tool or property" (64). Therefore, Atwood prompts a critical reconsideration of how female roles are constructed and constrained in male-centred texts. In the following section, this dynamic is further inverted as Felix, the

male protagonist, increasingly exhibits traits and behaviours traditionally associated with femininity.

2. Deconstructing the Hero's Journey

Following my dissertation on the reshaping of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I will now proceed to examine Gail Carriger's model of the Heroine's Journey and demonstrate how *Hag-Seed*, rather than *The Tempest*, aligns more closely with this framework, by reimagining the narrative arc through a feminist lens. First, I will outline the main stages of the Heroine's Journey, using Felix's trajectory in *Hag-Seed* as a case study, while drawing comparisons to Prospero's journey in *The Tempest*. This shift in framework is not merely comparative but diagnostic: while Prospero's arc in *The Tempest* largely conforms to Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*, emphasising individual power and restoration, Felix's journey in *Hag-Seed* foregrounds his emotional vulnerability and relational repair, which are hallmarks of Carriger's framework.

2.1. Delving into Carriger's Heroine's Journey

Joseph Campbell's model of the Hero's Journey outlines seventeen stages, grouped into three phases (see Figure 1 below): Departure (or Separation), Initiation, and Return. In the Departure stage, the hero begins in the ordinary world, receives a Call to Adventure, may initially Refuse the Call, encounters a Supernatural Aid, crosses the First Threshold, and symbolically enters the unknown, the "Belly of the Whale." The Initiation phase presents a series of trials and transformative experiences: the hero may encounter an idealized figure in the Meeting with the Goddess, confront distraction or temptation (often personified as the Woman as Temptress), and undergo a deep internal shift through Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and the attainment of the Ultimate Boon. In the final Return phase, the hero may resist returning to the ordinary world, experience a

dangerous Magic Flight, or be aided by external forces in a Rescue from Without. The journey concludes as the hero Crosses the Return Threshold, becomes Master of Two Worlds, and achieves the Freedom to Live, a state of balance, wisdom, or enlightenment. This archetypal narrative structure has influenced storytelling across cultures and eras, from ancient epics to Prospero in *The Tempest* largely fulfils Joseph Campbell's monomyth by undergoing a journey that moves from exile and betrayal to moral enlightenment and restoration. His "call to adventure" begins with his forced departure from Milan and exile to a remote island, where he gains magical powers, his form of supernatural aid. The arrival of his enemies triggers the core of his journey, as he uses magic to test and confront them. However, the true ordeal lies in his internal struggle between revenge and forgiveness, culminating in his decision to renounce vengeance and relinquish his powers. This act of mercy marks his symbolic death and rebirth, allowing him to return to Milan (the "Return with the Elixir") not only as Duke but as a wiser, more compassionate man.
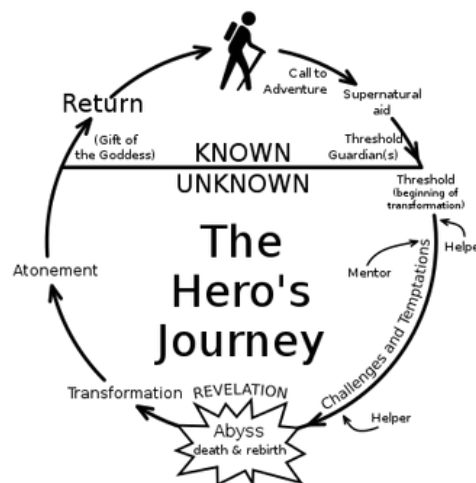

Figure 1: Campbell's Monomyth Diagram

To contrast this model, both Maureen Murdock and Gail Carriger published alternative frameworks that centre female protagonists. Murdock's The Heroine's Journey, originally published in the 1990s, was one of the first major works to respond directly to Joseph Campbell's monomyth, proposing a psychologically grounded model that focuses

on healing the split between the feminine and the masculine. She explicitly criticized the male bias of Campbell's monomyth highlighting the lack of female narratives.

