

Module A Essay: MARKED

Question: "Everything is being dismantled, reconstructed, recycled. To what end? For what purpose?"

To what extent is this statement true of the texts you have studied in this module?

Through textual conversation, composers explore the power of storytelling to shape notions of individuals' superiority and perpetuate disempowering narratives, revealing humanity's desire for control. William Shakespeare's tragicomedy *The Tempest* (1611) explores the power of theatre as a medium to enact an assumed right for control, whilst Margaret Atwood's metafictional novel *Hag-Seed* (2016) reconceptualises this pursuit for control through a Postmodern focus on psychological grief, both authors championing moral reflection as necessary for growth. However, whilst Shakespeare affirms Eurocentric desires for narrative control, Atwood reconstructs theatre as a tool for post-colonialist liberation from socially constructed narratives.

Shakespeare examines how an individual's obsession with a divine right to impose control must be tempered by moral reflection. Consumed by his usurpation as the Duke of Milan, Prospero assumes the Jacobean belief in the Divine Right of Kings which justified absolutist monarchy, metaphorically framing himself as "[a] master of a full poor cell," demonstrating how he imposes hierarchy on the island as a microcosm of the civilised world. Prospero utilises spirit Ariel to torment shipwrecked courtiers, his usurpers, declaring "Mine enemies are all knit up," the metaphor suggesting how vengeance compels him to abuse his role as a metatheatrical mastermind, revealing his loss of moral empathy towards other's suffering. Yet engrossed by the theatricality of a conjured wedding masque for his daughter Miranda, Prospero compares this illusion to "the great globe itself... that shall dissolve," illustrating how metatheatrical guides him to reflect on the transience of life, becoming receptive to Ariel's entreaty, "your affections Would become tender." Prospero thus forgives the Venetian courtiers and secures Miranda's future with Ferdinand in the anagnorisis, "The rarer action is In virtue than in vengeance" suggesting he exchanges revenge for morality, embodying the values of moral virtue. Thus Shakespeare suggests that theatre's illusions may prompt introspective insights of morality that mitigate an individual's vengeful obsession with an assumed right for control.

Atwood upholds Shakespeare's representation of theatre as a tool for transformation, though adopts a Postmodern understanding of the subjective psyche to examine how moral reflection prompted by illusion may allay an individual's experience of vengeance and grief. Within her metafictional novel, Atwood reflects the Postmodern relativism of emotions by reshaping Prospero as theatre director Felix who is more psychologically ambiguous, whose initial exclamation "where there are boos, there's life!" highlights how he absurdly conflates egotistical aesthetics within theatre with power over reality. Atwood transposes *The Tempest*'s island onto Fletcher Correctional Centre where "Tony and Sal...[are] sucked into a vortex of his own creation," the metaphor suggesting how Felix becomes so devastated by his theatrical deposition that he extends his domain of power as revenge over his usurpers, discarding morality. Atwood reimagines Miranda as deceased, psychologically controlling Felix's psyche in a metaphorical "charmed bubble...his Miranda would live again," portraying how Felix's metatheatrical reconstruction of *The Tempest* imprisons Miranda's spirit out of bitterness, stemming from his repressed trauma over losing her through arrogance. Yet Atwood develops Miranda into a mark of Felix's guilt during his revenge plot against his usurpers involving a production of *The Tempest*; her entreaty, "I would, sir, if I were human," highlights how the illusion of Miranda motivates Felix to accept her death, allaying grief and vengeance. Thus Atwood reframes Prospero's self-constructed narratives of power as Felix's ego-centric metatheatrical endeavours to reveal how illusion can help characters process grief.

Commented [AQ1]: I would include word 'innate' here, just to explicitly show to the marker why this desire exists.

Commented [AQ2]: Narrative control' on its own is a little generic. I would consider specifying 'the colonised' better sets up the contention point between Shakespeare/Atwood.

Commented [AQ3]: This is good. As we discussed in our 1-on-1 session, Mod A is hard to condense because we have to work so much (context, quote etc) into one piece of analysis. This is good because you chose a short quotation and have integrated it grammatically. Keep up the links to specific context e.g. Divine Right of Kings.

Commented [AQ4]: Do you see how 'compels' earlier in the same sentence shows Prospero actively doing something to his own morality? Our analytical verb needs to capture agency or process here as Prospero is the 'theatrical director'.

Commented [AQ5]: You could link this explicitly to context, for example 'Christian Humanist tenets' which then ties directly back to the Jacobean context. 'Values of moral virtue' is accurate but generic and could apply to any text.

Commented [AQ6]: This is good. We should be robustly linking back to the previous text in the topic sentence.

Commented [AQ7]: I would namedrop 'intertextually' here, just because you want to show the marker how Atwood was engaging with Shakespeare's text, not just what she did with the character.

Commented [AQ8]: I would mention how Miranda morphs into something that is essentially 'blended with reality and theatre' and frame this as a Postmodern construct. That phrase would tie this specific quotation back to your paragraph's topic sentence (Postmodern relativism).

Commented [AQ9]: I would include 'tempering psychological grievances'. As we discussed, markers really do read concluding sentences because they show whether you can sustain sophistication. Try keep a mental word bank (high level vocab) so you can elevate your links.

Shakespeare perpetuates 16th century colonialist narratives by representing how Eurocentric beliefs in their superiority designate the colonised to powerless social roles. Despite essays such as Michel De Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" (1580) portraying tribal societies as morally superior, Prospero justifies slave Caliban's harsh treatment, metaphorically framing him as "a freckled whelp hag-born" reflecting Jacobean views of European superiority. Within the comedic subplot, fools Stephano and Trinculo repeatedly characterise Caliban as a savage "monster", and his response "I will kiss thy foot...be my god," ironically illustrates a cycle of servitude where he internalises his subjugation, worshipping new colonisers. However, Caliban's natural imagery contrasts their crude language, flaunting how "the isle is full of noises...and sweet airs", illustrating a nuance in Western dictums correlating civility with superiority, aligning with De Montaigne's notion of Caliban as a 'noble savage.' However, once Prospero tempers his revenge, with "nobler reason gainst my fury", his pardon of Antonio's "rankest fault" contrasts with Caliban's conditional, "to have my pardon...trim it handsomely," reminding audiences that Prospero, restored to his dukedom, possesses agency for self-betterment denied to Caliban who cannot occupy a place in Western power structures. Through his portrayal of the power dynamic between Caliban and Prospero, Shakespeare perpetuates Eurocentric views of intrinsic superiority, relegating the colonised to predetermined social roles.

In contrast, Atwood rejects Shakespeare's perpetuation of colonial grand narratives, highlighting how individuals may transcend restrictive social constructs to discover self-worth through art. Advocating correctional programs which use literature to foster inmate reflection such as 'Shakespeare behind Bars' where participants had a 62% lower recidivism rate, Atwood deconstructs Shakespeare's assumptions of Caliban's savagery through the imagery of Felix with "a homemade shiv sticking out," criticising how justice systems perpetuate colonialist stereotypes projected onto modern prisoners. Yet inside Felix's prison drama class, when SnakeEye and other prisoners rewrite their restaging of The Tempest through rap, a historical retaliation against oppression, "caliban don't need no master," reflects how they reject Caliban's lack of autonomy, influencing Felix to metafactively question "isn't this what he asked them to do?...Reframe?" suggesting the prisoner's creativity challenges Felix's assumption of their singular narratives as prisoners. Thus Felix encourages the prisoners to include their children in the production with "photos of them... a cherubin type thing," humanising the prisoners through their families and highlighting the cathartic power of theatre as a medium for them to access emotional pain. The prisoners metafactively engage in "post play lives of characters," rewriting the singular truths of all characters in The Tempest to mirror the prisoners' post-colonialist autonomy as they now dictate their own narrative. Thus Atwood challenges Shakespeare's colonial narrative, showing how theatre can help the marginalised find a voice.

Thus textual conversations allow contemporary composers to reimagine how we construct stories to shape notions of individuals' superiority and perpetuate disempowering narratives. Atwood, using a Postmodern approach, builds on Shakespeare's idea that theatre can help temper grief and prompt growth. Through a similar Postmodernist lens, she dismantles the colonial grand-narrative, representing how the marginalised can reconstruct their own stories, allowing for post-colonialist liberation.

Commented [AQ10]: 'Innately justified power over natives' would help you name a specific belief system (as a justification). As we discussed, the distinction matters in a Mod A essay about how narratives are constructed to justify power.

Commented [AQ11]: Nice reading. Naming the irony (he worships his new oppressors) and linking it to a pattern ('a cycle of servitude') comes off well. Keep pushing every paragraph to this standard.

Commented [AQ12]: Weaving the rap lyric in as a 'historical retaliation against oppression' before you even analyse the quote is convincing contextually. I like your clear postcolonial framing and direct engagement with Felix's metafactive question.

Commented [AQ13]: You undermine your paragraph with this sentence here.

Consider something like:
"Thus, Atwood subverts Shakespeare's deterministic grand narrative, demonstrating how the theatrical medium empowers the marginalised to dismantle cycles of institutional victimhood and assert their post-colonial autonomy."

Commented [AQ14]: Instead of isolating "using a Postmodern approach", integrate the postmodern methodology directly into the verb actions to answer how text is "recycled" or "reconstructed".

Consider changing it to something like:
"By adopting a Postmodern focus on the subjective psyche, Atwood recycles Shakespeare's structural exploration of theatrical catharsis, dismantling his early modern frameworks to reconstruct theatre as a vehicle for therapeutic reclamation."