Decades later, Gail Carriger, a prominent scholar and bestselling author, published the non-fiction book *The Heroine's Journey*: *For Writers, Readers, and Fans of Pop Culture in 2020*, which quickly gained widespread recognition for its novelty and originality. In this work, she reconfigures Joseph Campbell's monomyth to create space for female-centred narratives, offering a direct challenge to traditional storytelling frameworks. Since Carriger's model offers a clearly parallel structure to Campbell's monomyth, this dissertation adopts it as the guiding framework.

Drawing from mythology, psychology, pop culture, and building on the earlier work of Murdock, Carriger emphasizes the importance of community and emotional growth in the heroine's journey, a sharp contrast to the hero's journey, which typically centres on individualism, and external conquest More than a critique, her book proposes a fully developed parallel structure that reflects the distinct rhythms of the heroine's path. Crucially, she argues for moving beyond binary models of narrative and gender, asserting that "biological sex characteristics are irrelevant to whether a main character is a hero or a heroine" (Carriger xv). In her analysis, Carriger contrasts Joseph's Cambell's Hero's Journey, arguing that while the hero seeks solitude and self-actualization through external conquest, the heroine finds strength through relationships, collaboration, and emotional insight. As Carriger puts it: "The hero doesn't trust other characters. He does not try to network, because he absolutely sees himself as deserving of being (and better off) alone." (186) On the other hand, "[The] heroine doesn't work that way - she wants and needs to build a whole community" (187). Therefore, reading *Hag-Seed* through these lenses, it is noticeable how Felix, the protagonist can be seen as a heroine even if presented as biologically male. There are two arguments to support this. First, the character aligns with

Gail Carriger's model of the Heroine's Journey and embodies the key attributes associated with the heroine archetype; secondly, he is constructed through a distinctly female gaze, shaped by a woman author's perspective.

Looking back at Carriger's model, she outlines sixteen stages of the *Heroine's Journey*, much like Campbell's *Hero's Journey*, with three central phases (see Figure 2 below): the Descent (or Loss/Separation), the Search, and the Ascent (or Return). The first phase, Descent, includes six stages: Loss or Separation, Broken Family Network, Pleas Ignored, Involuntary Withdrawal, Family Offers Aid but Not Solution, and Isolation and Danger. Carriger emphasizes that this descent is not voluntary, it is marked by a stripping away of social connection and agency. As she notes, "The heroine's descent, as a result, moves her away from civilization and safety (and her seat of power) toward solitary, unacceptable risk" (93).

This concept resonates powerfully with Felix's trajectory at the outset of *Hag-Seed*. Once a brilliant and celebrated artistic director at the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival, Felix's life begins to unravel following the deaths of his wife and young daughter, Miranda. His identity is shaken to its core, and his grief is intensified by the betrayal of his trusted assistant, Tony, who ousts him from his position. As the narrator exposes, "His wife, Nadia, was the first to leave him, barely a year after their marriage. (…) She was what had kept him from sinking down into chaos. He'd held himself together the best way he could, which was not too well; but still, he'd managed" (14). What follows is a period of involuntary withdrawal and emotional exile, which can be read through the lens of trauma theory. As Cathy Caruth argues, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature […] returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Felix's retreat into isolation, both physical and psychological, reflects this haunting return. He is not simply grieving; he is

caught in a cyclical, unprocessed trauma that disrupts his identity and sense of purpose. Contrary to Campbell's Hero's Journey, the hero alone loses power and it's through friends and family that he reunifies with his purpose. His grief and emotional collapse, compounded by betrayal from his assistant, lead to his forced retreat from society, an involuntary descent into isolation that sets the stage for the rest of his journey.
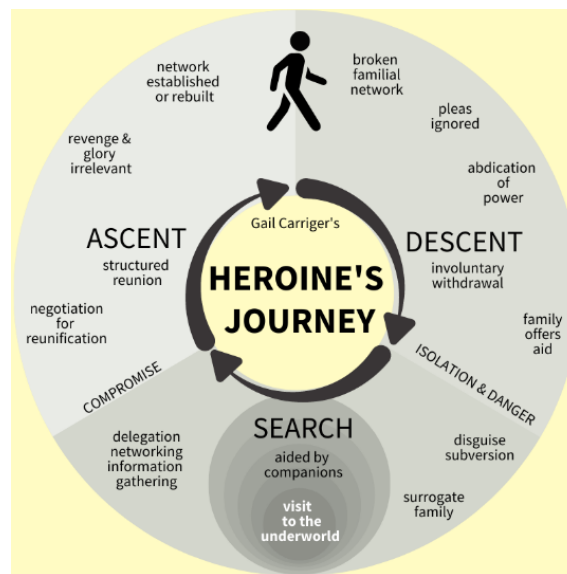

Figure 2: Heroine's Journey Diagram

Felix's withdrawal from society, living in a remote shack and talking to the imagined ghost of his daughter, symbolizes a descent that is deeply emotional but also existential. In this phase, he becomes what Carriger might label a "tragic figure," disempowered and suspended in a liminal space (92). What distinguishes him, however, and begins to align his arc with the heroine's journey, is his lucidity during this descent. Unlike a typical tragic hero who is destroyed by loss, Felix recognizes the danger of inertia: "His occupation was gone, and the love of his life. Both of his loves. He was in danger of stagnating. Losing all energy. Succumbing to inertia" (40). This self-reflective awareness and his bond, however imagined, with Miranda, prevent him from being fully consumed by despair. Instead, his solitude becomes a space for gestation and potential reinvention.

In Carriger's terms, although Felix is isolated and powerless, this descent is a necessary first step toward his eventual reconstruction of identity and reclamation of agency.

What pushes Felix into the next phase of the Heroine's Journey, "the Search," is what Carriger identifies as one of its keys defining aspects: motivation. As she writes, "[The heroine's] need to mend that breach is what drives her into motion" (117). In Felix's case, that "breach" is the loss of his daughter Miranda, whose absence continues to haunt him. It is this emotional rupture that slowly compels him to take tentative steps forward, not to restore the past, but to build a life around its absence. This process aligns with Dominick LaCapra's idea of "working through" trauma, which he defines as "the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation" (42). Unlike "acting out," which involves an unconscious, repetitive reliving of the traumatic event, leaving the individual stuck in cycles of unresolved pain, working through requires a more reflective engagement with the past. In other words, Felix does not attempt to undo or erase his loss, nor is he immobilized by it. Instead, he begins to confront his grief consciously, taking incremental steps toward healing. His actions mark a movement away from compulsive repetition and toward a more deliberate negotiation with trauma, one that acknowledges its persistence but also opens the possibility of living with it differently.

This is reflected when Felix begins making small but deliberate changes: "He cut the weeds in front of the shanty" and, more symbolically, "he cleaned the window and, more precariously, the skylight" (39). These actions suggest not only an attempt to impose order on his external world, but also to clear his internal landscape, both literally and metaphorically allowing light back in. His consideration of planting a garden, though ultimately dismissed as "going too far", points to a cautious desire for renewal. As

Carriger suggests, the heroine's journey is rarely bold or immediate; rather, it unfolds in small acts of resistance against inertia. Felix's "busyness," then, becomes a coping mechanism, a quiet rehearsal for re-entering life. In assuming this isolated, almost monastic identity, he begins the search not just for revenge, but for meaning.

In reviewing this argument, one might claim that Felix's primary motivation for moving forward is revenge. On the surface, this interpretation seems plausible, after all, Felix meticulously orchestrates a theatrical scheme to publicly shame those who betrayed him. However, to reduce his journey to revenge is to overlook the emotional and psychological complexity Atwood weaves into *Hag-Seed*. This is precisely where *The Tempest* and *Hag-Seed* diverge in meaningful ways. Good! In *The Tempest*, structured as a classical Hero's Journey, Prospero's motivations are deeply rooted in wounded pride and a desire for retribution. His pursuit of justice is not triggered by the loss of a loved one, but rather by a political betrayal that threatens his identity and authority. As Prospero declares, "The creatures that were mine, I say, or changed 'em, / Or else new form'd 'em; having both the key / Of officer and office, set all hearts i' the state / To what tune pleased his ear" (Shakespeare 106). In other words, Prospero's purpose stems from a usurpation of power, not grief as it is Felix's case. As Paul Joseph Zajac states, "Immediately after Miranda's funeral, [that] Felix decides to channel his sorrow into Shakespeare's play" (329). The play is a means of duel to which Felix handles the isolation left by the gap left by two loved family members.

Consequently, Felix uses subversion and enters what Gail Carriger identifies as Phase II of the Heroine's Journey: the "Search for Unity" (102). This stage encompasses several key narrative elements, including the search itself, the risk associated with the loss of familial structures, disguise and subversion, the appeal to surrogate familial figures, a descent into the underworld aided by companions, and assistance rendered by

friends or family. In *Hag-Seed*, the prison serves as this metaphorical underworld: an archetypal site of exile, reflection, and transformation. It is within this liminal space that Felix, our heroine figure, begins to reconstruct his fractured identity and chart a path toward emotional and creative renewal. As the author observes, "In most Heroine's Journeys, a visit to the underworld (metaphorical or actual) happens in the Search" (78-79). Felix's immersion in the prison environment thus marks a critical juncture in his psychological and emotional development.

Through the use of disguise, he adopts a new identity. According to the narrator: "It pleased him to have an alter ego, one without his own melancholy history. Felix Phillips was washed up, but F. Duke might still have a chance; though at what he could not yet say" (Atwood 37). The character is thus reborn as Mr Duke, in pursuit of reunification. As Carriger confirms, the heroine is not alone, but "as part of this search, our heroine finds second family and pursues a constant need to further a relationship network. (95). Both the inmates in Fletcher's correctional and Anne Marie serve this role. Another critical concept that reinforces this argument is the function of the doppelgänger or alter ego in Felix's journey, a notion discussed in depth in Section I. As Maufort observes, "Felix decides, in an act of magic of sorts, to give himself a double called Mr. Duke, an allusion to Prospero's title" (95). Through the creation of this double, Atwood not only invokes one of Shakespeare's characteristic motifs, but also embeds intertextual references to *The Tempest*, such as disguise and subversion. As Maufort further explains, this layering operates through a process of "Carnivalization," wherein the boundaries between reality and performance are blurred, evoking a mode of magical realism in which transformation becomes possible (91). This aligns closely with Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of carnival as a subversive, liberating force that "builds its own world [in opposition to] the official world," enabling the suspension of hierarchy, the unmasking

of truth, and the regeneration of identity (88). In employing this technique, Atwood embeds feminist concerns implicitly, crafting a narrative that resists overt political labelling. This strategic subtlety enables her to engage critically with themes such as female agency and provide a feminist voice without exposing the text to reductive interpretations or backlash.

Following Carriger's model, aid and new networks are essential for the Heroine's development and eventual emotional reintegration, acting as channels that help her reestablish with what had been lost. These forms of support, as Carriger notes, may be "physical, mental, or emotional" (97). In *Hag-Seed*, Felix's journey is deeply shaped by such connections, Anne-Marie, the inmates at Fletcher Correctional, and the ghostly presence of Miranda each play a vital role in helping him bridge the emotional abyss left by his daughter's death. These figures not only provide external support but also serve as mirrors and extensions of Felix's own fractured identity.

Within this framework, the theatre becomes a central therapeutic tool, a symbolic and literal stage upon which Felix performs his grief, guilt, and desire for redemption. As he tells the inmates, "I'm the theatre guy. When you walk in here, you shed your daily self. You become a clean slate" (Atwood 61). This statement reflects his belief in the transformative potential of performance, not just for the inmates but for himself. Although he continues to envision Miranda's ghost, her presence during the creative process becomes less haunting and more cathartic. While directing the play, Felix is momentarily freed from the weight of his grief; he becomes "clean," able to access a version of himself unburdened by the past. In this sense, the artistic act is not merely symbolic, it is reparative. This moment exemplifies a further movement into the space of working through rather than becoming consumed by grief or reenacting his loss compulsively, Felix channels his emotional energy into creative expression (LaCapra 42). The act of

staging the play enables him to temporarily step outside the cycle of acting out, offering a structured way to engage with his trauma.

It offers Felix a space to rewrite not only *The Tempest*, but his own narrative, reshaping trauma into something meaningful and shared. Jessica McDaid, in discussing Felix's healing journey, argues that "through staging *The Tempest*, Felix manages to both satisfy his need for revenge and elude his grief and agency in his fall" (14). In Atwood's postmodern context, art becomes inherently tied to the process of grievance, first as a means of evasion, then as a pathway toward healing. In this way, Atwood employs metanarrative to chart Felix's recovery: it is through the act of creation that he begins his "ascent," aligning with Carriger's framework. Moreover, it is through the relationships he builds within the correctional facility that Felix's transformation gains emotional depth, demonstrating how healing is enabled not only by art, but also by human connection. In this sense, theatre functions not merely as a symbolic backdrop but as a utopian and reparative space. In Jill Dolan's terms, it becomes a space where "people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world" (2). By offering both a communal and reparative outlet, the play within the novel functions as a utopian space where imagination, solidarity, and grief converge, allowing Felix and his actors to reimagine who they are, and who they might yet become.

In this third phase, known as the ascent or return, Carriger outlines five key stages: Return, Success in the Quest, Negotiation for Reunification, Establishment of the Network, and the Diminishing Importance of Revenge and Glory. For Felix, the Return begins when he finally lets go of his obsessive need for vengeance, a fixation that has driven his actions since his dismissal from the Makeshiweg Theatre Festival. This release only becomes possible after the successful staging of *The Tempest* for those who betrayed

him. That night, after the performance, Felix symbolically reclaims his old identity as an artist. As he leaves the prison and drives into the night, we are told he'll be dining alone "unless his Miranda decides to join him" (239).

Despite his apparent victory, Felix finds the conclusion of his journey, underwhelming, experiencing a profound anticlimax. At that moment, Prospero's line "the rarer action is/ in virtue than in vengeance," comes to his mind, and he imagines Miranda speaking the words. This is a turning point: Felix undergoes a moment of catharsis and begins to understand that the true purpose of his journey was not revenge, but emotional liberation. The ghost trope resurfaces here, signalling his gradual release from grief and the beginning of a new life. As Maufort observes, *Hag-Seed*, like many of Atwood's works, emphasizes the importance of moving beyond victimhood and becoming what she terms a "creative non-victim" (93). Once again, Gordon's notion of the ghost as exposing emotional cracks resurfaces here, now reflecting Felix's growing capacity to respond ethically to the haunting presence of Miranda (xvi).

Similarly, though Maufort does not use Carriger's terminology, his interpretation also aligns with the concept of the ascent phase, where the protagonist reconnects with his core self and comes to understand "what [he] really wants" (Carriger 111-112). In other words, this distinction between hero and heroine further distances *Hag-Seed* from *The Tempest*: whereas the hero derives gratification from the destruction of his adversaries, the heroine's success is measured through the attainment of "unity" and the construction of relational networks (Carriger 49,95). Felix's formation of a supportive community within the correctional setting facilitates his emotional liberation from the haunting presence of Miranda's torment. In other words, Felix's reconstruction of *The Tempest* is simultaneously a reconstruction of self. As Paul Ricoeur argues, "The narrative constructs the identity of the character... It is the identity of the story that makes

the identity of the character" (47). By reshaping the story of Prospero as a play-within-a-play, Felix reshapes himself, healing through storytelling and creating what Ricoeur terms a "narrative identity" that integrates his past, loss, and transformation into a meaningful whole (47).

Felix's full ascent unfolds in the final pages of *Hag-Seed*, where he reaches a climactic moment of self-realization, his anagnorisis, marked by an emotional farewell to his daughter's ghost. This moment occurs as he finds himself alone, packing up his few belongings in the cottage, signalling the end of his long period of isolation. With the electricity out and Maude's family gone, their former presence now seems illusory, as if they only existed to serve Felix's journey toward closure.

In the powerful epiphanic scene that precedes this, Felix finally acknowledges that keeping Miranda's ghost tethered to him has been an act of selfishness. Triggered by her simple, imagined question, whether he still needs her with him, he comes to understand that the true purpose of his journey was not revenge, but the emotional release of both himself and his daughter. As Maufort argues, this moment, rooted in the insights Felix gains during the transformative, carnivalesque staging of *The Tempest*, represents the novel's emotional climax. Felix adopts a humanist, almost Stoic clarity, as he lets go of his grief and gains the status of a "creative non-victim," completing the morning ritual that performance has facilitated (93). The disappearance of the spirit is the disappearance of Felix's inability to move on. This moment in the novel can be fruitfully framed through Avery Gordon's theory of haunting, which suggests that ghosts persist until the ethical demand they represent is acknowledged and fulfilled (xvi). In *Hag-Seed*, the spectre of Miranda haunts Felix's life and creative vision, but this haunting begins to dissipate as he stages his cathartic production of *The Tempest*. At this point, since the ethical demand has been finally fulfilled, the ghost ceases to haunt him. As Estella Ciobanu argues:

"Unbeknownst to Felix at the time, the production becomes his farewell to the memory of his daughter. her release and thereby also his from the prison of memory and mourning, from the haunting past" (14). The novel therefore ends with the famous quote "To the elements be free", imitating Prospero's release of Ariel (Atwood 283).

In conclusion, reading *Hag-Seed* through Gail Carriger's framework of the Heroine's Journey reveals not only the story of a heroine but also a profound narrative of trauma and recovery. As Paul Joseph asserts in reference to Atwood, "Shakespeare can not only haunt us, but, like trauma, can possess us" (339). Atwood explores the heroine's role while deeply engaging with the central issue of traumatic loss, the death of Felix's daughter. This trauma, traditionally associated with female suffering, is here embodied in a male protagonist, further challenging conventional gender narratives. By doing so, Atwood subverts expectations and crafts a powerful story about healing and moving forward beyond mourning, offering a fresh perspective on grief, identity, and resilience.

3. Rewriting the Ending: Polyphony, Intertextuality, and Narrative Agency in *Hag-Seed*

In this section, having examined how Atwood challenges centuries of patriarchal criticism imposed on Shakespeare's The Tempest, notably through the splitting of Miranda into two distinct characters and the construction of a female-centred journey within the framework of a seemingly conventional hero's narrative, I will now bring these ideas into dialogue with her approach to narrative closure. Specifically, I explore how Atwood subverts the traditional notion of a singular, authoritative ending by using the character of Anne-Marie, who is portrayed as a strong-willed and self-directed woman, to reclaim narrative agency. Through this act of narrative re-appropriation, Atwood opens space for multiple, often subversive outcomes. In the final chapters of *Hag-Seed*, she offers

alternative endings for each of the characters from *The Tempest*, thus destabilizing the idea of a fixed narrative ending. This strategy exemplifies the concept of intertextuality, as Atwood engages in a sustained dialogue with Shakespeare's text.

The notion of intertextuality originates with Julia Kristeva, who built upon the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to argue that no text exists in isolation. As Graham Allen observes, "Works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature" (1). Intertextuality, therefore, foregrounds the inherently relational and referential nature of literature, wherein meaning is generated through the reader's recognition of echoes, allusions, and transformations across texts. Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* exemplifies this dynamic, as it can be read either as an entirely self-contained narrative or, more significantly, as a reimagining of Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* While the former reading is possible if the reader lacks familiarity with the source text, it is through the latter lens, an intertextual one, that the novel reveals its richest complexities. As we have seen, Atwood constructs a narrative that is distinct in form and context yet fundamentally attached to the structural and thematic foundations of Shakespeare's play. As Afwa notes, "Appropriation and intertextuality in *Hag-Seed* are mediums that achieve the dynamic interplay between Atwood's text on the one hand, and its roots founded in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on the other" (58). In other words, what makes *Hag-Seed* particularly compelling is the way Atwood weaves a rich dialogue between the original play and her contemporary retelling by using these techniques.

This approach becomes especially powerful in the final section of *Hag-Seed,* where each chapter is dedicated to reimagining the ending for a character from The Tempest, rewritten by the inmates and Anne-Marie. These alternative endings serve as both narrative closures and spaces for personal agency, allowing characters, and by extension, the actors, to reclaim their voices and futures. Particularly compelling is Anne-

Marie's contribution, which stands out not just because she is the only woman in the group, but because she exerts her agency within the overwhelmingly male-dominated space of the correctional facility. Her interruption is deliberate and assertive, signalling her refusal to remain a passive participant:

> "If you don't mind," she begins, "I have something to add. I know I don't get marks or cigarettes or anything, but I've been a part of this production, and by the way it was a pleasure working with all of you, but I need to say I can't let this rest. Felix? Mr. Duke?" (Atwood 254)

Anne Marie reclaims narrative space explaining how she environs the character. In her version, Miranda is no longer a helpless "rag doll," but rather "a strong girl," "a tomboy," someone with "muscles too," capable of resisting Caliban's attempted assault (254-255).

Anne-Marie envisions Miranda as a dynamic and self-sufficient figure: she invents a spell to lure Ariel onto the ship, filling it with cowslips and conjuring bees to create an illusion that captivates the spirit. When the villains attempt to attack Alonso, Miranda, alerted by Ariel, confronts them directly, breaks Sebastian's wrist, and, with the help of three goddesses she summons, disables Antonio and subdues Caliban by dislocating his arms.   Through this lens, the inmates' reworkings of *The Tempest* and Anne-Marie's assertive narrative intervention enact again with Dolan's idea of "affective public spheres," spaces where collective emotion and embodied experience foster connections that transcend the individual and open possibilities for social transformation and communal agency. (2).

Similarly, the theme of rape, and Atwood's decision to reintroduce and reframe it in *Hag-Seed*, is also far from incidental. She purposefully exploits a narrative gap, left largely ambiguous in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, to confront uncomfortable, politically charged realities surrounding sexual violence. By doing so, Atwood reclaims the silenced space of female agency and reimagines it with critical intention. For centuries, Miranda has been interpreted through the lens of potential sexual victimhood, often discussed in

academic and literary circles as the almost-raped figure whose innocence was nearly violated by Caliban. Atwood engages directly with this legacy. Rather than avoid it, she foregrounds it, making it a site of both tension and transformation. As Drost notes, "Miranda, as a hallucination, suffers no threat of rape. Anne-Marie is warned about the inmates potentially acting inappropriately and sexually towards her, but this ultimately does not happen" (57). This contrast is crucial: Atwood dismantles the passive victim trope and instead presents women, both Miranda and Anne-Marie, as figures who actively resist objectification. This act of textual reclamation also resonates with Sara Ahmed's assertion in *Living a Feminist Life* that naming what has been ignored or denied "brings [it] into existence" (14). In this sense, Atwood's revision becomes a feminist gesture of visibility and resistance, drawing attention to the often-overlooked implications of sexual violence in *The Tempest*. *Hag-Seed* not only critiques these historical silences but performs a reparative feminist re-voicing, making visible the structures and narratives that have long rendered women passive or voiceless.

Moreover, Atwood's decision to create new endings in *Hag-Seed* is far more than a stylistic choice; it is a deliberate act of resistance against narrative and societal oppression, and a means of amplifying marginalized voices. Not only does she reinterpret and transform Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but she also subverts the hierarchical structure of the original by allowing each character, regardless of gender, class, or background, to speak and reclaim agency. Unlike *The Tempest*, where Prospero's dominant voice largely controls the narrative, *Hag-Seed* introduces a polyphonic structure in which multiple perspectives coexist and challenge one another. As Muñoz Valdivieso puts it, "This multiplicity of endings allows Atwood to incorporate subversive, against-the-grain, re-visions of *The Tempest* that the tight premise of the Hogarth series has bounded in and provides a glimpse of insights that could pan out into alternative appropriations of the

play" (124). In other words, Atwood's choice of creating new endings, is her way of fighting off the oppressiveness of the system and giving voice to minorities through dialogism. Through that perspective in the novel there's not an "authorial voice" but "The polyphonic novel [instead] presents a world in which no individual discourse can stand objectively above any other discourse; all discourses are interpretations of the world, responses to and calls to other discourses" (Allen 23). Therefore, dialogue occurs both within and without the novel.

In conclusion, by fragmenting the original's monologic closure and allowing each character to offer an alternative ending, even if I had mainly focused on Anne Marie's, Atwood affirms their existence and agency. In doing so, she challenges not only literary tradition but also the broader systems of power and silencing. Her deliberate engagement with intertextuality becomes both a political and ethical act, one that repositions the margins at the centre and transforms passive figures into active agents. *Hag-Seed*, then, does more than rewrite Shakespeare; it rewrites the very conditions of storytelling, reminding us of the fact that literature, like justice, is shaped by those who are allowed to speak.

4. Conclusions and Further Research

The present dissertation has analysed how Atwood's modern retelling of *The Tempest* destabilizes canonical expectations surrounding gender, heroism, and narrative form. It has been argued that *Hag-Seed* offers a pointed critique of traditional mythic structures, which are often rooted in patriarchal, male-gazed narratives. Through the use of intertextual strategies, narrative experimentation, and feminist theory, Atwood constructs a deliberate and politically charged response to monocentric forms of storytelling, advocating instead for multiplicity, relationality, and the reclamation of silenced voices.

The feminist potential of *Hag-Seed* has been upheld, first, through the doubling and reimagining of Miranda's character, in which the traditional passive archetype is split into two contrasting figures: the ghostly daughter and the embodied actress, Anne-Marie. These doubles offer a layered and complex representation of femininity that resists the objectification and silencing present in Shakespeare's original. Second, the character of Felix has been analysed through the lens of Gail Carriger's Heroine's Journey, revealing how his trajectory departs from the classical Hero's Journey model. Instead of pursuing conquest or external achievement, Felix's path follows a cycle of descent, search, and ascent, centred on emotional healing, vulnerability, and relational growth. This reframing destabilizes traditional gender expectations associated with male protagonists and redefines heroism not as the ultimate accomplishment of a quest or the attainment of power, but as the capacity to rebuild emotional and communal bonds. Third, the polyphonic structure of *Hag-Seed* and its multiplicity of endings have been examined as an act of narrative resistance. By enabling each inmate and Anne-Marie to contribute their own interpretation of the story's resolution, Atwood dismantles the monologic authority of Prospero's voice and reclaims narrative space for marginalized perspectives.

Furthermore, the dissertation has argued that Atwood's use of intertextuality is both political and ethical. Her deliberate engagement with Shakespeare's *The Tempest* becomes a form of literary activism that interrogates systems of power, voice, and exclusion. The representation of trauma, especially through the spectral presence of Miranda and Felix's unresolved grief, adds psychological depth to the text and reframes the story not as a redemptive myth, but as a journey of mourning and emotional restoration. The act of staging the play within the novel functions as both a metatheatrical device and a therapeutic process through which characters symbolically rewrite not only Shakespeare's ending, but also their own.

For further research, a logical step forward would be to examine the role of intertextuality and trauma in other works within the Hogarth Shakespeare series, particularly those that foreground questions of gender and narrative authority. It would also be valuable to extend the study of the Heroine's Journey model to male characters in other contemporary rewritings such as Ian McEwan's *Nutshell*, Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*, or Edward St. Aubyn's *Dunbar*, three works that reframe canonical male protagonists through contemporary lenses, to further interrogate how gendered narrative structures are being reimagined. In summary, Atwood's *Hag-Seed* provides a compelling example of how feminist storytelling can reclaim space in the literary canon, not only through critique but through imaginative reconstruction.

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Figure 2. https://ultimatepopculture.fandom.com/wiki/Hero%27s_journey. (Access date: 12/06/2025)